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**The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Ed Canby
Conducted by Jason Stewart
Date 25 May 2010
Transcribed by Cole Edwards**

The transcription of this interview was paid for by a generous grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

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

1 Jason Stewart: This is Jason Stewart with the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech
2 University, conducting an Oral History interview with Mr. Ed Canby. Today is May 25th,
3 2010. I am in Lubbock, Texas, in the Special Collections Library on the campus of Texas
4 Tech and Mr. Canby is joining me by phone from Nevada. Is that correct, sir?

5 Ed Canby: That's right.

6 JS: Okay, all right. Why don't we begin with a little bit of biographical
7 information about yourself? First of all, when and where were you born?

8 EC: What?

9 JS: First of all, when and where were you born?

10 EC: Gary, Indiana.

11 JS: Yes, sir.

12 EC: November 27th, 1926.

13 JS: Okay, all right. Could you tell me a little bit about your parents? What were
14 their names and what did they do for a living?

15 EC: Well, let's see. My father was the same name as me, Edmund B. Canby.

16 JS: Okay.

1 EC: He was an accountant investigator for an insurance company after the
2 depression. Before that, he was in the lumber business. He cut houses for Sears and
3 Roebuck.

4 JS: Okay.

5 EC: But when the Depression hit, he got stuck with 400 houses that he couldn't
6 sell. He went in the accounting business. He was an insurance investigator.

7 JS: Okay.

8 EC: Fraud investigator. He didn't carry a gun or nothing like that.

9 JS: Right, right. Yes, sir.

10 EC: He was a numbers man. My mother, she was a model at one time for stores in
11 Chicago—most of the big department stores.

12 JS: Oh wow.

13 EC: She modeled fur-coats mostly and then she went into the restaurant business.
14 My uncle had her to manage his restaurant. She was a graduate of a teacher's college.

15 JS: Okay. Yes, sir. Could you talk a little bit about—

16 EC: My father was a WWI veteran.

17 JS: Okay. Yes, sir. Did he ever talk to you much about his service?

18 EC: Did what?

19 JS: Did he ever talk to you much about his service?

20 EC: Yeah. He told me to go in the Navy and not get in the trenches. He says,
21 "You got to go, so that's all I'm telling you. In the Army and Marines, you got to get in
22 them trenches." Well, they didn't have trenches. They had things just as bad, the Marines.

23 JS: Yes, sir.

24 EC: That's about all he ever said. He never talked much about it.

25 JS: All right. Did you grow up there in Indiana?

26 EC: No, sir. I grew up in Chicago.

27 JS: Okay, all right. So overall, you mentioned your father getting stuck with all
28 those houses during the Great Depression. But overall, how did your family fare in the
29 Depression and do you have many memories of the Depression?

30 EC: Well, I got quite a few from 1933 on, you know.

1 JS: Yes, sir. All right. Could you talk a little bit about that, what you remember
2 about the Depression?

3 EC: I remember that everyone tried to work and help. I sold papers on the corner
4 when I was twelve years old. I use to give a quarter or thirty-cents I'd make to my mom.
5 My dad, he worked on the WPA (Works Progress Administration) for a while. It was
6 pretty debilitating for him because he had a lot of money one time. He was down in San
7 Antonio, Texas, with his shop.

8 JS: Okay.

9 EC: He had a lot of money one time. When he lost it all, it was kind of hard for
10 him to find a job, but I remember a wartime buddy got him his job with the insurance
11 company. He was lucky there. I think when he started, he made ninety dollars a month.
12 That was enough for that one bedroom and a Murphy bed.

13 JS: Okay.

14 EC: During the Depression, things were kind of hard. I remember they didn't
15 have big markets. You just went to the corner market and whatever she had, you bought.
16 If you had any extra money, you went to the butcher shop and got some kind of meat if
17 you had meat.

18 JS: Yes, sir.

19 EC: I remember those kinds of things. The first market I ever remember was an
20 A&P.

21 JS: Okay.

22 EC: Atlantic and Pacific. The first big market. That was in '39 or '40.

23 JS: Okay. Yes, sir. At what point did things start to get better?

24 EC: When the war started.

25 JS: Okay.

26 EC: Up to that time, things were tough.

27 JS: Yes, sir.

28 EC: When I was sixteen, I got papers with the Merchant Marines. I went to sea. I
29 made two trips. I made one to Murmansk and one to the Mid.

30 JS: Oh, wow. Yes, sir. What made you decide to do that? To join the Merchant
31 Marines?

1 EC: No money, nothing to do.

2 JS: Right. You mentioned you were sixteen, so did you quit school to go do that
3 then?

4 EC: I did.

5 JS: Okay. Yes, sir. So that would have been what, about 1942 or so? '42, '43?

6 EC: Yeah. The last of '42.

7 JS: Okay. At that point, was there still much threat of German U-boats?

8 EC: Oh, yeah. We went in convoys. When I went to Russia, there was about
9 eighty ships in the convoy. I think they sunk thirty of them.

10 JS: Oh, wow.

11 EC: My ship was machine-gunned a couple times. They dropped bombs at it. We
12 had English Armed Guard then. I ended up on the 20 millimeter by myself. If you had a
13 war administration ship, you had to sign that you'd take a gun station and help the
14 soldiers or whoever you had on there. We had a Navy lieutenant and a signalman on
15 there—regular Navy guys. They hadn't put Navy Armed Guard on there yet. We still had
16 English on there.

17 JS: Okay. Yes, sir. Do you know what types of cargo and things that y'all were
18 bringing?

19 EC: We took ammunition on that thing, and we took—on deck, they had trucks
20 and I think three planes as I remember right. They had them all dismantled but they had
21 all the parts there. The wings were off of them, and the bodies were on there, on deck.

22 JS: Right.

23 EC: I remember the older guys used to say, "Well, keep them engines running
24 because if you're your engine stopped, the convoy didn't stop for you."

25 JS: Right.

26 EC: It kept going and you were on your own. A couple ships, we ordered them to
27 get torpedoes out there because they were out floating by themselves. The first trip I
28 made, we didn't have much—well, we had English corvettes.

29 JS: Okay.

30 EC: We had two WWI destroyers, four-pipers—lend-lease deals. That was about
31 it.

1 JS: Oh, wow.

2 EC: When you went up the river to Murmansk, at that time, you could hear the
3 big guns firing—artillery firing up towards Norway there. What we did is, when we went
4 up that river, the Russians treated us like criminals. You couldn't go off the ship. They
5 had women big as bears come on there and unload. They were really good at it. We
6 topped the boons and everything, but they unloaded their equipment. We turned around
7 and went back on to the river. We hid under a tree until the convoy made up.

8 JS: Yes, sir. How long did you remain in the port there at Murmansk?

9 EC: How long did what?

10 JS: How long did you remain in the port there at Murmansk?

11 EC: Just long enough to—I think a day and a half it took them to unload that stuff.
12 They worked twenty-four hours a day.

13 JS: Okay. Yes, sir.

14 EC: I remember that they had quite a few Yak fighters in the air all the time over
15 the port. We never got bombed in the port, but we got bombed day and night coming to
16 there. They'd come out of Norway—the (unintelligible) did, Dorniers. I signed up on the
17 same ship and I went to the Mid. We went to Malta and went to North Africa. We didn't
18 have much trouble in the Mid for some reason. I guess we had too many fighters in there.

19 JS: Yes, sir. When was that second trip? When did you make that?

20 EC: When what?

21 JS: When did you make that second trip—the one to the Mid?

22 EC: I made that in '44.

23 JS: Okay. Yes, sir.

24 EC: I got tired of them ol' slow ships. I told my mom I would like to go in the
25 Navy, so I went in the Navy.

26 JS: Yes, sir. All right. Before we get into your time in the Navy, let me just ask
27 you a little bit about—if you could talk a little bit more about your decision to join the
28 Merchant Marines. Is it because you wanted to help out in the war effort? Was that why?

29 EC: I was a wild young kid. The streets of Chicago wasn't too kind in those days.

30 JS: Okay.

1 EC: We lived on the south side. The biggest thing was if you could be a wise-guy
2 for somebody—collect policy or something like that. I didn't see me going to Joliet
3 Prison even as a young kid, yow know.

4 JS: Right.

5 EC: So, I just went down there to the Coast Guard and said, "Can I get papers?"
6 He said, "Yeah, if your mother will sign." I got papers for an ordinary seaman, a wiper,
7 or a mess-man. I went to sea as an ordinary seaman.

8 JS: Okay, all right. What did your family think about your decision to do this?

9 EC: Who, my mother?

10 JS: Yes, sir.

11 EC: Well, she didn't like it, but she knew I had to go. My dad said, "He's better
12 off at sea than he is getting drafted."

13 JS: Right. Yes, sir.

14 EC: My dad was very much against going in the Army. Not for the reason that he
15 hated the Army, he just knew what them trenches were.

16 JS: Right, right. Yes, sir.

17 EC: Like he said, they went over the top and lost half the company at ten feet.

18 JS: Oh, wow.

19 EC: That's where he got wounded there. He got wounded and he got well, and
20 then he got gassed.

21 JS: Oh, goodness.

22 EC: He just said that, "Go in the Navy, man." He said, "You always got a hot cup
23 of coffee." He was saying that when it rained, it's like blood coming up out of them
24 trenches. It's red-looking water. He said, "Man, they're awful." But he didn't know, you
25 know.

26 JS: Right.

27 EC: When you get something like that, I guess you never forget it, you know.

28 JS: Sure. Yes, sir. Could you talk a little bit about your duties on the ship there in
29 the Merchant Marines? What types of things would you be doing?

30 EC: Well, I went to boot-camp.

31 JS: Okay.

1 EC: I fell asleep at the gunnery. The chief carried cutlasses. He hit me in the
2 bottom of the foot with that cutlass and said, “Wake up son. You’re going to need this.” I
3 was a wise guy. I said, “Chief, I’ve fired more bullets at any enemy aircraft than you’ll
4 ever see.” I said, “I’m sorry. I won’t sleep again.” He took me to battalion and the
5 battalion commander said, “You got any papers to prove all this.” I said, “Oh, yeah.” I
6 got my discharges from two ships. On the back of one, it says, “Murmansk”.

7 JS: Right.

8 EC: They were really—most of our crew was good about that. They figured the
9 guys that went to Murmansk maybe would have trouble someday or something. I don’t
10 know why they did that, but they stamped it on the back, “Murmansk Convoy 110”. They
11 didn’t put in on the other ones in the Mid. I don’t know why they did that. But anyway, I
12 sure did warrant officer that. He’d run everyone out of that room. He said, “Now listen, I
13 want you to be respectful to them chiefs.” He says, “God bless you, you young war lack.
14 You wound up there like that.” I said, “Well, I went and I’m sorry I said anything.” So, I
15 got out of boot-camp all right. When I got out, they made me seaman 1st class. They
16 made me a gunner’s-mate striker.

17 JS: Yes, sir. Okay.

18 EC: That’s what I did on the ships. I cleaned guns, repaired guns.

19 JS: Yes, sir. Backing up for just a moment, when did you join the Navy? When
20 would that have been?

21 EC: I went in October 3rd, 1944. I went in and I was lucky. I was recruited—if I
22 had waited five days more, I would have been seventeen and a half. They said he couldn’t
23 have took me.

24 JS: Ah, yes sir.

25 EC: I would have had to register for the draft and wait for the draft to pick me up
26 at eighteen.

27 JS: Oh, wow. Yes, sir.

28 EC: So, I said, “I guess I was lucky, wasn’t I?” I said, “But I could have always
29 went back to sea.” He laughed like hell. I went into the Navy as a regular. I just figured
30 that was as good a job as any. That’s why I stayed. It was a good job. I made my ranks,
31 and I went up as I was supposed to. I was happy in the Navy.

1 JS: Yes, sir. Where did you go through boot at?
2 EC: Huh?
3 JS: Where did you go through boot-camp?
4 EC: San Diego.
5 JS: San Diego, okay. Could you talk just for a minute, a little bit more about boot-
6 camp and what that experience was like for you?
7 EC: It wasn't hard. I was used to losing a lot of sleep and I was used to doing my
8 job. I didn't have any trouble in boot-camp, except that one time. I learned quick that you
9 don't say nothing. So, I never said anything. I thought some of them was kind of silly, but
10 I guess they had to train guys into being sailors.
11 JS: Yes, sir. I know you said that—you talked about mentioning that you told
12 them about you had been in the Merchant Marines and that you had fired on enemy
13 aircraft and all. Did your times in the Merchant Marines help you as far as your training
14 and your career? Did it actually do you some good?
15 EC: Oh, yeah. You know, I think it made me more mature. I used to tell them
16 guys in boot-camp, "Don't bitch about this and that. Just do it, man." In our company, we
17 had one of Bob Wills' singers and guitar player Frog Covington in there. He said, "Boy,
18 you're a pretty mature captain for your age." I said, "Well, you just do things, and you
19 don't get in no trouble."
20 JS: Right.
21 EC: He laughed like hell. He says, "They want to put me in the Special Services,
22 you know. Singing around bases." He said, "I didn't come in here for that." He says, "I
23 want to do my job in the Navy." My other friend was a guy that did—he did six years
24 before. He was an Indian guy. Oklahomee was his name, Jack Oklahomee. He had been
25 on a battleship six years.
26 JS: Yes, sir.
27 EC: He went in again and he was driving a nitro-truck in the oilfield. They asked
28 him what he'd done, and he said, "I drove a nitro-truck in the oilfields." I think they made
29 him 2nd class, the same as he got out 3rd captain.
30 JS: Oh, okay. Yes, sir.
31 EC: He went back on a battleship, I know that.

1 JS: Okay, all right. Was it at the end of boot-camp that they assigned you to be a
2 gunner's mate at that point?

3 EC: Right. I was a gunner's mate and striker, they called it.

4 JS: Okay. Yes, sir. Where did you go from there? Did you go to advanced training
5 at that point?

6 EC: No, I went to a minesweeper.

7 JS: Minesweeper, okay. Where were you assigned then? Where was the
8 minesweeper?

9 EC: We made it to Okinawa.

10 JS: Okay.

11 EC: Of course, we went in there first and swept. We didn't lose any of our
12 division. We didn't get any mines either for some reason. I don't know why. I guess they
13 figured they had killed so many when they landed that they didn't need mines out there.
14 They'd rarely have them land. Everything was zeroed in. We had a three-inch gun on
15 there and had twin .40s. It had one quad in the center. We fired support for them Marines
16 the best we could—close-in support. They wanted everything. They didn't care what it
17 was. So we fired that three-inch. We didn't have no more ammo to fire for them. Skipper
18 said, "I go to keep some of this stuff for my own protection." We went out—that was it.

19 JS: Yes, sir. Did you arrive in the Pacific right before Okinawa?

20 EC: Yeah.

21 JS: Okay, all right. Prior to that point, had you paid much attention to what was
22 going on in the Pacific? Prior to your arrival?

23 EC: Not really. There wasn't much said about it except the kamikazes. We shot
24 down two of them—40 millimeter, maybe the 20 millimeter, I don't know. I know the
25 three-inch didn't because our fuse-settings were way off. We had fuse-set them manually,
26 you know.

27 JS: Mm-hmm. Yes, sir. You were working as a gunner's mate—strike gunner's
28 mate?

29 EC: Oh, yeah. I was a ginner's mate on there.

30 JS: Okay.

1 EC: They wanted to make me 3rd class. The exec says, “No, we can’t make him
2 3rd class. He’s not twenty-one. He can’t go on shore patrol.” The old man told him— I
3 was up on the bridge when he told him. He said, “What shore patrol?” He said, “We’re
4 out here getting shot at and he’s a good man.” He says, “I’m going to make him 3rd
5 class.” That’s how I made 3rd class.

6 JS: Oh, okay. Yes, sir. Could you talk a little bit about the duties of a gunner’s
7 mate on a minesweeper?

8 EC: You just keep the guns operating. That’s about it. Clean them, see if they’re
9 cleaned up. Check the magazine temperatures every day, and report to the captain if
10 things get too hot down there. There’s nothing they could do about it, but you reported it
11 to them anyway. You’d give them the temperatures every day and kept things clean and
12 operating. When something bad went wrong, you’d try to fix it with what you had. In
13 those days, for the 40 millimeters, we had spare parts cases on every gun. It had firing-
14 pins in there, firing-pin springs, extractors, we had a breach mechanism in there, and
15 minor things. You couldn’t fix the power-driver or anything with them. You could keep
16 the guns firing.

17 JS: Yes, sir.

18 EC: They were on every mount.

19 JS: Okay.

20 JS: Same with the 20 millimeters, we had the extra barrels. Our biggest thing on
21 the 40 millimeter is keeping them water jackets cold and steam it. Empty that five-gallon
22 thing, you’d have to pour water in them. It’s just general maintenance, you know.

23 JS: Yes, sir. All right. During this time around Okinawa, did you guys have much
24 interaction with the enemy?

25 EC: Well, yeah. When the kamikazes come.

26 JS: Okay. Yes, sir.

27 EC: When we first went in there, we had PCs (Patrol Coastals). They were
28 smaller than their escort. They led the charge, you know. We just swept and they shot at
29 us pretty good, but I don’t know. Our division never got hit. I think the *Surfbird* got hit
30 by something.

31 JS: Yes, sir.

1 EC: A good example of that was that *The Caine Mutiny* movie.
2 JS: Oh okay. Yes, sir.
3 EC: That's what we did. Of course, we didn't break-off like that. I mean, that's
4 what we did.
5 JS: Right.
6 EC: That was our job. The PCs led the boats in.
7 JS: Okay, yes sir. Once the troops went ashore—once the Marines went ashore
8 there at Okinawa, what was your job at that point?
9 EC: Nothing.
10 JS: Okay.
11 EC: We fired support for them. Everybody did when they first landed trying to get
12 them off the beach. When they got off the beach, of course our guns couldn't fire that far,
13 we got the hell out of there to the anchorage.
14 JS: Okay.
15 EC: We did a lot of patrolling off there, so the destroyers could fire for
16 submarines. We had sonar and we had depth-charges. Our job was done, you know, once
17 we swept the area.
18 JS: All right. Did you remain in the area of Okinawa then until the battle was
19 over?
20 EC: Yeah. They didn't send us anywhere. We just patrolled out there.
21 JS: Yes, sir. Well, are there any other memorable moments or anything that stands
22 out in your mind from Okinawa that you could possibly talk about?
23 EC: Yeah. When they had the great kamikaze raid, they sent—what was it? 500,
24 600 planes up there. They sent all kinds of them. They weren't just Bettys and Vals and
25 that. They were bi-wings and everything else. Anything they could crash into a ship, they
26 sent.
27 JS: Right.
28 EC: There's not many left to the anchorage, if some of them did. We shot down
29 two.
30 JS: Oh, wow. With your gun?
31 EC: Yeah, the 40 millimeter.

1 JS: With the 40 millimeter, okay. Yes, sir. Did you guys talk much about the
2 kamikazes? Just to understand why they were doing—

3 EC: We thought, “What kind of people are these?” They’d crash into ships and
4 kill themselves. When the word come out, we’d call them blocker-bombs. Everyone was
5 scared of them.

6 JS: Yes, sir.

7 EC: You know, because they were so fast that you couldn’t shoot them down. The
8 Japanese found out that they had to launch them from Betty bombers, big-buck Bettys.

9 JS: Okay.

10 EC: The CAP (Combat Air Patrols) shot them down before they could launch
11 them because they were so slow. For some reason, they quit using them. In fact, I was in
12 D.C. last month. I went to that space museum, and they got the only one in the whole
13 world there.

14 JS: Oh, wow. Okay.

15 EC: Yeah, they got it by the Japanese planes. He said, “The Americans called
16 them blocker-bombs.” That’s the only one left in the whole world. That space museum is
17 something else.

18 JS: Yes, sir. I bet it is. How long did that kamikaze attack last?

19 EC: They had a man’s eye on them for two days with the combat air patrols. The
20 *Laffey* almost got sunk. *Morrison* got sunk and a couple other destroyers. We lost 5,000
21 sailors at that Okinawa campaign.

22 JS: Oh, wow. Yes, sir.

23 EC: On the ships, crashing into carriers. *Franklin* got hit. *Princeton* got hit. The
24 CAPs shot down a lot of them. They had a continuous combat air patrol up there.

25 JS: Right.

26 EC: With the ones that got through, they attacked you. They’d come at you from
27 your fantail and your bow from the side, you know.

28 JS: Okay. All right.

29 EC: But otherwise than that, we just hung around. Did mostly ASW (Ant-
30 Submarine Warfare) work, our division did. I don’t know how good we were at it. I don’t
31 know how good those sonars were. Sonar guys kept pinging, so I guess they did all right.

1 JS: Right. So this sonar, did it pick up any—
2 EC: No. We never picked up a submarine.
3 JS: Okay, okay.
4 EC: The *Morrison* sunk the biggest one the Japs made right before they got sunk.
5 They sunk a big submarine. It had a plane on it.
6 JS: Oh, wow. Yes, sir. In the anchorage, where would you guys have been in the
7 anchorage as far as the layout of the anchorage itself?
8 EC: They had a big anchorage there at White Beach. All them LST (Landing
9 Ship, Tank) and that, they kept going in, going in, going in—all them amphibious ships,
10 you know. Once the Marines got off the beach, they kind of left the beach alone, but they
11 kept getting supplies in there to them— trying to. We didn't, you know, we didn't carry
12 nothing. Our biggest problem, I think, was cook would say, "Man, we got to go along the
13 side of something here and get some more chow. We got to have some food on here."
14 Besides that, it was no problem.
15 JS: Yes, sir.
16 EC: We went along side to *Mount Katmai* and they give us ammunition and that.
17 Loaded up our freezers—ice-box. That's about it.
18 JS: Okay, all right.
19 EC: There was LSDs (Landing Ship Dock) out there. Hello—
20 JS: Yes, sir. I'm here.
21 EC: There was LSDs out there. There was all kind of amphibious ships, PAs, AKs
22 (Cargo Ship). They were all unloading. Then, we convoyed some of them PAs because
23 they were running out of destroyers. We convoyed some of them back to Mocwog and
24 the back islands there. Loaded them and brought them back.
25 JS: All right. How long did you guys remain there at Okinawa, in that area?
26 EC: I'd say we were there a month.
27 JS: A month? Okay.
28 EC: Of course, when they dropped that bomb, they sent all the minesweepers
29 back to the States except the small ones. We thought we was going to have to sweep
30 Tokyo Bay. The AMs (Motor Minesweeper), the big ones like I was on, they just kept

1 one division there. They sent our division back to Pearl. I think what they called the AMs
2 or YMSs (Yard Minesweeper), whatever they called them. They swept Tokyo Bay.

3 JS: Okay.

4 EC: We did training until the Korean War come out and then we did the same
5 thing.

6 JS: Okay. Yes, sir. Before getting into that, I want to ask you about the reaction
7 when you guys heard the news about the dropping of the bombs. What was the reaction
8 on the ship?

9 EC: Oh, shit. It was joyous. Everyone was happy.

10 JS: Sure. Yes, sir.

11 EC: Especially what they call the V-6's. That was victory in six-months. That's
12 an acronym for that. They felt they were going to get it out right away, you know. "We're
13 going home, man." It didn't happen that way. They had to hang around for a while. They
14 had the point-system, you know.

15 JS: Yes, sir. So you said after that they sent you guys back to Pearl at that point?

16 EC: Yeah, we went back to Pearl for overall and maintenance and retraining.

17 JS: Right.

18 EC: They made us go out there and sweep. We went to Monterey Bay of all
19 places. They had dumped a bunch of dummy mines in there. They laid them and we had
20 to sweep that minefield training. They weren't explosive mines. They were dummies.

21 JS: Okay. Yes, sir.

22 EC: We did that and then we hung out in Long Beach—oh shoot, for three years.

23 JS: Yes, sir. Did you remain aboard the same minesweep?

24 EC: I did, yeah. I made 1st class on there. I stayed on there as long as I could.
25 Then, I got orders to Brooklyn. They were going to put all those AMs out of commission,
26 and I got orders to Brooklyn Navy Yard. I put the *Wiltsie* in commission, the 716
27 destroyer.

28 JS: Okay. What year would this have been?

29 EC: 1947.

30 JS: 1947, okay. What were your duties here?

1 EC: Same thing. As a gunner's-mate, I was leading PO (Petty Officer) of the gun
2 division. I just seen they did all the work, and the chief would tell me what he wants done
3 and that's it.

4 JS: Yes, sir. All right.

5 EC: It's kind of nice in Brooklyn.

6 JS: Mm-hmm. How often would you all go out to sea?

7 EC: We were in the first increment of 1st class of chiefs. All we did is—we had
8 some seaman with us. They stood the fire-watches. Then, we just watched the ship being
9 built.

10 JS: Okay. Yes, sir.

11 EC: They put the guns on there and they'd check them out. We'd check them out
12 with the yard-birds and then we'd sign them off. The chief would sign them off. We did
13 sea-trials. They had a bad screw on the *Wiltsie*. We had to go back in the Navy yard and
14 dry it off. They pulled that hull out of there. It was bad—I don't know what they said,
15 they had bad bearings. Then, we went to Guantanamo and then we went through the
16 canal.

17 JS: Okay.

18 EC: After the skipper signed for the ship and put it in commission, we went to the
19 canal. We got into San Diego and got burnt there. They took me and all of the gunner's-
20 mate strikers in the 3rd class and put them on the *Hollister* because all those guys got out.
21 We went to China at three o'clock in the morning.

22 JS: Oh, wow. Right.

23 EC: We were all transferred at two o'clock and chief said, "What's going on?"
24 The division officer said, "Well, the *Hollister's* going to China. They need a crew."
25 That's the way it was then. You'd go from ship to ship kind of, because all these guys
26 were getting out the reserves. Us regulars, we just went ship to ship.

27 JS: Right. Yes, sir. When you joined the *Hollister*, what year was this?

28 EC: '47.

29 JS: Okay, still in '47.

30 EC: I was on the *Hollister* until '49.

1 JS: All right. What type of things did you guys do in these couple of years there?
2 Did you spend most of the time around China?

3 EC: Yeah. We went from Shantou to Shanghai to Hong Kong.

4 JS: Okay.

5 EC: Then we went to Japan. That's all we did is show the flag.

6 JS: Okay. Yes, sir.

7 EC: It was kind of nice duty.

8 JS: All right. Anything else we should mention about that time period?

9 EC: No. it was just like you read about in the books, you know. We went from
10 place to place, had liberty, went to the next place, had liberty, showed the flag.

11 JS: Right, right. After that, in '49, where was your next assignment at that point?

12 EC: What?

13 JS: What was your next assignment?

14 EC: I got transferred in '50 to a fleet tug. The USS *Tawasa* ATF 92.

15 JS: All right.

16 EC: I was on there until '52. For some reason, I got transferred to another
17 minesweeper. I guess because I had experience, I don't know. During Korea, we swept
18 all them places. We were sweeping when the *Pirate* and *Pledge* got sunk. "Bam-bam"
19 they went down. It's kind of scary. We swept the Inchon and went to the other side,
20 swept Hungnam. We was sweeping all the time. Them Koreans floated mines all around
21 us. They had us out there looking for them I guess. We run the hammer-box a lot for
22 acoustic mines.

23 JS: Yes, sir. You mentioned sweeping Inchon. Do you have many memories of
24 the Inchon landings?

25 EC: No. They didn't seem like they had that much trouble. I remember the *Pirate*
26 and *Pledge*. It went "Boom, Boom", it's going down.

27 JS: Right. Did you actually see it?

28 EC: Oh, yeah.

29 JS: Okay. How far away were you?

30 EC: I saw the explosions. The *Surfbird* and I forget the other one, went up there
31 and picked up survivors. We kept sweeping.

1 JS: Mm-hmm. How long did that last—the sweeping mission?
2 EC: Just two days.
3 JS: Just a couple of days.
4 EC: Oh, yeah. We swept that whole thing in two days—that whole harbor. Then
5 we went back to Japan.
6 JS: All right. Had you gone to Korea prior to joining the sweeper? Had you gone
7 with the *Tawasa* before that or—
8 EC: No. I just got orders to go to the *Tawasa*. They needed a 1st class gunner's
9 mate.
10 JS: Okay, all right. You said after sweeping Inchon, you guys went to Japan at
11 that point?
12 EC: Yeah, we went to Japan, then we went back to Long Beach—No, no. We
13 swept the other side. We swept Hungnam. When they evacuated there, we kind of
14 convoyed them boats in. Then, when we were done, we went back to Long Beach. I got
15 orders for crew training. I was a company commander at Great Lakes for three years.
16 JS: Okay. Yes, sir. What years would that have been?
17 EC: Oh, '54 and '57.
18 JS: '54 and '57, okay.
19 EC: When I left there, I went to another minesweep.
20 JS: Right.
21 EC: We did a tour out in WestPac (Western Pacific). I don't know what we did.
22 We anchored right back at the 38th Parallel. The thing that the skipper never once told us
23 was that we're looking for—what do you call them? Not pirates—smugglers. All of us
24 guys thought we was up there to see if them North Koreans would shoot at us.
25 JS: (Chuckles) Right.
26 EC: We stood condition-2 watches for some reason, but we couldn't get up on the
27 guns, you know.
28 JS: Ah, okay. Yes, sir.
29 EC: We had to kind of stay out of sight when we were there. We never had any
30 trouble. We was up there thirty days at a time. Then, we'd go back to Japan and relieve
31 one of them other sweepers and then we went back home to Long Beach. They put all the

1 AMs out of commission. I went to gunner's-mate school at Washington, D.C. Class-B
2 school. I graduated out of there and went to another destroyer.

3 JS: Okay. What year would this have been?

4 EC: Golly, let's see. When I went to school, it must have been '55— no, it must
5 have been '58.

6 JS: '58, okay.

7 EC: Yeah.

8 JS: Yes, sir. You said you went to the school in D.C.?

9 EC: Huh?

10 JS: You said you went to school in Washington?

11 EC: No, no. I went to school in Washington D.C.

12 JS: Yes, sir. Okay.

13 EC: They added the Anacostia there at the air station. It was a class-B school—
14 what they call class-B. That was for 2nd class and 1st class.

15 JS: Yes, sir. Could you talk a little bit about the training there?

16 EC: You just went eight hours a day. One week out of there—no, two weeks—
17 they took the five-inch power-drive apart. We did and put it back together. Things like
18 that, that's all. At that time, they were bringing the three-inch fifty in, the automatic
19 three-inch fifty. We had two weeks on that—how to adjust the damn thing and keep it
20 running. We spent a lot of time with the five-inch thirty-eight power-drive. That was a
21 son-of-a-gun, man. Them guys that put problems in there, you had to get in there and fix
22 them, you know. We all graduated.

23 JS: Yes, sir. All right. Once you graduated, you said you went back to a destroyer
24 at that point?

25 EC: Let's see. When I graduated there—yeah, I went to a destroyer. I went back
26 to the *Hollister*.

27 JS: Okay, okay. Where was the *Hollister* at that point?

28 EC: Huh?

29 JS: Where was the *Hollister* at?

30 EC: In San Diego.

31 JS: Okay. Yes, sir.

1 EC: When I made chief, I got orders to an LSD of all things. I was on there four
2 years.

3 JS: Okay.

4 EC: the USS *Gunston Hall* LSD-5.

5 JS: Okay. Yes, sir. What were your duties as chief? What type of things did you
6 have to do?

7 EC: Just see if the work was done. Tell the first-class what to do. I used to go
8 around maybe in the morning and check everything. Stay out of his way unless he called
9 me.

10 JS: Yes, sir.

11 EC: That's it. I stood JOD (Jack O' the Dust) watches on there and I had to go to
12 ship-handling school. I went there. That was a ship that sent me there. Let's see, in '61,
13 '62, I went to recruit training at San Diego. I pushed three or four companies there. I got
14 in what they call a drill-masters unit. I thought, "Thanks for the parade." They called me
15 up there and asked me would I— this is '64, '65. They asked me would I go to Vietnam. I
16 said, "Yeah. I don't care."

17 JS: Had you paid much attention to what was going on Vietnam? Did you know
18 much about it?

19 EC: No.

20 JS: All right.

21 EC: There wasn't much going on there then, except Kennedy sending more
22 advisors there. I thought that would be pretty nice being an advisor. I don't know. I didn't
23 know anything about it.

24 JS: Right. Okay.

25 EC: I went to what they call self-protection school. That was four weeks. You had
26 to fire all the M1s, M16s, Thompson's, and BARs (Browning Automatic Rifle). You
27 went to Camp Pendleton for that. Then, they taught you some about what they thought an
28 advisor should do and off we went. The admiral in charge there knew me. He said, "By
29 golly, I know you. You were on the *Hollister* with me as admiral warden." I said, "Boy,
30 you got a good memory." He says, "Sit down, let's bullshit a little bit." He told that, he
31 says, "Close that door. We're going to talk a little bit." He asked me about—when he got

1 off of the *Hollister*, he made captain and got off of there. He says, “What’d you guys do?
2 Raise hell in China?” I said, “That’s about it.” He laughed like hell. He said, “We did
3 have a good time there, didn’t we?” I said, “Yeah. That was pretty nice duties sailing
4 from Shantou to Shanghai to Hong Kong. Then, I got assigned to the Junk Force. They
5 called it the Junk Force then and then they changed the name to the Coastal Force.

6 JS: Okay. Yes, sir. Well, you talked about that advisor training. Did they teach
7 you much about Vietnamese language or Vietnamese culture? Anything like that?

8 EC: Nothing.

9 JS: Nothing. Okay, all right.

10 EC: They just told us that, “Remember that them people been doing this for a long
11 time and don’t try to change them. Work with them.”

12 JS: Okay, all right. How did you get to Vietnam? How did you actually get over
13 there?

14 EC: I flew on an airliner.

15 JS: Okay. From where?

16 EC: We left Alameda.

17 JS: Okay, all right.

18 EC: It was a commercial airliner.

19 JS: Yes, sir. Okay.

20 EC: It had four pretty girls on there. Hell, them girls had a ball on there with those
21 guys.

22 JS: Right. (Laughs) Yes, sir. What was the mood like on the plane ride over there
23 then?

24 EC: Them guys, you know, they all said they’d go. It was pretty good then.

25 JS: Yes, sir.

26 EC: They all said, “We’re going to do our best to help these people.”

27 JS: Yes, sir. Did you come into country in Tan Son Nhut?

28 EC: Yeah. We went into Tan Son Nhut, right.

29 JS: Okay, all right. What was your first impression of Vietnam?

30 EC: Hot.

31 JS: Hot, right. What sort of in-processing did you go through?

1 EC: Let's see, it was still MAAG (Military Assistance Advisory Group) when I
2 went there. The Navy changed it to Naval Advisory Group. The Army changed to MACV
3 (Military Assistance Command Vietnam).

4 JS: Right, right. Yes, sir.

5 EC: I don't know why the change was. I'm not a politician. I guess everyone
6 wanted their own say.

7 JS: Right, right. Do you remember about the—what month it was when you
8 came?

9 EC: About what?

10 JS: Do you remember what month it was when you arrived in Vietnam?

11 EC: Yeah, you mean what was happening?

12 JS: No. I mean the time period, when?

13 EC: Oh, I went in there September of '64.

14 JS: September of '64. Okay, all right. You already knew by that point that you
15 were going to be—of course, never mind.

16 EC: I knew I was going to the Coastal Force because I had five days of infantry
17 training at Camp Pendleton.

18 JS: Right, okay. What did you think about that? About that type of duty?

19 EC: I thought it would be interesting. That's about it. I didn't know anything
20 about it. I got down to the fort down there. That's what it was, a triangle. They policed-up
21 the civilians and they made them make the wall higher so they couldn't see me. They
22 were very nice to me them guys, to start with.

23 JS: All right. Where were you based at?

24 EC: Well, our main base was Cat Lo outside of Vung Tau. My place I was an
25 advisor at was on the Ham Luong River at a village called Tiem Ton, a shrimp village.

26 JS: All right.

27 EC: There was a hundred junkmen there and three officers there. There was
28 lieutenant—well, they called him “dai uy”. Captain, I guess, and had a JG (Junior Grade)
29 and an ensign. That was the three Vietnamese officers. At the time, I had to go by myself
30 because we didn't have enough officers and men to go around.

31 JS: Yes, sir.

1 EC: I found out when I got down there that these guys weren't even in the Navy.
2 They were paramilitary guys. I figured that if they'd stayed there that long, they were all
3 right.

4 JS: Yes, sir. Your direct counterpart, what was his rank?

5 EC: He was a lieutenant.

6 JS: A lieutenant, okay.

7 EC: Navy lieutenant.

8 JS: Yes, sir.

9 EC: He and I got along fine. We wanted to do right. He wanted to win. He was
10 from the north, and he'd been to St. Cere. He had been with the French assault, which
11 later we called the RAG (River Assault Group). His problem was that he was overly
12 aggressive. In fact, it got him killed. I was up at Saigon to a meeting about the latest coup
13 and I understand they fired a few rounds at the base. He went out there and they were
14 waiting on him, ambushed him, and killed him. They did that when I was there and I'd
15 say, "Bon, we can't go out there like that. You got to have some kind of support besides
16 this 181."

17 JS: Right.

18 EC: I said, "Think about it." We went out a couple times, we didn't get ambushed
19 or nothing. I think that to this day they did that because I wasn't there to talk to him. He
20 was very aggressive. A lot of times, they'd shoot at us from the beach, and we'd land
21 them boats. Stuff like that.

22 JS: Yes, sir. Could you talk a little bit about just your quarters and housing and
23 the food?

24 EC: Our housing in them days was coconut-frond hut.

25 JS: Okay.

26 EC: That's it. The greatest thing that they ever did for me in the military in those
27 days was, they'd drop me a roll of plastic and I'd put it on top of my bunk and wrap my
28 shoes at night in it. I gave some to Bon. He did the same thing because it would leak like
29 hell, you know. When it rained hard, it leaked. This way, it kept our bunk dry anyway.

30 JS: Right. How about the food? Were you eating Vietnamese food?

1 EC: We ate their food. Bon made me drink an ounce of Nuoc Mam every day. He
2 says, “You need”— well, he called them “veetamins”. I said, “Oh, has this got
3 ‘veetamins’?” I said, “They’re ‘vitamins’ Mr. Bon.” He finally got to where he could say
4 vitamins. If I had known French, I could have really talked to him because he spoke
5 French like a Frenchman. I didn’t know French. He taught me what Vietnamese I knew
6 to start with.

7 JS: Right. Were you able to pick up a good bit of Vietnamese as you—

8 EC: Yeah, especially on operations. I was pretty good at it. Of course, like anyone
9 else, we’d take a lot of fire from the beach and those officers would say everything in
10 Vietnamese. They didn’t bother translating it in English for me.

11 JS: Right.

12 EC: Yeah, I learned quite a bit.

13 JS: Okay. Yes, sir. Were there other Vietnamese there that could also speak
14 English or was it just Bon?

15 EC: No. Let’s see. Tuy Long, he spoke English pretty well. He was educated in a
16 catholic nunnery, nun school.

17 JS: Okay. Yes, sir.

18 EC: So he learned English very well, but he spoke French very well. If I would
19 have learned French in high school or something, I could have gotten along better with
20 them. But I got along good with both of them.

21 JS: Yes, sir. All right. You talked about eating the food and drinking an ounce of
22 the Nuoc Mam every day. Did that take long to get used to? Did you like the food?

23 EC: It took a while. He’d call rice-rats, squirrels. I think for me, once I got used to
24 the idea that they weren’t sewer rats, they lived out in the rice-paddies and ate all the rice
25 shoots they could eat, it didn’t bother me too much. I used to get a kick out of him when
26 people would come down and hassle him for Saigon, he’d give them a dinner. Squirrels
27 and the dessert was duck-blood pudding with peanuts. I never could get used to that one.
28 That was a tough one. The rest was good, you know. I had a chief’s wife that—she’d
29 cook sometimes for me. She’d cook for the—so she said, the commandant in a French
30 base. She was pretty good. We had very good food with her. Of course, I paid her.

1 JS: All right. Well, outside of the food, did it take you a while to adjust to living
2 like the Vietnamese?

3 EC: Yeah, it took a while.

4 JS: Okay.

5 EC: It took a while to realize that I was in a—we were in a bad place. That I had
6 to make some changes if I could. Like, I got cover on the machinegun pits. We didn't
7 have any overhead cover there. I talked them into making overhead cover.

8 JS: Right.

9 EC: I talked them into making the firing-pits a little better. A little thicker and
10 better. I got some rockets from the helicopter pilot. I put them in the wall and aimed them
11 towards that tree line. I had told them all, "You fire one at a time." Bon understood, but I
12 don't think the ensigns and the JG did because the ensigns fired them off automatic.
13 (Laughs) We had rockets flying everywhere.

14 JS: (Laughs) Right.

15 EC: We had to rebuild that wall and put them back in there. They did help us.
16 You'd fire one out to that tree line, you know, and it's pretty good. When I first went
17 there, we didn't have any real support or anything. The only air-support we had were
18 Mohawks from Vung Tau. They had one M60 mounted in there on each side. Then, they
19 got a colonel right before—I guess in '66 they got a colonel that made them take them off
20 of there and said, "You guys are not fighter planes." So, there went our air-support.
21 Otherwise, than that, we did pretty good.

22 JS: Hmm-mm, right. How about just ability to get supplies. Was it ever difficult
23 or did you guys usually have what you needed?

24 EC: Oh, yeah. It was really tough because somewhere along the line the
25 Vietnamese were scared of losing things. It seemed like they thought they could fight a
26 war and not lose any boats or not lose any people. If you needed supplies like old gun-
27 barrels, things like that, they were really reluctant to send them to you. I don't know what
28 good they did in the warehouse.

29 JS: Right, right.

30 EC: Those kind of things. Now, CORDS (Civil Operations and Revolutionary
31 Development Support) was good. I got the Seabees down there from CORDS and they

1 dug two nice wells for me and showed the Vietnamese how to rest the wells. I got a
2 Filipino farmer down there that was with CORDS, and he showed them how to plant the
3 magic rice. Of course, the Viet Cong told them all I was trying to kill them all with that
4 magic rice. I had a little trouble getting them to eat it. But once they saw that they could
5 make their yield better and that we were out there at night protecting them, they did really
6 well with it. I'll tell you what I think about my first tour with the Coastal Force or Junk
7 Force, they were very brave guys. They had nothing to patrol with. At nighttime, we had
8 no way to find our way back to the river. No navigation, no compass, no nothing. In fact,
9 I had a compass in a cigarette lighter that we used. We did most of our time protecting
10 the base and patrolling the river. We'd go out in the daytime and patrol out there, stop a
11 lot of junks, and check them out. We got some contraband, but I'm sure at night they had
12 free movement because we had no way of getting back into port. It's awful dark down
13 there in them provinces, you know. Especially then, no one had electric down there. I got
14 a generator out of CORDS. We wired every house in that ville with one light bulb. Boy,
15 they thought that was the greatest thing in the world. I got them a TV. They put that in
16 the market. We had our problems. We had two girls blow up the market, two young girls.
17 I think they'd give them cans of explosive with probably mousetraps on the bottom.
18 When they set them down, it blew them and everyone up. I had that happen.

19 JS: Yes, sir.

20 EC: When I opened a school down there—I got CORDS to build me a school.

21 JS: Okay.

22 EC: They put a 105 shell booby-trap. If I would have went there, it would have
23 blew me up. One of the PFs (Popular Forces) that they had in the village happened to
24 notice it and we dug it out of there and disarmed it. It go so that we'd send ambushes out
25 at night. I think we killed a lot of that proselyting cavalry, cause they didn't come around
26 so much. We got the PRUs (Provincial Reconnaissance Unit) down there for a while.

27 JS: Yes, sir.

28 EC: They went out all the time. Of course, you know the story on them. We made
29 ambushes around the ville. It kept that proselyting cavalry out of there. Up until '66, I
30 think we did more base defense than we did patrol.

31 JS: Yes, sir. This was at Tiem Ton?

1 EC: Yeah, at the Junk-base 3437. Well, they're all the same name.
2 JS: Okay.
3 EC: They didn't have any navigation equipment on the big junk.
4 JS: Right, right. Yes, sir. The villagers there, what was the relationship like with
5 them? Were they pretty friendly for the most part?
6 EC: Oh yeah, because we protected them.
7 JS: Yes, sir.
8 EC: We did convoy their boats up to Ben Tre, so they could sell their shrimp up
9 there. They were happy about that naturally. But that's what we did. In '66, I got orders
10 back to Vallejo—No, back to San Diego, to Coronado, to help set up a curriculum for the
11 PBRs (Patrol Boat River) they were making. That was a big argument. There was three of
12 us there that had experience. We told them all that they couldn't go on the canals. They'd
13 get all that crap in there that floats in there. Of course, big-shot Naval officers that have
14 never been in country said, "Well, you guys just shut-up. We're going to put these in-
15 country." The first year them PBRs were there, all you heard was, "Pounce, pounce,
16 pounce." Finally, they made the drive-shafts bigger and put cutters in there. I did nine
17 months with them PBRs—a patrol officer. Then, I transferred over to the RAG at Vinh
18 Long.
19 JS: Yes, sir.
20 EC: When I transferred there, I guess I was lucky. They gave us the Mang Thit
21 Canal open—Mang Thit Nicolai Canal open, which was full of bad guys. For the first six
22 months we were in that canal, we took forty percent casualties.
23 JS: Oh, wow.
24 EC: Not so much KIAs (Killed in Action), but a lot of wounded guys from B-40s.
25 JS: All right. Before we get into all that with the PBRs and then also your return
26 for the third time, if I could ask you some more questions about that first tour with the
27 Coastal Force?
28 EC: Yeah, go ahead.
29 JS: Okay. Could you talk a little bit more your responsibilities as an advisor when
30 you would be out on patrol? What would you be doing during that point?

1 EC: Well, I taught the Vietnamese how to really work their guns. Those guys
2 didn't have any training in it, otherwise whatever they told them. They used to tell me the
3 extractors were bad on the .50 calibers and all that. I'd set them up for them and show
4 them how to set them up. They said, "Oh." No one taught them anything. They just set
5 them down there with a bunch of bolts. I talked to Bon all the time about changing oil in
6 the motors, naturally.

7 JS: Right.

8 EC: Keeping the fuel-tanks full because I said, "You'll pop your ejectors there
9 and you won't have any motors when you need them." He was really good. He listened
10 and made them do that. They were very well little trained when I went down there.

11 JS: Okay.

12 EC: In fact, they took them all out of prisons and everywhere else. Tattoo them
13 and send them down there.

14 JS: Right. You mentioned the tattoo the other day when we talked on the phone.
15 Could you talk a little bit more about that, the significance of the tattoo?

16 EC: I think mainly it was, so they didn't turn to the Viet Cong.

17 JS: Okay, right.

18 EC: I think that was the idea of it. That was a Vietnamese idea by the way, not an
19 American idea.

20 JS: Right, okay. You got one as well though?

21 EC: Oh, yeah. I got one.

22 JS: Right. Was that one of the first things you did?

23 EC: No, not really. They kept on me, "You don't have no Sat Cong, no Sat
24 Cong." I said, "Okay, go ahead." So, they picked it in me. That helped my rapport with
25 them, believe me. In those days, I'd stay down there a month and maybe I'd go to Vung
26 Tau for a week and then I'd go to Phan Thiet. We just didn't have the advisors in.

27 JS: Okay. So they had you moving around?

28 EC: Well, we all moved around. The officers moved around and ol' Bon used to
29 tell them, "You send that chief back to me. I like the chief. He's the number-one guy." So
30 I spent a lot of time down there and through all the coups, and everything.

1 JS: Yes, sir. Could you talk a little bit about the boats themselves and how many
2 crewmen would be on a boat?

3 EC: We had five and an officer, patrol officer, or a chief on there. We had a .50
4 forward, we had a .50-AP (Armor Piercing), and of course, the small arms. We had five
5 guys on there. Of course, when we made operations, we'd have twenty on there, you
6 know.

7 JS: Okay, right.

8 EC: We made some good operations. We got a bunch of stuff at a place called
9 Quan Loi. It's a peninsula that hangs out. We got a bunch of stuff out of there. In fact,
10 that was the most successful one we had.

11 JS: Yes, sir. All right. Was it finding things like weapons caches and things like
12 that?

13 EC: What kind of weapons we had?

14 JS: No. As far as the things you captured there at Quan Loi.

15 EC: We got the first Chicom (Chinese Communist) in the Delta.

16 JS: Okay. Yes, sir.

17 EC: Bon sent one up to Admiral Cang. He was a Vietnamese admiral and a brand-
18 new one up to him. The rest of them we turned into the province chief. What he did with
19 them, God only knows. I don't know.

20 JS: Right.

21 EC: I'm sure all the ammo and stuff that we got out of there—we got three junk-
22 loads full.

23 JS: Wow.

24 EC: After that, we had a series of really pretty serious base-attacks. What the guys
25 did really well is, they never got inside the base. I think that was trying to get us out of
26 there. But otherwise than that, that's what we did. We were supposed to patrol the coasts.
27 It's just firing during the daytime, stop bullets. At nighttime, we were lost. In fact, we
28 would tell the base to shoot a star shell out of the .81 in the air, so we could find the river-
29 mouth.

30 JS: Yes, sir. One more question about Quan Loi. How did you find all this stuff?
31 Was it hidden? How did you discover it?

1 EC: We'd go every night on the fishing-nets. We'd have dinner with the
2 fishermen. One guy told Bon, he says, "The Viet Cong moved many rifles at Quan Loi."
3 They don't have too many men there. They have maybe two squads. He says, "Let's
4 make an operation there." So we took four junks and made an operation. We did very
5 well. We had thirteen KIAs and five WIAs (Wounded in Action) Viet Cong. We'd just
6 run upon this stuff. It was in a hooch. We got it all out of there and took the ones that
7 were wounded back to our base and province, then sent a RAG (River Assault Group)
8 down from My Tho. They didn't find anymore. Of course, we couldn't hold it. You
9 know, we couldn't land and hold it.

10 JS: Yes, sir.

11 EC: We had to withdraw to get where we could find and leave. There might have
12 been more there. I doubt it. They looked pretty well. They didn't find anything else under
13 them hooches in those caves they dug. That was the best operation that I did with the
14 Junk Forces.

15 JS: Okay. All right. Could you talk a little bit about, I guess, about just what a
16 typical day would be like during this tour with the Junk Force?

17 EC: We'd get up around six, seven o'clock and eat breakfast. We'd go out and
18 patrol out there. We'd take a couple junks out there on patrol and we'd check their
19 papers. We'd check underneath the boats. We'd bring any people in there that were
20 suspected, that didn't have the right papers. I forget what they call it—"can cuoc". Yeah,
21 can cuoc, the ID card. We did that. We nosed around in shore trying to get them to shoot
22 at us. Bon liked that. That was our day really and we'd come back to the base at night.
23 They'd set up an ambush and sometimes I'd go with them and sometimes I wouldn't.
24 They liked me to go with them. They thought I was lucky. (Chuckles)

25 JS: (Chuckles) Right.

26 EC: I guess I had good karma. That was really our day.

27 JS: Yes, sir. Okay.

28 EC: If we didn't go on patrol, what was there to do, you know. Walk around the
29 base and see if all the machineguns had ammo. My biggest problem with the Vietnamese,
30 even in the RAG units, was they didn't realize—I don't think, to fight a war you got to

1 work at it. You can have the best equipment in the world, if you don't work keeping it up,
2 it won't work.

3 JS: Right, right.

4 EC: Sometimes the machineguns would be an awful shape. We had .30 calibers
5 then. I'd tell them, you know, "No good." Then, they'd look at me and laugh and clean
6 them up. That was a problem I had all the time I was with the Vietnamese Navy, is
7 maintenance. You got to work at war to win it. You know, it's not all shoot-them-up.

8 JS: Right. Yes, sir.

9 EC: They weren't as scared to shoot-them-up, but they didn't like to clean-them-
10 up. (Laughs)

11 JS: (Laughs) Right, right. You talked about the .30 cal machineguns, but what
12 about your own personal weapon? What did you carry?

13 EC: The personal weapons they had?

14 JS: Yes, sir.

15 EC: They had Thompsons. They cut the stock off of them and hung them around
16 their neck. We had a BAR (Browning Automatic Rifle)—two BARs. They called them
17 FM-BARs, their French name. We had Garand, one Garand. That was it.

18 JS: Okay. What about you? What did you carry?

19 EC: I had a .45. I could grab a Thompson anytime I wanted one from them.

20 JS: Okay. All right. Yes, sir.

21 EC: I got a grenade-launcher right at the end of my tour there—M79. They were
22 all scared the VC (Viet Cong) would get that, but they never did. I took it back with me
23 and gave it to my relief. They liked that. Of course, then they got armed better. I think
24 they got M16s finally. They had to because they had to change the ammunition, I think. I
25 know in the RAGs they still had M1s, but they did have M60s. Anyway, when I left
26 there, they were still with the M1s. They looked kind of funny trying to shoot an M1.

27 JS: Mm-hmm. So they had the Garands and not the carbines?

28 EC: Yeah, they didn't like carbines.

29 JS: Okay, right.

30 EC: When I first went there, they gave me a carbine with two clips. That's what
31 an advisor got. You weren't supposed to do any shooting or anything. I asked that one

1 province advisor, “Well, how can I go out advising when something happens if I can’t
2 shoot.” He looked at me like I was some kind of nut. Was I supposed to stand there and
3 wave a flag and say, “I’m American, don’t shoot me.” I don’t think so.

4 JS: (Chuckles) Right.

5 EC: One night, we had a base-attack and one of the junk-men hollered out there,
6 “Don’t shoot at me. The Cong is over there. Shoot at him.” (Laughs)

7 JS: (Laughs) Really, right—go ahead. Could you talk a little bit about, I guess,
8 your first significant encounter with the enemy and what you remember about it?

9 EC: I remembered that they had—the first time they hit the base, you could tell
10 they had a conglomeration of weapons. After the first kind of assault was there, I think
11 they run out of ammo. They had to back-off. That’s my opinion.

12 JS: Okay.

13 EC: Of course, later on when they started getting Chicoms and AKs and them
14 Russian machineguns, it was kind of different. At first, they were like us. In fact, we got a
15 MAS-36 off one of them that we killed in the wire. That’s an old French rifle. I think they
16 used that in the Foreign Legion. As the infiltration progressed, their attacks got better. It
17 seemed like they had more ammo and a better selection of weapons. You know what we
18 call the Viet Cong, the National Liberation Front guy, was a pretty tough soldier.

19 JS: Right, okay.

20 EC: He fought Japanese, a lot of them. He fought French, a lot of them. He wasn’t
21 any dummy as a soldier. I think American units found that out. They thought they could
22 go in there and he was going to run away. They found out he was a pretty good soldier
23 once they rearmed him and them old-timers took charge. They knew what they were
24 doing, man. I used to tell them at school that. You’re going against some tough people
25 out there. You got to keep your mind in gear all the time.

26 JS: Yes, sir. Could you talk a little bit more about the Viet Cong and their tactics,
27 and how they used the environment?

28 EC: I don’t know who did that big battle at Ba Ria with the Marine Corps, the
29 Vietnamese Marines. Down there, they were satisfied if they could kill one or two guys
30 and get their weapons, you know.

31 JS: Right.

1 EC: I really believe that they knew they had time on their hands. Why get out
2 there and get a bunch of us killed for nothing? Do what we could do and do it tomorrow.
3 Why they got talked into that Tet Offensive, I'll never know.

4 JS: All right. Yes, sir.

5 EC: Especially in the Delta.

6 JS: Yes, sir. Well, you mentioned a lot of the time was spent guarding the base
7 there. You spent a lot of time in the base defending it at night. How often would the Viet
8 Cong actually attack?

9 EC: Well, when I first went there, they hit us every night with something.

10 JS: Okay.

11 EC: I never got one, but they had those little Chinese grenades. They shot them
12 out of something. They'd shoot them in the base. That's why I made them make—I
13 didn't make them, I talked Bon into making overhead cover for the machinegun pits. I
14 said, "You don't want them damn grenades landing in there and killing your best men."
15 "Oh, no, no. You're right, you're right." So, we made overhead cover for that. They were
16 content to harass us. I guess that kept us off the river. Bon finally put two boats out there
17 anyway. Coastal Force then was very ineffective as far as stopping junk-loads of stuff
18 because they had no navigation equipment, no way to get around. Of course, the Sea
19 Force wouldn't help the Coastal Force. The RAGs were a different story. They'd do what
20 they could. They didn't like us either. So, that's what we did. We just stayed there and
21 did the base defense and try to patrol. We'd go over the river-mouth and back. If we had
22 to go out to sea, we would go out and kind of idle around until light come. There was one
23 place at the bottom of the Ham Luong that was a very well-guarded place. I'm sure they
24 had a lot of troops there. They shot too much for us. Then, we couldn't get anyone else to
25 come down there.

26 JS: Right.

27 EC: The sea force wouldn't help us. There were a lot of Viet Cong there. They got
28 better armed all the time because they'd start with red treasures and ended up with them
29 green treasures. So, they had a bunch of communist ammunition there. We tried to stop
30 things there, but they were too much for us. No one would come help us in those days.

1 JS: Right. Yes, sir. So as they begin getting more and more weapons, did you
2 guys become out-gunned at that point then?

3 EC: They got re-armed. The ol' one-shot Charlie with that MAS-36, he turned
4 into a man with an AK-47 or a Chicom.

5 JS: Right. At what point in this first tour did you notice that when they started
6 getting the Chicom, the AK-47s?

7 EC: That was right in the middle of '65. They started getting better weapons
8 down there.

9 JS: Right.

10 EC: That was right when we got that big catch at Quan Loi.

11 JS: Okay, right. Did you have a feeling at that point that the war was starting to
12 turn against you guys then? How did you feel about the way things were going?

13 EC: I don't know how to put it. I thought the Vietnamese thought everyone had
14 their bally-wack and don't help the other guy.

15 JS: Okay.

16 EC: I don't know. Like Thieu, when he was president, he wanted to take our .50
17 calibers away from us because he was scared we'd shoot at VNAP (South Vietnamese
18 Air Force). We never did. I never saw any indication that we shot at VNAP.

19 JS: Right, right.

20 EC: The Vietnamese didn't cooperate with each other. That RAG would stay up
21 at My Tho and we'd ask him to come down to help us, and they wouldn't send anyone
22 down there. "No, that wasn't our job. That's your job." That's the opinion I got. Some of
23 the other guys felt the same way. They wouldn't help each other. When it got so serious
24 there, it was the last of '65, they took a hundred junk-men and sent them to Ba Ria to
25 help the Marines. They were all afraid they were going to lose the country.

26 JS: Right. Yes, sir.

27 EC: The Viet Cong really slaughtered them Vietnamese Marines. They caught
28 them in a bad ambush. We went up there and tried to help them the best we could.
29 Finally, VNAP come in there and bomb the shit out of them. That ended that, you know.

30 JS: Right.

31 EC: It probably saved the country.

1 JS: Yes, sir.

2 EC: I noticed the cooperation between the different things wasn't there.

3 JS: Right. Did that have any impact on your morale, or morale in general, about
4 the fact that they weren't cooperating with each other?

5 EC: I thought, "My goodness. We got a place where we got an intense fire." We
6 lost people there trying to get in there at the mouth of the Ham Luong River. Why
7 wouldn't the sea force come in there and help us?

8 JS: Right.

9 EC: They had 40 millimeters. They had three-inch guns on those ships, but they
10 wouldn't come and help us. I thought, "What are we doing here?" That's the attitude I got
11 in that thing.

12 JS: Yes, sir. At what level did that problem originate or who should have been
13 making sure that there was coordination?

14 EC: Well, I'm sure the hierarchies of the Vietnamese Navy should have told the
15 Sea Force captain, "You help those guys."

16 JS: Right, right.

17 EC: I just don't think it was happening. I mean, that's just an opinion. When you
18 call for help and they don't come, something's wrong. It's their country.

19 JS: Right, right. Did you ever discuss this problem with other advisors?

20 EC: Oh, yeah.

21 JS: Okay. You guys, were you not in much of a position to do anything about it?

22 EC: Our Coastal Force boss was a senior lieutenant in the Navy. He said "Yeah,
23 I'll go to Saigon and talk about it." He come back and said, "I was told to shut up." So,
24 that's as far as that went.

25 JS: Okay. Yes, sir. Right. You guys ended up providing support for others though,
26 correct? For example, at Ba Ria with the Marines.

27 EC: Yeah. I'm sure the hierarchy up there— what was that guy, Khanh I think
28 was president then.

29 JS: General Khanh? Yes, sir.

1 EC: Yeah. I think he thought they were going to string him up by a pole and he
2 better get all the help he could get to the Marines. They slaughtered the Marine Corps
3 there, in that plantation.

4 JS: Yes, sir. You talked about the coups and the different changes in government.
5 Did it improve any under one president or another? Did it only improve under Khanh
6 because of what was happening at Ba Ria?

7 EC: Oh, yeah. They knew about it. They'd jump on to say, "Who's going to send
8 us our rice and our payday?"

9 JS: Right.

10 EC: I said, "Well, we'll go get it." We always got their payday. Hell, they didn't
11 make any money. I think in them days, they made seven dollars a month, but they were
12 promised rice.

13 JS: Right. Yes, sir. All right. Another thing I want to ask you about, changing the
14 subject just a little bit if we could.

15 EC: Okay.

16 JS: You talked about your first counterpart, Bon, being killed. At what point in
17 your tour did that happen?

18 EC: It happened right in the middle of my tour. I had to go to Saigon to a meeting.
19 All of us advisors did. They were talking about American units coming to Vietnam and
20 what to expect out of them— all this kind of thing. He was just hard-headed. He took his
21 troopers and went out there. He was going to kill them guys that "pop-pop" at him. They
22 had a regular ambush set up and he didn't have support. He had 181.

23 JS: Yes, sir.

24 EC: I used to tell them—I got the 105s later on at Ben Tre. I said, "If we get in
25 trouble, they got the coordinates and everything I think that trouble will come from." But
26 he wouldn't do that. He says, "You can do it better than me because—" I guess the
27 American advisors felt sorry for me. They'd get them to support us.

28 JS: All right.

29 EC: That's what killed him. He went out there without support and he run into a
30 big ambush. It killed him and I think twelve other junkmen.

1 JS: Yes, sir. You mentioned that you were at a meeting in Saigon at that point.
2 Did you do this very often, go to meetings?

3 EC: Once in a while, they'd call us to Vung Tau, but they called us to Saigon
4 about the American units coming in there. Basically—I don't know. I forget this
5 commander's name. Basically, he said, "Don't expect too much support out of them.
6 They're going to run their own operations."

7 JS: All right. Did any American units come down there to where you were?

8 EC: Oh, no, not until the PBRs come in-country.

9 JS: Okay, all right. Your first tour was already over by that point, right?

10 EC: Yeah, but no other foot soldiers or anything come down there, no.

11 JS: Okay, all right. Okay. One more question about this time period real quick. As
12 far as the men in the Junk Force or in the coastal force, did you feel like— as far as just
13 the average sailor there, did you feel like you could trust them? Or were some of them—

14 EC: Oh, yeah. I trusted them.

15 JS: Okay, okay.

16 EC: Yeah, I trusted them.

17 JS: All right.

18 EC: A good example of that was Commander Sanh was coming down on a French
19 boat and the engines stopped. We went down there to get him. The wind come up and the
20 junk couldn't get us off. We had to dig holes in the sand, fighting holes. We had kind of
21 an all-night thing. They tolerated them junk-guys. If you come to us, we'll treat you all
22 right. They'd give them all the dumas in the world.

23 JS: Right.

24 EC: They stuck right with me and Bon. We had three or four wounded then. I
25 trusted them. I guess some guys didn't. Some of those bases— one of them got overrun I
26 understand. Both of the advisors got killed. I trusted the ones we had. I slept every night.

27 JS: Right. After Bon was killed, did it have an impact on the unit as far as its
28 capabilities?

29 EC: Oh, yeah. They had a guy named Tuy Phu—he was brave enough. I mean,
30 he'd fight, but he wasn't any good at running a base. So all the things that Bon did and
31 made them do, they kind of got lax. Then, I got out of there. I left.

1 JS: Yes, sir.

2 EC: He had had quite an impact because when Dickey Chapelle was with us, he
3 told her—she said, “What do you need down there?” He says, “I need a few more good
4 men like I have. Only Vietnamese can win this war.” He told her that. She told me, “We
5 need more like him.” Right after that— well, she wrote that article in *National*
6 *Geographic*.

7 JS: Right. Yes, sir. Okay.

8 EC: I guess she got killed right after that up in I Corps somewhere. Jeep hit a
9 mine. I left. Like I said, I got orders to Coronado to help organize the school for PBRs.

10 JS: Yes, sir. Before getting into that, we’ve come up on our—unfortunately, on
11 our two-hour limit for today. Could we go ahead—.

Interview with Ed Canby
Session [2] of [3]
Date: 3 June 2010

1 Jason Stewart: This is Jason Stewart with the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech
2 University, continuing an Oral History interview with Mr. Ed Canby. Today is June 3rd,
3 2010, and this is interview session number two. Okay, Mr. Canby. Just a moment ago
4 when we were talking, you mentioned that you had undergone SERE (Survival, Evasion,
5 Resistance, and Escape) Training. Could you talk a little bit about that?

6 Ed Canby: Just a general navigation in the forest and that. How to navigate, how
7 to eat certain leaves and berries, and even grubs if you have to. You had four days in the
8 prison-camp. Then, you went back hungry to Coronado.

9 JS: Right. Where did you undergo this training?

10 EC: Where?

11 JS: Where? Yes, sir.

12 EC: Warner Springs, California.

13 JS: Okay, all right. How long did it last?

14 EC: It was a ten-day course.

15 JS: All right. So kind of teaching how to survive in the jungle and what to do if
16 you were caught?

17 EC: Yes, sir.

18 JS: Okay.

19 EC: How to set up your committees and try to find an informer, things like that.

20 JS: All right. Did you find that the things you learned were fairly useful or no?

21 EC: Well, I never got captured and I never got stranded in the jungle, but I got
22 stranded one night on a peninsula. Our junk-boat went in there to pick another boat up
23 and I did remember that you could eat all kinds of birds. The Vietnamese and I caught a
24 bunch of birds. You run them in the water and then they can't fly. They're little birds. I
25 guess I wrote them a letter and told them about them little birds. I sent them a picture of
26 one of them. Well, they kept us alive two days—I mean, not hungry for two days.

27 JS: Yes, sir. So this happened during your first tour?

28 EC: Yes, it did.

1 JS: Okay. How about the POW (Prisoner of War) training? Could you talk a little
2 bit more about it?

3 EC: Well, it was just routine things. I don't know. After forty years, I guess—I
4 wasn't supposed to talk about it before.

5 JS: Okay. Yes, sir.

6 EC: I guess now they've had it on TV and everything.

7 JS: Right.

8 EC: It was general things. The coffin, the boxes. They drug you into interrogation
9 and water-boarded you a little bit, so you get the feeling of what it is. They kind of shook
10 you around a little bit and interrogated you. Of course, you couldn't walk. You had been
11 in that damn box for forty-five minutes with a broomstick behind your legs. They drug
12 you in there and of course, they insulted you that you was a "fool that couldn't walk".
13 "What kind of military would send a man like that?" They just tried to make you mad.
14 We just killed it. Of course, the Navy in that time, it was name, rank, and serial number.
15 That's all we told them. That's all I told them anyway. That guy says, "Get that clown out
16 of here." So, they kicked me in the butt out the door. There's a couple guards waiting on
17 me and they took me back to the hooches we had to live in. They gave us rice with Nuoc
18 Mam in it. That's what we got to eat. We did a forty mile or forty click hike for an
19 airdrop. Naturally, the canister had been open, and the guards told us, "Well, you people
20 bombed all the people's food, and they took it all." There was one can of tuna in there for
21 twenty guys. We made a soup out of it. Just stuff like that, just general things.
22 Rappelling. We rappelled down a—it was about an eighty, ninety-foot cliff. They taught
23 us repelling and we had to run the course. If you made it to the finish-line, you got a
24 sandwich, you know.

25 JS: Right.

26 EC: Of course, I'm sure they had sensors that followed us all the way.

27 JS: If you made it through without being captured?

28 EC: Yeah, right.

29 JS: Okay, all right.

1 EC: Like I say, I made it pretty close, and they popped up out of the bushes and
2 said, “Got you.” So, I’m sure they had sensors all over that course. I never saw any, but I
3 would guess.

4 JS: You think it was designed so everyone would be captured, so they would
5 undergo the—

6 EC: Everybody had to go there. My class had a squadron of pilots in it— fighter
7 pilots. We had a SEAL (Sea Air and Land) team in there. So everybody had to go that
8 went to ‘Nam. I guess it was a good thing. It taught you some things about yourself.

9 JS: Yes, sir. Was this the last training you did right before Vietnam?

10 EC: Yeah, right.

11 JS: Okay. Well, anything else there we should mention about that training before
12 getting back to the end of your first tour?

13 EC: No, I don’t think so.

14 JS: Okay, all right. As I mentioned, the last time we left off, you had just
15 completed you first tour in Vietnam. At what point did you come home and when you did
16 come home, what was your next assignment?

17 EC: When I came home, my assignment was Coronado. I was assigned to help
18 them fabricate a lesson plan and so forth of new PBRs. Seeing that I had experience in
19 the canal and the rivers besides the coast, they relied on myself and a Lieutenant Jim
20 Vincent. I don’t know if you ever talked to him or not.

21 JS: No, sir.

22 EC: He and I sat down and went over this thing—what they wanted. Coronado
23 had a lot of things in there them PBR sailors would never use. We fought and got it out of
24 there. Our biggest battle was—we told them, “Them pumps would never work.” They
25 thought we were kind of spoilsports until the guys got over there and a couple got shot
26 trying to fix those pumps, get the flotsam out of those pumps. If you ever been in them
27 rivers and canals, you know what I’m talking about.

28 JS: Yes, sir.

29 EC: At nighttime, you even churned up a bunch of water-snakes at certain times
30 of the year if you weren’t watching for them because they all get in there together in a big
31 bunch. One guy had gotten into that trap. Let’s see, I stayed there six months and then I

1 went back as a patrol officer. I'd keep telling them, "The pumps are no good," and they
2 say, "Yeah, yeah, yeah. What would you do?" I said, "Well, I'm not an engineer, but I'd
3 put some kind of cutters in there." They finally did in the Mark II's. They put a bigger
4 shaft and cutters in there. They didn't have that problem.

5 JS: All right. What other types of things did you make recommendations on?

6 EC: Well, I took the .30 caliber machineguns off of there.

7 JS: Okay, why?

8 EC: Well, because the American Forces were using M60s. I just told them, "Are
9 we going to draw our ammunition from the Vietnamese?" They looked at me kind of
10 funny. I said, "Well, the American Forces are using M60s. All the A-Teams got M60s." I
11 say, "I'm sure if they send infantry units, they're going to use M60s" So I got that
12 changed. They were using those NODs, Night Observation Devices, the old ones, and
13 you could see them a mile away—that big thing. I said, "You need star-lights on these
14 boats." No one knew what that was. Lieutenant Vincent says, "We'll find out where you
15 can get them." We called down to Special Forces. They were at Camp Gordon I think, in
16 those days. They said, "Yeah, here's the number on them and where you can get them."
17 So we got star-lights. They don't show up like a big ol' NOD does. Just stuff like that that
18 we learned. We even tried big listening devices. Of course, the sailors on there, they
19 didn't understand, but we did have a Vietnamese National Policeman that rode with us.
20 He took care of all the checking of the papers and that, you know

21 JS: Right.

22 EC: I tried to get Coronado to bring those guys over and train with a boat-crew.
23 Being an internal part of that boat-crew, "No, no. We can't do that." When we got out
24 there, we got a national policeman. All of a sudden, we had the same guy every night. So,
25 we had to train him. Naturally, he didn't hide when we got in a firefight. He did
26 something, you know.

27 JS: Right, right.

28 EC: We trained him on the M60s, and the M79, and the M16s because I'm sure
29 that little .38 pistol he carried wouldn't have helped us any. They got to be an internal
30 part of the boat crew.

31 JS: Okay. So, would there be one on every PBR then?

1 EC: One with the patrol officer.

2 JS: Okay, okay. While you were there at Coronado, did you get involved in the
3 training as well?

4 EC: Oh, I did. Yeah. I took them out and trained them. We went outside of land
5 pretty much and we had buoys in the water they could shoot at. We had a firing range out
6 there. We trained them on .50 calibers and M60s. Things like setting the headspace on
7 .50 calibers, things like that that most people in the Navy didn't know anymore. We
8 trained them in that. How to clean their weapons every day and put the knowledge in
9 their head they weren't fighting a silly farmer. You were fighting a hard-ass soldier.

10 JS: Right. At first, did they seem to have that perspective?

11 EC: They thought they were just a bunch of farmers going "pop-pop-pop" at
12 them. Some of those VC were pretty hardcore soldiers.

13 JS: Right. Yes, sir.

14 EC: They probably fought the Japanese, some of them. They were probably
15 trained by the OSS (Office of Strategic Services). You never know. Anyway, I just told
16 them, "They use every trick in the book to get you to shoot-up a ville or things. Their
17 ambushes are well planned." I said, "You're fighting a hard-ass soldier. You better learn
18 to train well and fast." They found that out too. I know my people—I had them trained
19 pretty good. At first, we didn't go in the canals and then we started. I showed them how
20 those fishing-nets and that spread out, how they could use them to trap you.

21 JS: Right. Yes, sir.

22 EC: Suck them up those pumps, you know. We trained them that way. Then, we
23 moved to Vallejo from Coronado. We started battle problems then.

24 JS: Okay.

25 EC: Because we had the sloughs out of Suisun. We started battle problems—
26 ambushes sometimes. We had places where we told them on their maps and that there
27 was a village behind the berm in the banks of the river and the tree line. We used to shoot
28 at them, "pop-pop," to see if they'd wake up and not shoot a bunch of rounds in the
29 village and make more enemies than they could hurt and kill. We did that. We used to
30 show them L-type ambushes. We showed them how they ambush is on the crook of the
31 river. We made mines out of artillery some-laters and floated them in some of the canals,

1 so they could see what they looked like. We did that kind of stuff with them. I got seven
2 Vietnamese sailors to come out of the river for us that were in school. They helped me do
3 some of that. They helped me train the Americans that were there. Of course, I was the
4 only one that had experience in-country—myself and Jim Vincent. It was kind of tough
5 training them as fast as we was putting them out. I got orders as a patrol officer in
6 Division 511. That's where I went from Vallejo.

7 JS: Right. Yes, sir. I know you said you were there for six months, but as a group
8 of guys would come in there for training, how long did their training last?

9 EC: Ten weeks.

10 JS: Ten weeks, okay.

11 EC: The main thing—what took longer, was the engineers. Most of them had
12 never seen them big GM (General Motors) engines that those PBRs had in them. So it
13 took a little longer to get them trained, especially in minor repairs and what to look for
14 when things go a little wrong with the motor, you know.

15 JS: Yes, sir.

16 EC: But there was two engines in each boat.

17 JS: All right. In the training that you were given, the guys that were preparing to
18 go over there, were you able to find any environment there in California that was similar
19 to at all to what they would be—

20 EC: Oh, yeah. The Suisun Sloughs.

21 JS: Okay.

22 EC: They were really similar because they had—some of them had rice-paddies.
23 Some of them had tree lines. Believe it or not, there was a continuous line of blackberry
24 bushes. They were very dense. So they were good for my guys to hide behind and “pop-
25 pop” a little bit.

26 JS: Right, right. Yes, sir.

27 EC: The Suisun Sloughs were very similar to the canals in Vietnam.

28 JS: Okay, all right. When you went back over, did you go with some of the guys
29 that you had been training?

30 EC: No, I just went myself and they assigned me to two boat-crews. I had trained
31 some of them.

1 JS: All right. Well, anything else we should mention about this time period before
2 your return for your second tour?

3 EC: I don't think so.

4 JS: Okay, all right. When did you receive your orders to go back for that second
5 tour? Do you remember?

6 EC: In June of '66.

7 JS: June of '66, okay. Had you volunteered or were you assigned?

8 EC: I was assigned, but I told them I'd go. That's the first they were operating on
9 the rivers.

10 JS: Okay. So then this was the first contingent to actually to go in the canals and
11 rivers?

12 EC: Right. We were supposed to go in the main river. I told them—one time, they
13 were sending a bunch of guys to the back of an island, Tan Dinh Island. I told them, I
14 said, "You don't want to send anybody back there." "Well, how do you know?" I said,
15 "Because I've been back there." I said, "One of the ensigns in the Junk Force had a
16 girlfriend that lived back there, and he wanted to go see her. We got in a hell of a firefight
17 back there. That's all a VC ville back in there." They sent them guys and we got the
18 first—I didn't, the division got the first wounded guys back there. I said, "I told you
19 that's a bad area." That was swept a lot of times by the ARVN (Army of the Republic of
20 Vietnam) Rangers. You know how they are. They'd disappear and come back, you know.
21 They didn't have any PFs back there at all. Didn't have anything back there but bad guys.
22 You know, you can shoot all day and they're in the bunkers laughing at you. You got to
23 have ground troops for things like that.

24 JS: Right, right. Prior to that point when they started entering the rivers when you
25 came back, but prior to that, were they just operating along the coast?

26 EC: No. They had the destroyers out there.

27 JS: Okay, but no PBRs at that point?

28 EC: In "Market Time"—they started "Market Time".

29 JS: Right. Yes, sir.

30 EC: We were the first PBRs—us and the ones at My Tho were the first divisions
31 in the rivers.

1 JS: Okay.

2 EC: We weren't allowed to go in them canals at all. As things progressed, the
3 powers that be decided we should go in canals too.

4 JS: Yes, sir. So at that point then you were just operating what? The Mekong and
5 the Bassac?

6 EC: Well, we operated on the Bassac, Co Chien, the Ham Luong.

7 JS: Okay, all right. Not to get too far ahead, but how long into your second tour
8 was it that you started going into the canals as well?

9 EC: I'd say about three months.

10 JS: About three months, okay. Before getting into all of that, I guess if you could
11 talk about your return for your second tour. The trip over and your arrival. What was that
12 like?

13 JS: It was an airliner, and I arrived in Tan Son Nhut and got orders immediately
14 for Can Tho. I flew down in a Caribou.

15 JS: All right. So was that the main headquarters there at Can Tho?

16 EC: Yeah, it was too. It was 4th Riverine.

17 JS: Okay.

18 EC: Plus the headquarters of Division 511.

19 JS Yes, sir. Was that where you were primarily operating out of?

20 EC: Yeah, that was our operating base in the Co Chien River—the Bassac, I'm
21 sorry.

22 JS: Okay. Could you talk a little bit about the base itself, the quarters?

23 EC: We had a hotel-like base. I don't know where they got that. It was two guys
24 to a room. We had a mess-hall and had a big pit the Seabees dug. They took river-water
25 and run it through an ERDlator, they called it. That was our drinking and bathing water. I
26 don't know how it worked. They had a civilian run that. It was not bad. It was better than
27 a grass-house.

28 JS: (Chuckles) Right, right. How many PBRs were based out of there?

29 EC: Twelve.

1 JS: Twelve, okay. All right. Could you talk a little bit about, I don't know, I guess
2 your first impressions of the unit and the guys that you were assigned with? Again, you
3 don't have to go into specific names, but if you could talk a little bit about the unit itself?

4 EC: Well, you had a 2nd or 1st class E-5 or E-6, as boat captain. The rest were
5 mostly young kids nineteen years old. They were like any kids. They were hot and ready
6 to go, you know.

7 JS: Right.

8 EC: Sometimes they'd get a little wild. You'd have to calm them down. Just
9 because a guy shoots "pop" at you, it doesn't mean to open up with 450s and M79s and
10 so forth. Just get out of there because you know there's a ville behind where he's doing it.

11 JS: Right.

12 EC: You don't want to shoot up the ville. That happened a couple times. They
13 finally wised-up to the fact that these guys were trying to make enemies out of us. Trying
14 to get the hearts and minds to go the other way, you know.

15 JS: Yes, sir. For this second tour, what was your rank at that time?

16 EC: I was E-7.

17 JS: E-7, okay. What were your duties? I know you said you had two boats
18 assigned to you—

19 EC: Well, just patrol my patrol area.

20 JS: Okay.

21 EC: We just run, we checked boats, checked their papers—of course, we had a
22 policeman for that. What we did is come alongside the boats and have them come
23 alongside us. One cover-boat would stand off. I'd send a policeman and another sailor,
24 usually with a shotgun on there. The policeman did all the checking of the papers and ID
25 cards—what do they call them, "can cuocs". He checked all that. We used to check— if
26 we'd see lines tied up on the side of the boats, on the gunnel and we'd run a line
27 underneath the boat ourselves. Sometimes we'd get guns that way, one or two weapons.
28 We'd check rice-barrels—just check generally as many boats as we could check in a day.
29 At night, of course, the rivers were quiet. There was nobody there. After a while, those
30 people understand if they cross the river tonight, they're liable to get shot at. It was really
31 quiet and dark. Well, you've been out in the country. It's really dark at night there.

1 JS: Yes, sir. If you—say you ran a line under a boat and you did find some
2 weapons—

3 EC: Yeah, we found some weapons that way.

4 JS: If you did, what would the response be?

5 EC: The policeman would arrest them all. We'd handcuff them with plastic, and
6 we'd run them back to Can Tho. We finally ended up— I forget the name of that outpost,
7 but it was a little district-town. We'd let them off in the district-town. We'd tell the
8 district chief, "Well, we found—whatever, a Thompson, an AK, or whatever we found
9 under there, two of them. There's these two young-birds on this boat here. You better
10 check them out." We never saw them again after that. Usually, you never saw the same
11 ones twice.

12 JS: Okay.

13 EC: They put them in a provincial prison at Can Tho or Chieu Hoi or whatever. I
14 don't know.

15 JS: Would that also be the reaction when they would be arrested—also if they
16 didn't have their papers, their "can cuoc"?

17 EC: Oh, yeah. The policeman would arrest them. We called them "VC suspects".
18 Especially if they were young men. There was a tax-collector. Boy, he evaded us for a
19 long time. He run a blue boat. He always had a heavily armed squad with him.

20 JS: Oh wow.

21 EC: We called it "the battleship".

22 JS: (Chuckles) Right.

23 EC: He'd go where we couldn't go with that damn thing. Finally, we caught him
24 one day and sunk that damn boat. I don't know how much money he had, but we got
25 three of his squad. Three of them made it to the beach and hid in the bushes somewhere.
26 We got three of his squad. They admitted they were part of the shadow government. They
27 were collecting taxes from the fisherman. That was down by the district of Dang Noi. In
28 fact, right across from the district-town, if you can believe it.

29 JS: (Chuckles) Right.

30 EC: Well, that island Cu Lao Mai—them RS and PS wouldn't go on there. That
31 was one of our problems—is we never had ground troops in these shootouts we had. So

1 those guys would shoot at us out of bunkers, spider-holes, and up on the Vinh Te Canal,
2 they laughed at us. They got our frequencies and laughed at us. They said, “Ha-ha, you
3 can’t hurt us. We’re in the holes.”

4 JS: Right.

5 EC: That’s when the American RAGs come over there. That’s later. They fixed
6 that. They had a water-cannon on there and they had flame-boats, you know.

7 JS: Right, right.

8 EC: That stopped that—a lot of it. Those water cannons would chew the banks up.
9 Those guys would fly in the air. It’s kind of funny sometimes.

10 JS: Right. You said you didn’t have the infantry to go on the islands there. Would
11 you guys ever get off the boats?

12 EC: No, we were not supposed to get off the boat at all. The only thing was if one
13 of the boats got sunk. We got off and tried to rescue the crew. In one other boat zone,
14 guys rescued those Army guys. That wasn’t our division. No, we weren’t supposed to go
15 off the boats at all.

16 JS: Okay. All right. Did that responsibility finally fall to the 9th Infantry Division
17 whenever they started doing the Riverine Force operations?

18 EC: No, the 9th ARVN. The best ones of the bunch were the 43rd Rangers out of
19 Soc Trang. Those guys were tough animals, I’ll tell you. They swept that island, that Ton
20 Dien Island, and— well, that’s a later date. That’s at a later date when I was with the
21 RAGs. I mean, they swept that island clean. They had piles of weapons and ammo. How
22 they did it, I don’t know. They were a tough bunch of birds that 43rd Ranger Battalion.
23 They had leadership.

24 JS: All right. I guess, could you talk a little bit about the PBRs themselves, the
25 boats themselves? And also, the crewmembers, the different responsibilities of the crew?

26 EC: We had a forward-gunner. Of course, everybody was trained to do every job.
27 If the forward-gunner got shot, we could put the engineman up there and he could run the
28 twin-50s. We had the M18 grenade-launchers, hurdy-gurdy ones. They were like a
29 Gatling gun. Everyone was trained on them after. I snuck a .60 mortar on one and put it
30 on a tire. I told them, “One bag only.” A lot of times I’d fire that thing. They’d shoot at us

1 and I'd fire, then they'd quit. They didn't like that .60 mortar banging around their bally-
2 wack. Everyone was very well cross-trained.

3 JS: Yes, sir.

4 EC: The hardest thing was, of course, the engines. That was the hardest thing to
5 cross-train people on. We never had trouble with the engine. We had trouble with the
6 pumps. Of course, that changed. When they come out of Vallejo, everyone was cross
7 trained on all the weapons and all the jobs on there. How to run the boat, how to land it,
8 they all done that in Vallejo.

9 JS: Yes, sir. Another question I have for you on a general level, how did working
10 with an American crew differ from working with the Vietnamese and which did you
11 prefer? Did you prefer working on the PBRs or with the junk Navy?

12 EC: It was both a different situation. As far as command goes, you know, they did
13 what I told them. Working with the junk-sailors, they were under the command of their
14 own officers. If you didn't have a rapport with the officers of some kind or the boat
15 captain, when you went out on patrol sometimes, you couldn't get anything done. With
16 the American crews, you just tell them what to do and they did it. There was that
17 difference.

18 JS: All right. How about things like ability to get supplies, things like that? Was it
19 much easier working with the PBRs?

20 EC: Oh, yeah. With the PBRs, anything we wanted, we got. Of course, the
21 Vietnamese—I don't know, sometimes they had to beg and barter to get things, you
22 know.

23 JS: Yes, sir.

24 EC: You'd fight a war different when you're with indigenous personnel. You
25 don't know how their supply-system works. I got things with the Vietnamese, the Junk
26 Force, though CORDS. They gave me a generator and they gave me a Seabee team to dig
27 wells for me. I got a dental MEDCAP (Medical Civic Action Program) from them. With
28 the American unit, if you got a toothache, they flew you to the nearest dentist, you know.

29 JS: Right.

30 EC: That's the difference.

1 JS: Yes, sir. Okay. When you were with the PBRs on this second tour, did you
2 guys ever work with the Junk Force?

3 EC: Yeah. Oh, yeah.

4 JS: Okay.

5 EC: We made ops with them. You know, they liked our firepower, especially if
6 they made good contact. They had a unit they called the Viet Hai. When they made good
7 contact, they liked the firepower of the PBRs when they were extracting, believe me. We
8 worked with them on numerous occasions. We did block and forest work with the PFs
9 and RFs (Regional Forces) too.

10 JS: Okay, all right. Since you had been an advisor your first tour, you were pretty
11 familiar with the Vietnamese. What was the reaction of the Americans on the PBRs that
12 didn't have much interaction with the Vietnamese? Did you get any impression on
13 their—

14 EC: They thought they couldn't do anything. There was a lot of misconception in-
15 country. I guess rightly so. Like I said, the 43rd Ranger Battalion was a hardcore
16 operating unit.

17 JS: Right.

18 EC: As good as any. I'm sure if you talk to any of their advisors, they'll tell you
19 the same thing. They're probably as good as the American units.

20 JS: Yes, sir.

21 EC: My experience with the Vietnamese Night Division, the 3rd and 4th Battalions
22 were useless. They wouldn't go out of that little enclave they had. The 1st and 2nd
23 Battalion had good leadership. Boy, those guys were hard chargers. They'd ride our
24 boats, and we'd get in a fight. Well, that's later. They'd land. The 3rd and 4th Battalion
25 was awful. They didn't have leadership. So that's kind of the opinion some of those kids
26 had. I said, "You know, them junkmen are pretty good soldiers if you just know a landing
27 off a junk-boat with one .50 caliber and a .30 caliber to back you up. It's not like these
28 boats." They got to know them pretty good. We operated out of Long Phu quite a bit
29 down there.

30 JS: Okay. Could you talk a little bit about your daily routine there with the PBRs
31 or a typical day?

1 EC: You'd get up an hour before patrol-time. Patrol officers in both cabins would
2 go to briefing. Tides—timing the tides, ebb and flow, any intelligence they had of
3 movement. The crews would go down to the boats and check all the weapons, check their
4 motors, their engines. Then, we'd come down and hold a briefing where intelligence says
5 we might get in trouble. There might be a crossing or something. Then, we'd go on patrol
6 and relieve the other guys for twelve hours. It was just up to you how you did it. Some
7 areas right around Can Tho there, up to the Tre Anh Canal, you didn't do anything but
8 check boats, hundreds of boats. On down farther, if you went to Tre Anh there, the
9 districts out of Tre Anh, it was more or less alert. It really is alert. All the weapons are
10 ready because that was a bad area in there. On down farther was the same way. There
11 were some bad areas. I'm sure what had happened is, the VC had used them for years as
12 crossing-areas and didn't like us trying to block them. But again, you can shoot all day
13 and all you're going to do is probably waste a lot of ammo, unless you captured boats
14 crossing because they're going to hunker-down. It was just day-in and day-out like that.
15 Then, you had the B-40 rocket. When they come down in the Delta, you had to really be
16 watching for them suckers. I never got hit with one, but I had them shot at me. They got
17 better at it. I got hit in the RAG boats with it.

18 JS: Yes, sir. At what point did the B-40 rockets start appearing down in the Delta?

19 EC: I think they come in—we first noticed those B-40s about August of '66,
20 when they started shooting them at the PBRs. Up until then—like I said before, we
21 captured a bunch of weapons, modern weapons, when I was with the Junk Force. They
22 were the first really modern communist country weapons that we captured. The rest of
23 them were old weapons that probably had from WWII. They started re-arming them then.
24 I'd say about August of '66 is when we starting noticing more B-40 rockets coming out
25 of the tree-lines, you know. Still, they didn't have that many.

26 JS: All right. Are there any specific or memorable firefights or days that you
27 remember that stick out in your mind that you could possibly talk about?

28 EC: I guess the biggest one I was ever at is— they call "Juliet". HAL (Helicopter
29 Attack Light) Juliet was our nickname for it. We had two guys killed there. I didn't. I
30 didn't have—the other patrol, Lieutenant Hal's peripheral did have one. A guy named
31 Anderson had another one. I had a guy shot in the shoulder there. We come aboard five

1 boats and they start shooting at us. We shot them five boats up. That lasted all day. We
2 had to get resupplying ammo. Every time we'd stop shooting, they'd shoot. I don't know.
3 Intelligence said we broke up a big crossing. The PFs got into it. They almost got
4 slaughtered, man. Them poor guys with those carbines, you know.

5 JS: Right, right.

6 EC: They were no match for that bunch of characters. Of course, we shot enough
7 at them to get them out of there. The advisor in that little district-town said, "My God,
8 what do you guys got?" Then, we had Seawolves in.

9 JS: Okay.

10 EC: Seawolves had a field-day with that bunch. They started running from us. I
11 guess they didn't have enough holes. They started running from us to the rice-paddies
12 and the Seawolves caught them on the rice-paddies. I guess those guys, the way they
13 talked, had a field-day out there.

14 JS: Right, right.

15 EC: That's the one I remember. That was in September of '66.

16 JS: Yes, sir. All right. Could you talk a little bit about the tactics you guys would
17 use in engaging the enemy?

18 EC: What?

19 JS: If you could talk a little bit about, I guess, the tactics you guys would use in
20 engaging the enemy?

21 EC: We tried to give them one to the side and one to the other side—make our
22 firepower go in the center of the ambush. Instead of lining up like battleships or
23 something, we tried to have one go one way and one go the other way and put all our
24 firepower in the center of that ambush.

25 JS: Okay. Yes, sir.

26 EC: We did that automatically. We'd just holler "ambush" on the radio and the
27 boat captain of the cover-boat knew where to go. We knew where to go and that's how
28 we'd try to break it up. Sometimes you'd get caught.

29 JS: Right. What types of things would you guys be looking for, as far as to keep
30 from getting into an ambush?

1 EC: There's one thing— a lot of times you'd see a bunch of birds fly in the air. A
2 lot of times, there wouldn't be any boats there. You looked out a canal and no fishing-
3 boats. You just automatically think there's something wrong here, you know.

4 JS: Right.

5 EC: Sometimes that didn't work either. Sometimes them fishing boats were there
6 when they ambushed us. Naturally, the bad guys would make those guys stay there and
7 maybe we could kill a few civilians. We tried to be careful.

8 JS: Yes, sir.

9 EC: But you know, when people are shooting at you, especially with automatic
10 weapons, it's kind of hard.

11 JS: Right. Yes, sir. You talked about the enemy would shoot at you guys from
12 bunkers and you had trouble getting at them as a result of it. Could you talk a little bit
13 about the bunkers themselves, what they looked like and what they were built out of?

14 EC: The ones I saw, a lot of them were spider-holes and they had coconut trees
15 around them. They had slits to fire out of. Now, that's just the ones I saw. I didn't see
16 them until I was with the RAGs because RAG-31 had a cowboy for a commanding
17 officer. He was not scared of going anywhere. If he got shot up, he got shot up. That's the
18 way it was. He was very adamant. He says, "I don't like Americans fighting my war." He
19 said, "I wish I had the new boats and the new equipment." In fact, later on in my last tour,
20 the last Op I made was with him. He was a captain. That's when I saw the bunkers
21 because we landed.

22 JS: Yes, sir. Prior to that, with the PBRs, would they be attacking you from
23 bunkers, but you just didn't see them?

24 EC: Oh, I'm sure.

25 JS: Okay.

26 EC: We could shoot, shoot, shoot, and when we'd stop shooting, they'd shoot
27 again. I used to tell my guys, "We'll try to get them at the crossways here and see what
28 happens." Once those guys were done with whatever their plan was, they were done. I'm
29 sure they knew— their planners knew, whoever they were, that we wouldn't land on
30 them. So, I'm sure they just hunkered down and waited for us to leave.

31 JS: Right, yes, sir. What type of weapons were they using besides the B-40s?

1 EC: They used AKs. They used Chicoms. They had that light Russian
2 machinegun that was really easy to carry and move around. That's mostly what they
3 used. Once in a while, they'd have a recoilless rifle. I'm sure they got that from us
4 somewhere.

5 JS: All right. When you guys would be out on patrol, how often would you make
6 contact?

7 EC: It just depended on what they we're going to do. Sometimes we'd make
8 contact above a canal, and we'd radio back where we were. The other boats would run up
9 there and see if they were trying to cross. Otherwise, keeping us busy, you know.

10 JS: Right, right.

11 EC: We kind of stopped that because we'd bring the other boats to that canal and
12 naturally, I'm sure they had some kind of lookout communication method. Then they
13 wouldn't try to cross there. That was one of their little tricks to get us engaged and
14 whether they were going to cross. We tried to stop that that way. Those guys were
15 hardcore soldiers, man. They had been around a while. I'm sure they had fought the
16 French and the Japanese, some of them, some of the older ones. They'd trained them
17 young-bucks good. Their operations, you know, they didn't have all the equipment we
18 had.

19 JS: Right, right. Speaking of the equipment and things like that, I know you talked
20 about—last time you said that one of the problems with the Junk Force was that they
21 didn't have the equipment to operate at night.

22 EC: We didn't have any compasses on those junks.

23 JS: Right. With the PRBs—did you guys operate at night?

24 EC: Oh, yeah. We had radars.

25 JS: Yes, sir.

26 EC: We had radars. We never went out to sea. We never left the rivers. We had
27 that radar. It was pretty good. You'd get a lot of false-returns on it, but it was still pretty
28 good. They wanted the powers to be one of the Junk Force to patrol out there in the ocean
29 without a compass. They had no idea where they were.

30 JS: Right. Since you guys could operate at night with the PBRs, would you find
31 much activity at night? Would there be much?

1 EC: The activity, it started—at certain places, we got to learn pretty good there
2 were fishermen there. They'd have those little lights on their boats. We got to figure out,
3 "Well, there's fishermen in there." They never come out in the river. They stayed in those
4 little indentations in the river.

5 JS: Okay.

6 EC: Little small canals. The policeman we had, he really got to know them. Not
7 personally, but he'd say, "I think fisherman." We'd float a lot at night, you know.

8 JS: Yes, sir.

9 EC: We'd just float down the river at night, some of us. We tried everything.
10 We'd run a boat backwards and we'd float. Everything we tried; those guys would figure
11 it out. I mean, the sailors did a good job. You never had them not do their job, but I'm
12 just saying that Viet Cong, they were smart operators.

13 JS: Yes, sir.

14 EC: They didn't have anything. They had some weapons finally that somebody
15 gave them. I guess the North sent them out. After I left, the division sunk a trawler out
16 there. It took them three days to get all the weapons off of it. In fact, John Wayne came
17 down there and looked at it. He was making a documentary then for the government or
18 something. The North supplied them better, but they still didn't have the equipment we
19 had. They didn't have the communication equipment we had.

20 JS: All right. One more question about operating at night. Was there any sort of
21 curfew for being on the river, for the Vietnamese?

22 EC: Any kind of what?

23 JS: Was there any sort of curfew?

24 EC: Yeah. We wouldn't let them cross the river at night.

25 JS: Okay.

26 EC: They had a curfew. They all knew it.

27 JS: So, if you caught anyone crossing the river, were they fair game then?

28 EC: They were fair game. They didn't do it either.

29 JS: Right. So the fishermen would just stay in the canals?

30 EC: Yeah, they'd stay in those little indents there. I guess they caught fish. I don't
31 know.

1 JS: Okay. Yes, sir.

2 EC: You'd see those little white lights. I guess they were candle lights. I don't
3 know—yeah, it had to be.

4 JS: Yes, sir. How often would you guys catch boats trying to cross into the river?

5 EC: Not very often. I think I caught five in a year. I'm sure there were more as we
6 went by or something. They'd run across in those little outboards they had. At first light,
7 we had another problem because that's typically Vietnamese going to market. All those
8 boats would come out of the canals, straight-shafts, and headed for Can Tho with their
9 wares to the floating supermarket.

10 JS: Right. Yes, sir.

11 EC: How do you stop all those guys from making a living? It was a hard call.

12 JS: Right. So then, you think the VC used that for cover to get to where they were
13 going?

14 EC: Everyone thought they did. We'd check them and check them and check
15 them, and we never found anything. At least my people didn't. I didn't hear of anyone
16 catching much when they went to the market. They didn't go across the river. They went
17 straight up, you know.

18 JS: Okay.

19 EC: This was an everyday occurrence. Like I said, a floating supermarket.
20 Anything you wanted was floating out there. It's the same way going into Can Tho.
21 You're talking about hundreds of little boats.

22 JS: Right, right. A few more questions about comparisons between the
23 American—between the PBRs and the old junk-boats with the Vietnamese Navy. I know
24 I asked you about supplies, the ability to get supplies. How about things like fire-support?
25 Was it much more readily available with American units?

26 JS: Oh, yeah. We had the Seawolves. They were on the LSTs. They were at Can
27 Tho. They were at Vinh Long. They were on Bien Hoa. They were the Navy's fire-teams.
28 That was their mission. When the PBRs got in bad trouble, they would go get them out.
29 Boy, those guys were good pilots too by the way. They got me out of trouble once.

30 JS: Yes, sir. Could you talk a little bit about that then? What happened there?

1 EC: We just caught in a canal, and I needed help. We just wanted out of there.
2 The Seawolves come in there. The biggest fight I had at Juliet, there was three fire-teams.
3 They went back to Can Tho and reloaded. Like I say, they said they caught those guys
4 out in the rice-paddies for trying to run and hide. They had a field-day out there.

5 JS: Yes, sir.

6 EC: That bunch never used that Juliet again neither, that we know of.

7 JS: Right, right.

8 EC: There's probably better canals than that. Where they had a lot of men
9 crossing, they could hide them. They said there was rice-paddies right in the back of that.
10 You don't want to get caught in them. The Junk Force didn't have that.

11 JS: Right. How often did you guys work with the Seawolves? I mean, how often
12 would you call them in for support?

13 EC: Whenever we got in trouble. That was their sole-mission—their primary.
14 They supported the ARVN troops too. Their primary mission was PBRs, RAG boats,
15 them kind of things. They didn't come until '66. Before that, when I was with the Junk
16 Forces, the only air-support we had was once in a while the Mohawks would come over
17 when we needed them. At Vung Tau, they said, "No more close-support for you guys.
18 You're photographic airplanes."

19 JS: Right. Yes, sir. I remember you mentioning that.

20 EC: They took them two M60s off of them, but that's all they had. Hell, them
21 Seawolves, those sailors had a .50 caliber in the center of that thing. They'd give them
22 old D-models at Vung Tau and them sailors completely gutted them and redid them.
23 They were a great outfit, HAL-3. HAL-3 was their designation Seawolves.

24 JS: Okay.

25 EC: In fact, at Tet of '68, they were good too.

26 JS: Yes, sir. You were with the RAGs then, right?

27 EC: I was with the RAGs, yeah. In Vinh Long.

28 JS: Okay, all right. I know you mentioned a little while ago, you said that about
29 six months—was it about six months into your tour? Or was it three months that you guys
30 actually started going into the canals?

31 EC: It was three to six months.

1 JS: Okay. How did things change at that point? Did you have a lot more contact
2 with the enemy at that point?

3 EC: Oh, yeah, a lot of contact. Just my opinion, the VC didn't operate in big units.
4 In the end of the thing, they'd have a squad, but they'd have a heavily armed squad.
5 They'd make you think they had a platoon. It seemed like they were pretty well trained
6 themselves somewhere or another. They wanted to live, so they learned what their bosses
7 told them. You know, only once or twice, even with the RAGs, I've seen big outfits. I
8 guess they were. We can talk about that later—about a big outfit. It seemed like the VC
9 were very well trained in squad-warfare and they figured it out that the PBRs weren't
10 going to land on them. They operated accordingly.

11 JS: Yes, sir. All right. Once you guys started actually going into the canals, were
12 there more actual ambushes and things?

13 EC: Oh, yeah. They'd police-up a squad or had a squad there, and they'd try to
14 sink them PBRs. PBRs had enough speed and maneuverability where they could turn on
15 a dime. Of course, they'd get the hell out of there because there's no use sitting there
16 shooting at guys in bunkers and spider-holes. What we were doing up them canals, I
17 don't know. Just somebody who wanted to make a run up there and see what we could
18 draw. The infantry is what you had to have.

19 JS: Right, right.

20 EC: I guess sometimes the SEAL teams didn't make operations themselves up
21 there at some of those places where we got hit pretty bad. I don't know. We never messed
22 with them guys. They did their own thing.

23 JS: Right, all right. In that case, what was the actual mission? What was the
24 purpose of going into the canals? Would it be marked as far as where the ambush took
25 place for someone to deal with later?

26 EC: I guess intelligence. A lot of times, them guys that wanted to go in the canal,
27 them young kids, just to get in a firefight. They loved it. I'll tell you, they were a good
28 bunch of kids. They liked that kind of stuff.

29 JS: Right. So the morale was high among those young guys?

30 EC: Oh, yeah. It was high.

31 JS: All right. Going into a small canal, how many boats would go into—

1 EC: Two.

2 JS: So it would be two at a time—always two?

3 EC: Yeah. On the briefing, we'd tell those guys, "Well, they want us to run this
4 canal to"—a lot of times just to the outpost and go up there and see if we could help them
5 do anything." There would always be a couple more boats around when we'd go. The
6 Vietnamese didn't like it because the RAGs had to go up and save them a half a dozen
7 times.

8 JS: Yes, sir.

9 EC: The Vietnamese were very smart too. They said, "Why go without soldiers?"
10 We shoot first and land the soldiers. The soldiers have to dig those people out. I don't
11 know, we went up there anyway. Anyway, we went where we were told.

12 JS: Right. Yes, sir. Speaking of the need for soldiers to actually get in there and
13 get them out of the bunkers, was that—

14 EC: Oh, yeah. Like I said, that ranger battalion swept that Tan Dinh Island. They
15 destroyed all the bunkers. They got a bunch of rifles and ammunition. It was a long time
16 before they shot at the PBRs after they left.

17 JS: Right. Yes, sir.

18 They cleaned that island out pretty good. It was a funny thing, they had two
19 SEAL teams with them. They worked together. Boy, when them guys come back and
20 they were saying, "Oh, boy. Them rangers are good soldiers." In that big op they had,
21 they cleaned that island pretty good.

22 JS: Yes, sir. All right. Were you still there with the PBRs when the American 9th
23 Infantry Division came in down there?

24 EC: I'd just left.

25 JS: Okay.

26 EC: I said I'd like to go to Vinh Long.

27 JS: Okay. Yes, sir.

28 EC: I didn't have anything to do back in the States. I was married then. My wife
29 was killed in a wreck, so I didn't have nothing to go back for. I just went to Vinh Long
30 and stayed with them guys.

31 JS: Yes, sir. Had you spent an entire with the PBRs before transferring?

1 EC: Yes, I did.
2 JS: Okay, all right. So at the end of your tour you requested the—
3 EC: I just said I had requested an extension to the RAG units.
4 JS: Okay.
5 EC: I wanted that experience.
6 JS: Yes, sir. So you wanted to go back as an advisor again?
7 EC: I did, yeah.
8 JS: Okay, all right. Well, we've gone over the hour a little bit. Why don't we go
9 ahead and take a break for today and we can talk about the RAG force next time.
10 EC: Okay.
11 JS: All right. Let me go ahead and stop the recording here.

**Interview with
Session [3] of [3]
Date 10 June 2010**

1 Jason Stewart: This is Jason Stewart with the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech
2 University, continuing an Oral History interview with Mr. Ed Canby. Today is June 10th,
3 2010, and this is interview session number three. Okay, last time when we left off, we
4 were talking about the end of your time with the PBRs. I wonder if you could talk a little
5 bit about how that transition back to working with the South Vietnamese Navy took
6 place.

7 Ed Canby: Well, I was married then. My wife had a wreck and she passed on. I
8 didn't have nothing to do, so I just extended.

9 JS: Okay. So you didn't even go home?

10 EC: Well, I went home for the funeral.

11 JS: Oh, okay.

12 EC: Then, I extended and come back. They assigned me to RAG-2331. I was
13 assigned as gunnery-advisor.

14 JS: As gunnery-advisor, okay.

15 EC: Yes, sir.

16 JS: Was that a similar advisory position as what you had had before with the Junk
17 Force?

18 EC: Yeah, that was my assignment. Man, we did everything in '65. We did
19 everything then.

20 JS: Okay.

21 EC: We just went down to the junk base. Whatever they did, we did with them
22 and tried to help them the best we could.

23 JS: Had the nature of an advisor—had that that changed by that point? By '67,
24 this second time, had it changed much?

25 EC: No, sir.

26 JS: Okay, all right. So still basically doing everything that they're doing?

27 JS: What we did is—we had more people. We had two officers and two enlisted
28 men. One with each RAG unit 23 and 31. We all went with them just every operation.
29 We had good rapport with our counterparts there. They say, "We go tomorrow." We'd

1 just go with them. Of course, we kept in contact with the TOC (Tactical Operations
2 Center) at Vinh Long in case we needed air. Being U.S Navy personnel at that time, if the
3 Seawolves weren't supporting the PBRs, they'd support us. That was HAL-3, the
4 Seawolves.

5 JS: Yes, sir. All right. Did you operate actually out of Vinh Long?

6 EC: Yes, we did.

7 JS: Okay.

8 EC: When I got there, we were tasked with patrolling the Mang Thit Vinh Te
9 Canal and also supporting the 9th Division. They had one battalion stationed there
10 between Long Vinh and the entrance to the canal. We supported them. Also, we took
11 ammunition to them and food to them, things like that. We also convoyed the big rice-
12 barges. They'd come from Cu Ma through Tre Anh. They'd go from Tre Anh to the Co
13 Chien River and we'd take them up to the bend in the river going to Saigon. The My Tho
14 RAG would pick them up.

15 JS: Yes, sir. Would that pass through the Mang Thit Canal? Was that part of it
16 actually going through it?

17 EC: Yeah. We were on thirty-five, forty percent casualties for a while. That was a
18 hot canal, believe me. PBRs didn't even go in there.

19 JS: Yes, sir. Correct me if I'm wrong, but hadn't the Mang Thit Canal just really
20 opened up for that traffic through there to get the—

21 EC: Yes, it had. We were tasked to do that.

22 JS: Okay. All right.

23 EC: What we'd do is, we had six POMs—you know what they are? They're small
24 gunboats, French gunboats. We'd put three on a side and maybe the command-boat as the
25 lead boat and the monitor whichever way he was needed. You know, for some reason,
26 after President Ky clipped that ribbon and said the canal was open, we didn't have much
27 trouble with the rice-boats. I don't know why they'd let them go through there. I don't
28 understand that. I don't know if you've ever seen one, but they were great big
29 cumbersome things. They didn't have any speed at all. We just trolled along with them. It
30 seemed like the VC didn't bother those rice-boats going through there. They didn't bother
31 them from Ca Mau for some reason. I don't know why. We all had our theories on it.

1 Maybe they bought rice in Saigon someday. I don't know. They had plenty in the Delta.
2 They could buy it at any market. I don't know why they quit. Maybe propaganda-wise,
3 they put a rumor through the people that they weren't going to try to starve the people or
4 something. They were good at that.

5 JS: All right. From your perspective, why the desire to open the Mang Thit Canal?

6 EC: To get the rice up to Saigon, through the inland waterways.

7 JS: Right. So kind of a shortcut to get it there more quickly?

8 EC: Well, no. It was a way they had to go.

9 JS: Okay, okay.

10 EC: You went to My Tho and hit the My Tho Canal and went up that way up to
11 Saigon River and up. I'd been through there on a junk-boat during Tet of '65. We didn't
12 have any trouble. No one shot at us or nothing. We just went up there. The 4th Riverine
13 Commander wanted to go up there, so we took him up there. That's the way I learned
14 how to go there.

15 JS: Yes, sir. If you could, could you talk a little bit about the enemy activity there
16 on the canal and why it was such a bad area?

17 EC: It started with a lot of small arms firing at us. We got to the point where we'd
18 return fire a little bit and of course, the monitor would blow the trees away with the 40
19 millimeter. The seemed to want to shoot at us with a village in back of them, like they
20 wanted the Vietnamese to destroy the village. Our counterpart who was very good, he
21 was a very good Naval officer then. Lieutenant Commander Tinh, his name was. He
22 knew where all those villages were and we just kind of returned enough fire to get their
23 heads down and get on down the way. Then, all of a sudden, the B-40 barrage business
24 started. Naturally, when that started, we had to shoot more. We tried to shoot crossways,
25 so we didn't go back into those villages.

26 JS: Yes, sir.

27 EC: We tried that. The lead gun would shoot back and so forth. We tried that. He
28 didn't want to destroy the villages and make the people angry at the Vietnamese Navy. I
29 think that was part of the Viet Cong's strategy. What I knew from the Junk Force, what
30 they tried to do to our village right by the junk base. What they tried to do at Tre Anh,
31 they tried to get the PBRs to destroy the district-town by shooting at them a lot. The

1 PBRs were pretty good. They just got out of there. They called the district advisor and he
2 tried to get the RFs to do something. It just went on and on like that. Of course, the RAG
3 sailors got a little mad. We were taking pretty good casualties. When the B-40s started,
4 some way or another, they got a supply of B-40 launchers and ammunition. Then, we
5 really took a lot of wounded people. In fact, that's where I lost my one ear. The thing hit
6 the side of the command boat and banged so loud that it just blew all the nerves out of my
7 ear.

8 JS: Yes, sir. Were the Viet Cong operating out of bunkers again like you had
9 talked about last time?

10 EC: Oh, yeah. They operated out of spider-holes. We landed a few times. Once
11 the forty millimeters start and the twenties would start, they would cut those trees down
12 and make shrapnel out of the wood. They'd run away then. I think their method was try
13 to maybe get us to shoot farther inland maybe with the A-1 or something. We never used
14 that much in those days because Tinh didn't want to do anything to destroy a village or to
15 hurt a villager. They had no choice. A guy comes in with a rifle and a bunch of guys and
16 say, "We're going to shoot here." What is an old man going to do, a rice farmer?
17 Nothing. He's going to say, "Okay," and hide.

18 JS: Right.

19 EC: There were spider-holes along there. I sighted spider-holes along the river
20 there—the canal I should say.

21 JS: All right. Did you guys in the RAG boats, being in the RAG unit, did you
22 have more success actually getting after the enemy than you did with the PBRs
23 previously or was it about the same?

24 EC: We could take more B-40 rockets. What the Vietnamese did is—of course,
25 we didn't have the things the American RAG had at the time, but they took wood and put
26 it around a 40 millimeter. They were four-by-fours. They nailed them around there where
27 the rockets would explode on them. Of course, the Americans had Bar-Armor. Even with
28 Bar-Armor, they put C-rations behind the Bar-Armor. They seemed to take the shrapnel
29 pretty good, I guess. That's what the American guys said. That's what we did to try to
30 help with that rocket business. It got so that when they ambushed, they'd "pop-pop" a
31 few with the rifle and then shoot two or three B-40s at us. Duck in the holes and that was

1 it. They'd hit a POM or they'd hit the command boat. We had one ensign lose an eye. We
2 had a forty millimeter where we had to get a new housing and a new loader for it. Just
3 things like that. That's what it evolved to, is ambushes with rockets.

4 JS: Okay. Yes, sir. Could you talk a little bit about the actual boats themselves
5 compared to the Junk Force and the PBRs? Could you talk a little bit about the RAG
6 boats?

7 EC: The ones we had were the old French Dinassaut boats.

8 JS: Okay.

9 EC: The command boat had an .81, it had two .50 calibers, two .30 calibers, and a
10 20 millimeter AFT. The bombs of course had .50 calibers. If we had enough guys, they'd
11 have .30 calibers down below on each side—two on each side. We rarely had enough
12 sailors to man those fully. We manned the .50 caliber forward. The monitor had a 40
13 millimeter. It had a .50 caliber on it side by side there with it. Then, they had a 20
14 millimeter AP. They had two .30s up by the bridge, by the steering cockpit up there, and
15 small arms. All of them had small arms.

16 JS: Yes, sir.

17 EC: They were the old French Dinassauts. Actually, our landing-craft were just
18 old Mike-boats we'd give the French. In fact, they were all made out of them. Actually,
19 even with the rockets hitting them things, they stood up pretty well. I never seen one go
20 through. The hot metal would go through. They stood up pretty well. We never had one
21 sunk. I had a monitor—well, I'll talk about that later, had a bad time. They stood up very
22 well.

23 JS: Yes, sir. If you could talk a little bit more about the crew from one of the
24 Dinassaut boats?

25 EC: They were assigned a crew and a boat. I think our biggest problem was the
26 Vietnamese weren't the best maintainers. You'd take the 20 millimeters—you would
27 have to clean them. Even the rounds, you have to take out of those magazines and clean
28 them and re-grease them properly or they won't work.

29 JS: Yes, sir.

30 EC: They used to tell me, "We needed extractors. We need this." And I'd go on
31 there with them. We'd clean up a magazine or two and fire them on the free-fire island

1 and they fired fine. I said, “You guys have to clean these rounds periodically or they
2 won’t fire.” They never grasped the idea that when they weren’t in the canal, you put the
3 main spring in the magazine on fifteen pounds. When you went in the canal, you cranked
4 it up to sixty pounds. That’s the way it is with 20 millimeters. I couldn’t get through to
5 them to do that. They just weren’t the best on maintenance. The RAG engineers— we
6 never had problems with the engines. They seemed to know that their livelihood
7 depended on those engines.

8 JS: Right.

9 EC: They kept them up very good. All the time I was in the RAG three years, we
10 never had engine problems.

11 JS: Yes, sir.

12 EC: As far as the guns went, the 20 millimeters were the worst. I finally got
13 through about setting headspace on the .50 calibers. They had to do that. They finally got
14 better on the 20 millimeters. When things got really hot in that canal, the 20s didn’t work
15 because of maintenance problems. They started to do the maintenance on them. You
16 know, when your life depends on something, that’s a different story.

17 JS: Right, absolutely.

18 EC: As long as I was with the Vietnamese, I had the feeling that they didn’t have
19 the urgency to kill the Viet Cong soldiers as much as the Viet Cong soldiers had to kill
20 them.

21 JS: Okay.

22 EC: I don’t know why I felt that way. I always did. They didn’t like killing
23 Vietnamese in other words. I always felt that way. They were brave and they’d go
24 anywhere they were told. Once the rockets would start flying, I guarantee you, they put a
25 line of fire with everything they had, you know. I don’t think they liked it. We’d get
26 ashore and find a dead one or two. They’d just look away like, “Why are we doing this?”
27 I’m sure now, after their relocation camps and the retraining camps a lot of them went
28 through, that would change their mind. At that time, I had the feeling they’d do what they
29 had to do to stay alive. You know what I’m saying?

30 JS: Yes, sir.

1 EC: They were very aggressive. Anywhere that Tinh told them to go, they'd go. I
2 just had that feeling they didn't like fighting other Vietnamese. When the North come
3 down there, it was a little different. When we started to get a few soldiers from the North
4 down there, it was a different story. They didn't like them. The Viet Cong themselves,
5 the local Viet Cong, I don't think they liked killing them. They did it but I don't think
6 they—they never said anything, but just a feeling I had.

7 JS: Right. All right. Could you talk a little bit more about your counterpart here?

8 EC: Lieutenant Commander Tinh was very good. He liked me to go on operations
9 with him because he knew that I was steady and could help him get air-support if we
10 needed it. He and I were pretty close. Lieutenant Ton—Tom Ton, his name was. He was
11 very aggressive and sometimes he'd get us in trouble. He wouldn't listen, in other words.
12 "No, no. I go now." He'd get us in canals we couldn't turn around in. Off canals, you
13 know—off chutes. I'd say, "Look at the map here. This is very small." "Oh, I go. I go
14 anyway." He was good that way, aggressive. I always thought about him, he was too
15 aggressive to the fact that he endangered his outfit by going into water where we couldn't
16 turn around in. You had to back out. That's no way to fight a war when a guy can run
17 along the bank and shoot at you.

18 JS: Right. Did this ever create any problems? Did any of his men take casualties
19 because of his aggressiveness?

20 EC: Oh, no. I never had problems with him. I'd just say, "Look at the map. Very
21 small, very small canal." He said, "I know, I know. But I must go there."

22 JS: Yes, sir.

23 EC: Sometimes, you know, the monitor was our lifeblood. The rest with the
24 machineguns and that, they were good, but the monitor had that 40 millimeter. They'd
25 definitely keep their heads down when that thing started pumping out there.

26 JS: Yes, sir. Could you talk a little bit then about the tactics of how the monitor
27 would work with the other boats, how it all would work together?

28 EC: A lot of times, we'd just form a line and then just give it everything we had.
29 Like I say, the Viet Cong weren't that dumb. They were smart soldiers. They would all
30 seem like, not a 100 percent, but they would always get a village in the back of them
31 when they ambushed us.

1 JS: Right. Yes, sir.

2 EC: The monitor was good because the 40 millimeters—we had HEIT (High
3 Explosive Incendiary Tracers) at that time, High Explosive Incendiary Tracers. They'd
4 hit the trees and of course, the trees splintered out on them and they'd keep their heads
5 down. The Viet Cong were smart. They always had a village behind them, ninety percent
6 of the time. They wanted us to shoot in that village and make them people mad at us.

7 JS: Yes, sir.

8 EC: Same when we used to call in the choppers, Tinh would tell them, "Don't
9 shoot in the village. Not unless they shoot up at you." I think a lot of times the PBRs—
10 some guy would go "pop-pop" and they'd unload. They'd have a lot of civilian
11 casualties. I think they stopped that after a while. Intelligence told them, "Hey, these guys
12 are smart. They're getting you to shoot-up friendly villages and friendly people."

13 JS: Right. Yes, sir.

14 EC: That was one of their main tactics.

15 JS: Okay.

16 EC: Smart son-of-a-guns, man. I used to tell them in school, "You're not going
17 against school-boys."

18 JS: Right. Yes, sir. Another question I have for you—I know you talked about
19 during your first tour working with the Junk Navy and working with those guys. There
20 was a cooperation problem between the different levels of the Vietnamese Navy—if one
21 group got in trouble, you couldn't get another group to come help. Had this changed at all
22 by 1967? Had it gotten any better?

23 EC: Not really. The Army and the Navy wouldn't work together.

24 JS: Okay.

25 EC: They'd call us, the 9th Division—the troops they had in there, that battalion,
26 would call us when they really got in bad trouble. They wanted us to get on either side of
27 their encampment there and give them all the firepower we could. Otherwise, they didn't
28 work good together. Sometimes they'd send me to Can Tho or Vinh Long there, or Sa
29 Dec to an operation planning thing. It seemed like they just ignored the RAG unit unless
30 they had to go somewhere. In my opinion, they didn't work well together.

1 JS: Yes, sir. So just as an example, if you guys ran into an enemy and you were
2 taking fire and you needed the land swept, would it be difficult then to get the actual
3 9th Division to come down there and actually sweep what you needed swept?

4 EC: Oh, they wouldn't do it at all.

5 JS: Okay.

6 EC: The best unit we had were the Vinh Long Regional Force Battalion or the
7 PRUs (Provincial Reconnaissance Units), if you could get them. You know, the Popular
8 Force, the PFs, they didn't have anything. They'd try, but what did they have? They had a
9 few carbines and a uniform somebody gave them. Now, when the MAT (Mobile
10 Advisory Teams) teams come in there—U.S. MAT teams—them PFs got pretty good.
11 They got tired of these people coming in their villages and haranguing them all night and
12 so forth. They got pretty good.

13 JS: Right. Yes, sir.

14 EC: As much as we tried, we never had a platoon, or a squad, or two squads of
15 anything ride with us like the American units had. We never got anything like that, never.
16 That's in my three years at Vinh Long.

17 JS: Yes, sir. I know that you talked about the Viet Cong tactics of trying to get
18 you guys to try and use your firepower to anger the villagers in Vinh Long, to kill some
19 of those people, to anger them. But in your interaction, what interaction you had with the
20 local people there in Vinh Long, what's your impression of them? Were they pro-
21 American, anti-American, somewhere in the middle, or a mix?

22 EC: No, no. Vinh Long was a very nice place.

23 JS: Okay.

24 EC: Our people got along in Vinh Long very well. They got along at Vinh Long
25 good.

26 JS: All right. Yes, sir. Did you have any interaction with the local Vietnamese
27 outside of Vinh Long, on the outside of the city, in the countryside at all?

28 EC: Oh, yeah. We had a couple of villages that we held MEDCAPs (Medical
29 Civic Action Program) at and things like that.

30 JS: Okay. Did those people seem to be pretty friendly as well?

1 EC: Oh, yeah. They were friendly—as friendly as they could be. Of course, we’d
2 bring a doctor down there. He’d listen to their chests and listen to their heart and give
3 them some aspirins or something. You know, what can you do in one MEDCAP?

4 JS: Yeah. Yes, sir.

5 EC: Of course, the kids, not all of them, but a whole bunch of them had Sclera
6 with scolias on their head. They’d give them grease and things to cure that up. The old
7 lady’s teeth, with that betel nut, what could they do? They’d give them a bunch of
8 aspirins to take the pain away. We did do MEDCAPS in there. People were very friendly.
9 A lot of times, they’d come out the best way they could and say, “The Viet Cong is up
10 around the bend. They come here last night.” They’d try to help us with some of those
11 villages. They didn’t have anything to fight those people with. The old men is mostly
12 what they had there.

13 JS: Yes, sir.

14 EC: We had one fish-net—Tinh and I knew about it. If he had it out one way, that
15 meant the Viet Cong were in the area. They killed him. They caught on I think, and killed
16 him. Tinh and I were the only ones that knew what the net-signal was.

17 JS: Right. Yes, sir. So practically anyone they had any knowledge of helping you
18 guys at all, they would just simply kill them?

19 EC: Oh, yeah. They’d disappear because they didn’t have anything. You know,
20 they took life in their hands helping us. The Army had a small outpost on the road to
21 Vinh Long there. It had a 120 in there and some Popular Force soldiers, and two or three
22 Americans in there. They helped them quite a bit. I don’t know, for some reason they
23 never got attacked or overrun. I don’t know why. They didn’t have much in there.

24 JS: Yes, sir. One question I meant to ask you at the beginning, as far as the
25 timeline, when would this have been? What months would this have been that you made
26 the transition over to the RAG unit?

27 EC: I went there in ‘67.

28 JS: Do you remember what time of year it was?

29 EC: It was in July.

30 JS: July, okay. How long did you end up staying there?

31 EC: I stayed in Vinh Long—let’s see. I left there in January of ‘70.

1 JS: Oh, wow.

2 EC: I was transferred to Vallejo, to the Naval Inshore Training Unit Center.

3 JS: Okay.

4 EC: We trained everyone that went to Vietnam. They went through our thing.

5 JS: Yes, sir. All right. During this time that you were here in Vinh Long, outside
6 of the Mang Thit Canal, what were some of the other areas that you operated in? And was
7 Mang Thit Canal the worst place that you operated in?

8 EC: It was. It was terrible.

9 JS: Yes, sir. What were some of the other places though that you—

10 EC: We landed troops on Ton Dien Island a few times. We went behind it. The
11 PBRs didn't go there. Every time they went, they got someone killed or shot-up. That's
12 when the 43rd Rangers swept that island. We went behind there and acted as a blocking
13 force for them. We went on the duck capturing operation a couple times. We got the word
14 that the VC had thousands of ducks trapped in a bay on these islands. We went on those
15 operations with the RFs. They'd capture a couple old men with MAS-36's which was
16 supposed to guard them ducks. They'd herd all the ducks in the boat, and we'd take them
17 to Vinh Long. What happened to them, I don't know. I just know we had boat loads of
18 ducks.

19 JS: (Chuckles) Right.

20 EC: We made quite a few operations with the PRUs. We went on some islands
21 that they had intelligence that they had 120 rockets on there. They didn't find any. We hit
22 a couple paymasters on the island. I don't know what happened to it. The officers took
23 care of that box they had. We did that. That's about it. We just made operations when
24 they told us. We always had one RAG in the Mang Thit. If 23 come out for a rest, 31
25 would go in there.

26 JS: All right. I guess if you could talk a little bit about some of the things that
27 happened in Mang Thit—in the canal. If you could talk about some of those firefights?

28 EC: We went in Sa Dec. The Vietnamese engineers were making a road from, I
29 don't know, Long Xuyen Province. I don't know where it went. We went as far as we
30 could go. We had a lot of trouble in there. PBR guys told me, "Boy, you guys are asking
31 for a lot of trouble past Long Xuyen here." I said, "Well, we got to go." Of course, that's

1 where Lieutenant Maricourt was killed in '65, back in that canal. It was rough back in
2 there, but they got that road built.

3 JS: Yes, sir.

4 EC: We did that operation. But again, we had one RAG in there, and the other
5 RAG was in the Mang Thit all the time. That was about a two-month operation. I think
6 they had the ranger battalion in there. I'm not sure. I think so.

7 JS: This was support to help build the road?

8 EC: Well, we just supported them. We didn't do any building or anything. They
9 had their Vietnamese engineer battalion in there. They did a good job too by the way.

10 JS: Yes, sir. All right. I know you also mentioned that—of course, I know you
11 were there when Tet happened, but before we actually talk about Tet, could you talk a
12 little bit about some of the memorable days or some of the things that happened actually
13 while you guys were in the Mang Thit Canal?

14 EC: The Mang Thit was just patrol operation and supporting that 9th Division a
15 bunch. I guess some of the things was—we had a skyspot go wrong on one of the villes.
16 The RAG sailors put a blocking force around the ville and I got the Medevacs (Medical
17 Evacuation) to come in and take them out of there. That was kind of a memory. We
18 didn't make any contact, but the RAG sailors went out and put ambushes around the LZ
19 (Landing Zone). We took those people out to where the sky-spot was, cause it was in the
20 wrong spot. That was kind of memorable. I think the village chief's daughter got married.
21 He invited Tinh and I to the wedding. I thought that was kind of neat. It was peaceful and
22 quiet. I'm sure there were some Viet Cong in there because they would look at me and
23 smile. It was like, "Let's have a truce here and have a nice wedding and get these people
24 on their way." You know what I'm trying to say?

25 JS: Yes, sir.

26 EC: That was memorable. There was a lot of beer and a lot of Ruou De. (Laughs)
27 I presented him with a fifth of Jack Daniels. The village chief took one drink of that, "Oh,
28 I like Ruou De." He put his pepper in there. You know, little red pepper.

29 JS: Yes, sir. Right.

30 EC: He liked that better. That was a memorable day. The day that we landed the
31 9th Division, as we landed, the B-40s come out of them trees. I'm sure we was doubled by

1 somebody. The monitor was put out of commission. I helped to get it out of the canal
2 because they almost sunk it. It took so many rockets. In fact, there was forty Vietnamese
3 soldiers on one of the mike-boats. He shot rockets right in the well-deck when they
4 lowered the ramp. I'm sure somebody doubled us on that one. That was the most
5 memorable day. I will never forget that day. Rockets were coming from both sides of that
6 canal.

7 JS: Right. So you got a pretty good feeling then that they knew about that
8 operation in advance?

9 EC: I don't think they could get there that fast to when that ramp went down on
10 the boat to shoot rockets in the well-deck. I'm sure that they knew about that. That was
11 one thing that the Army had. They'd make operations like that and they'd say, "Oh, the
12 Viet Cong knows." I'm sure they had spies everywhere.

13 JS: Right. Yes, sir. How did that operation end up turning out after—

14 EC: It's good. We got them on the beach. In fact, they did well.

15 JS: Yes, sir.

16 EC: When the thing was over, they killed about forty. They got a lot of weapons
17 out of there. The Army captain—he was really happy. He says, "I'm one happy guy.
18 Good operation but I don't like my men hurt like that." Most of them wounded were just
19 shrapnel from the B-40s hitting the iron inside the well-deck. They had to know that we
20 were coming because we had rockets on both sides and small arms. The one side of the
21 canal—the farmers quieted that down quick because there wasn't any village or anything
22 in the back of there. They put the hurt on them. The command boat fired the 81 over
23 there.

24 JS: All right. How long did that firefight last do you think?

25 EC: Oh, I'd say it lasted twenty minutes. That was the longest one I was ever in.

26 JS: Yes, sir. You talked about the casualties that the 9th Division guys took, but
27 how many casualties do you think the RAG sailors took?

28 EC: We took eight, I know.

29 JS: Oh, you took eight. Yes, sir.

30 EC: The 40 millimeter crew—that was two. We had an ensign almost lose his
31 arm. A couple of FOM (French River Patrol Boat) guys had shrapnel from B-40s hitting

1 the side of the boat. Those guys were cowboys. They loved it. They'd show you bandages
2 and wave it at you. The guys that rode the FOM, they were cowboys, believe me. They
3 rode ahead all the time, you know.

4 JS: Right. Yes, sir.

5 EC: Sometimes, we used them as minesweepers too.

6 JS: Okay. Was that a serious concern, mines in the canal?

7 EC: Not in the Mang Thit. We never had a mine problem.

8 JS: Okay, other places though?

9 EC: Well, the PBRs said they did. I don't know. Some of the other RAGs down at
10 Ben Tre—or at My Tho rather, they said they had some mine problems in a smaller canal.
11 We never had any.

12 JS: Okay.

13 EC: We had a swimmer one night with a mine in—our watch up there threw a
14 hand-grenade on him and the whole thing blew up. He kind of rocked the boat a little bit.
15 I think he had a limpet mine. I don't know how he figured he was going to get it on the
16 boat. There was a pretty good tide flowing there, you know.

17 JS: Right. Yes, sir.

18 EC: Our watch at night saw him and threw a hand-grenade on him. That's the
19 only mine problem I know of that we had.

20 JS: Yes, sir. Well, any other memorable moments before we talk about Tet?

21 EC: Oh, every time they'd shoot rockets at us—they'd do that about every other
22 day for a while. They were pretty memorable when they'd bang on that boat. You never
23 knew where they were going to hit. I liked it when we could medevac people out that
24 were sick. In fact, when I left, I was really surprised the Vietnamese had a big ceremony
25 when I left and gave me, besides other things, a First-Class Humanitarian medal for
26 helping people medevac them and stuff. I wasn't expecting anything. I didn't know what
27 it was. They made a thing out of that.

28 JS: Yes, sir. If you could now, if you could talk about the Tet offensive there in
29 Vinh Long—actually prior to the offensive itself. Prior to the beginning of the attack
30 there at Vinh Long, did you guys notice any sort of build-up?

31 EC: I can tell you about that.

1 JS: Okay. Yes, sir.

2 EC: We got a Navy Seal relived a guy in the PRU outfit. We had a welcoming
3 party, all these advisors for him. I worked with the Intelligence chief. He was a very
4 smart, aggressive guy. When I come back to the base, the PBR command duty officer for
5 the day told my boss that I called him on the radio and said, "VC come." My boss says,
6 "Well, he couldn't have done that because he was at this party. Who took the message?"
7 All the message was, says, "It can be VC come." I had a snotful of beer. I went and woke
8 the senior advisor up next door. That's where the Army lived, next door to our base. I
9 said, "Listen, I got a message that these PBR guys are telling me that I'm drunk and I
10 radioed them. I didn't radio them. I think it was my intelligence chief in HD-1. He's out
11 now." For some reason, he was out in the countryside. That senior—he was a colonel.
12 Roush, his name was Roush. He said, "Are you sure?" I said, "Well, that's what the
13 command duty officer said, that I got a message on the radio, 'Can be VC come'." He
14 says. "What's 2-10 doing about it?" I said, "We're building fortifications right now.
15 We're setting 260 mortars." If you know that base, you had a long walk from the main
16 road down to the base. So he was setting up sixty mortars. This was twelve o' clock at
17 night.

18 JS: Yes, sir.

19 EC: The next day, nothing happened. The day after that, we were on patrol in the
20 Vinh Long canal between the market and the bridge there. He put two FOMs in there and
21 boy, they made contact quick. That's when it started in Vinh Long. I never did see that
22 PBR officer again. He never would come around. They all left our base. They left us cold
23 turkey, believe me. I have never seen so many American flags taking off for Bien Hoa in
24 my life with all them PBR boats. The VC were on both sides of our base. Our guys—
25 well, they shot up their own housing to save the base. Anyway, that continued a day and a
26 half. These PBR guys said, "They took our base." That's wrong. There's not one Viet
27 Cong soldier that stepped foot on that base, not one. In fact, of the matter—I took twelve
28 guys and swept that whole area in front of us and I got the—oh, he was a civilian. I forget
29 what they call them advisors—political advisor. I got him out of his building and back to
30 the base. By then, they'd killed eight or nine soldiers. We got some weapons out of our
31 housing area and got some AKs. Boy, they left us alone from then on. You know,

1 everyone was going to go to the air-base and then I said, "You guys all go there. I'll stay
2 with these guys. I'm going to advise them. I'm going to fight with them." So all of the
3 advisors stayed. We got 2000 people that we took over to the island and we got them rice.
4 I forget where Tinh got that. He got rice somewhere to feed them. We lost one Mike-boat
5 there before the rockets hit it. Not one Viet Cong soldier stepped foot on that base at Vinh
6 Long, not one. At the end of that Tet, we went down by the TOC they said, "Well we
7 can't go out of there. The VC is in the officer's club across the street." I took eight sailors
8 that I knew, and we swept that whole area. We killed two VC in that building and got
9 their weapons and told that TOC bunch, "Okay, you can come out of there now, I think."
10 We put a monitor down the Vinh Long canal, and they got in a big firefight in the market.
11 By then, they didn't care. They let it go and the VC run away somewhere. I understood
12 the VC ran away and the PRUs got them.

13 JS: Okay.

14 EC: The PRUs was waiting in their ambush outside of their white compound there
15 and they got them. That's what we did at Tet. My people and myself went every night in
16 Vinh Long on a different building on the roof and set up ambushes along there. After Tet,
17 them people were really happy that we run them out of there because we didn't destroy
18 any buildings. Of course, at the cathedral there, the big cathedral, they tried to make a
19 hospital in there. The helicopters put some bullet holes in there. I don't think they hit it
20 with rockets. No, they didn't hit it with rockets—they hit it with machinegun fire. The
21 Viet Cong, what they'd done, there was a small bridge separating Vinh Long with the
22 canal and they blew a big hole in there trying to separate the city. I'll tell you, my sailors
23 could clear the bunch of that city out. In fact, to my knowledge, a guy told me later in the
24 States that we were the only foreign unit that ever got a Navy Commendation Medal,
25 ordered to them. That was a big deal. Admiral Zumwalt come down there himself and
26 presented it to Tinh. Well, that was a big deal. There's no foreign unit that has ever got
27 that from the United States Navy. Everyone thought them RAG sailors were cowboys.
28 They thought they were crazy riding them boats day-after-day in them canals. They were
29 really proud of that.

30 JS: Yes, sir.

1 EC: We flew that flag over the base a long time—that Navy Commendation
2 Medal flag.

3 JS: Okay. Yes, sir.

4 EC: They flew that under the Vietnamese flag a long time. So I was proud of
5 them that they earned that. They defended themselves like that and they earned it. They
6 took all them people across the river and put them on that island. They set out ambushes
7 at night with the RAG sailors so them Viet Cong wouldn't infiltrate those people and
8 shoot at people, you know.

9 JS: Yes, sir.

10 EC: They never bothered them on the island over there. To the day I left the
11 PBRs, I never come back to that base at Bien Hoa. They blew up all the buildings they
12 had. That was a sore-subject.

13 JS: Right. Were there any other Americans there in Vinh Long during the time?

14 EC: Yeah, the PBR division.

15 JS: Well, I mean after they left, was there anybody else besides you advisors?

16 EC: No.

17 JS: Okay.

18 EC: The Army had an advisor team there. They'd come back to their building. Of
19 course, they caught them unaware. They were mostly the administrative guys. The 9th
20 Division guys were out in the field. The armor battalion, they had their problems, but
21 they handled them pretty good I heard. The RAG unit defended their base outstandingly.
22 They just shot the thing up and the VC left—left their dead-ones there too.

23 JS: Yes, sir. About how many VC do you think attacked the base?

24 EC: Oh, I think it was maybe a platoon.

25 JS: A platoon, okay.

26 EC: Thirty or forty, I think. You know, they had quite a tactic in town where they
27 took those apartments and knocked holes in the wall. What they'd do is, they had a fire
28 team up there in the windows, but they'd run back-and-forth like they had more guys up
29 there. I don't know how many people attacked at Vinh Long. I've got no idea. It wasn't
30 as bad as say, Ben Tre.

31 JS: Okay. Yes, sir.

1 EC: They didn't have to bomb the whole city to get them out of there. The RFs
2 did pretty good there too. The National Police did pretty good. They went out and with
3 what weapons they had, they got truck-loads of weapons where the VC had run away.
4 They really didn't want any more part of Vinh Long. They didn't have the uprising there
5 they thought they were going to have. Vinh Long was a pretty happy town. They weren't
6 bothered too much. They had a good Regional Force company there. They had a pretty
7 good province chief. I don't think he was too bad. It seemed like Vinh Long was a happy
8 place.

9 JS: Okay.

10 EC: Did I lose you?

11 JS: No, sir. I'm still here, I'm sorry. I'm still here. How long was it before things
12 began to quiet down then? How long did the Tet Offensive last there?

13 EC: It quieted down—you know how they had a lot of problems at the air-base?

14 JS: Yes, sir.

15 EC: They were infiltrated pretty good, but things quieted down then.

16 JS: Hello? (Audio cuts) They left the airbase.

17 EC: The American 9th Division, as far as I know, they come down that canal north
18 of the air-base and put up a blocking-force there and rooted all those people out. All that
19 air cav bunch come in there with a bunch of loaches and their fancy hats.

20 JS: (Chuckles) Right.

21 EC: They came in there and I guess they made operations. My people, the RAG
22 people—well, we separated then. They pulled us out of the Mang Thit and we took one
23 ferry-landing up towards the Long Xuyen and another one halfway down to the Mang
24 Thit Canal. The one halfway down to the Mang Thit Canal, they took a lot of B-40s there.
25 The one up north, we landed the Regional Force. I think it was two platoons of them.
26 They didn't have any problems. The VC run away. I guess they didn't want no part of
27 them. The one down halfway the Mang Thit Canal, that ferry-landing, we took some B-
28 40s out of there. We got the troops landed and that all quieted down then. Then, we went
29 up the Mang Thit Canal to a PF outpost, but that was all deserted. I'm sure they got
30 overpowered there. Them poor guys, give them a few carbines, you know, and tell them,

1 “You’re soldiers.” That didn’t work until the MAT teams come in there with them and
2 they rearmed them and retrained them. Then, they did pretty good.

3 JS: Right. Yes, sir.

4 EC: The city of Vinh Long got mortared up into February. They mortared at the
5 air-base and sometimes it would hit the outskirts of Vinh Long. Of course, we’d go out
6 then. Ambush teams would go out and check and the civilians say, “No VC.” They liked
7 our sailors. Tinh was hard on them. Our sailors didn’t mess with the people in town. They
8 were there to help them and boy, they helped them the best they could. Our only problem
9 was a Ranger battalion and our guys got in an argument and they were going to blow
10 each other away. I went out there. They said I was crazy, but I went out there and talked
11 to the captain. I said, “Why are you wanting to fight us? There’s enough VC around here
12 if you want to fight them.” He says, “Well, they did something, blah, blah, blah.” I said,
13 “Let’s be nice now. Call your guys off and I’ll call my guys off.” So, we got that settled
14 anyway, whatever it was.

15 JS: Yes, sir. All right. You mentioned the air base there at Vinh Long. Did you
16 ever have any contact with any of the Bird Dog pilots there at the air-base?

17 EC: I did. I flew every fourth day with Major Burkhardt.

18 JS: Okay.

19 EC: He and I flew up and down that Mang Thit Canal. In fact, I’ve got a movie of
20 a B-52 strike he put in there.

21 JS: Yes, sir. Were these Army Bird Dogs or Air Force Bird Dogs?

22 EC: Air Force.

23 JS: They were Air Force Bird Dogs, okay.

24 EC: I flew every fourth day with him. I think I’m one of the few black-shoe guys
25 in the Navy that’s got three air medals.

26 JS: Really? Wow.

27 EC: I was a security officer at Fallon when I retired. I used to wear that air medal
28 around there. You know, the bar? The pilots would look at me, “What’s this guy doing
29 with that?” I got it for hours, you know.

30 JS: Yes, sir.

1 EC: I was under orders. Well, we got shot at a few times. But we heard the rumors
2 that them Viet Cong commanders told them guys if they'd shoot up at them Bird Dogs
3 that they'd kill them because we put the fast-movers in. If there was ones around, we'd
4 put them in. We'd put a lot of them in tree-lines with nothing. They'd just schedule them
5 in there, and they put all that ordinance on them. That was kind of fun flying with Major
6 Burkhart. I liked him.

7 JS: How did you end up doing that to where you did fly with him? How did that
8 come about?

9 EC: Well, because we flew that Mang Thit Canal and tried to figure out where
10 those guys were coming from and so forth. We did find an ammo factory there. He kept
11 circling around it. He said, "There's some activity going on down there. What are those
12 guys doing?" I said, "I don't know." We looked and looked, and then they all run. He
13 says, "I'm going to put a strike in there." So, he got an arc-light in there. Boy, did we get
14 an explosion out of that. The first one he made was in the rice-paddies. I got a movie of
15 it. The second one he made was right on target and I'll tell you, we had quite an
16 explosion. Major Burkhart said, "Well, we did something anyway." He was quite a nice
17 young fellow—not young. He wasn't that young but he's a nice fellow. Oh, and another
18 thing—they put a big arc-light on the entrance to the Mang Thit canal and we went in
19 right after it. Boy, we took some people out of there. I guess they were soldiers. I don't
20 know what they were. They were young guys and women. Of course, they just had their
21 babadans on, they didn't have uniforms, you know.

22 JS: Yes, sir.

23 EC: I don't know what they were. They were walking around in a daze and not a
24 scratch on them. That concussion to that thing must have really bothered them. We went
25 in there right after that. Boy, there were holes in that mud. You could put a building in
26 them. We went in there. We thought we were going to have a fight or something. Hell,
27 them guys couldn't have fought if they had the best weapons in the world. They couldn't
28 have fought. That arc-light shook them up so bad. We took them to Vinh Long. What the
29 National Police did with them, I don't know. I got no idea.

30 JS: Right. Yes, sir.

31 EC: We took about forty people out of there.

1 JS: Oh wow.

2 EC: I mean women and men. They were walking around in a complete daze,
3 believe me. If they were in bunkers, they must have really got shook up. It was like an
4 earthquake hit them, you know. Because they put two planes in there. That was kind of a
5 memorial thing.

6 JS: Yes, sir. Any other days that stick out in your mind?

7 EC: Well, just patrolling. I thought the duck situation was kind of funny.

8 JS: (Laughs) Right. Yes, sir.

9 EC: Everyone would laugh, “You got VC ducks.” The intelligence chief told us
10 that, “They all laugh at us, but the Viet Cong are going hungry. They’re robbing the
11 people to stay alive right now because we got all their ducks.” He said, “That’s good for
12 us.” We did have some ducks. They called us the “Duck RAG”. We did have ducks really
13 and truthfully. They had them all—they had like a boom around them. They were in this
14 bay. Them two old guys were there with MAS-36s. they give up right away when they
15 seen the RFs coming in. They weren’t about to fight. They were old men. They said,
16 “Yes, yes. We’re VC.” Of course, they wanted the Chieu Hoi then, you know.

17 JS: Yeah, sure. (Laughs)

18 EC: All of those ducks were there. They said, “Take these ducks to the field and
19 eat.” Anyway, we took them all.

20 JS: Yes, sir. Well, did your guys get to eat any of those ducks?

21 EC: Oh, I’m sure they did. I’m sure the boat captains took their share. I thought
22 that was kind of a memorable experience. I bet I’m the only guy that got VC ducks.

23 JS: (Laughs) Right.

24 EC: It was kind of funny loading them M-boats and my guys are in the water
25 shooing the ducks in them. I don’t know if they clipped their wings or what, they didn’t
26 fly. Anyway, that was one. Another thing was the paymaster’s deal with the PRUs. They
27 all wanted to know where the black box was. I said, “I don’t know. I’ve never seen a
28 black box.” Of course, the PRU advisor, he says, “Hey, we give it to the province chief.
29 He was on there.” So that was kind of funny. Everyone was interrogating everybody
30 where the black box went. I’m sure it went to the province chief. I don’t even know what
31 was in it, no one opened it. I’m sure it was a fake. It was the paymaster who hid it out

1 there. I don't know, I guess watching them making that road, I felt kind of good when
2 they opened it. I always felt that we were there to help the people. If you could help the
3 people, then things would change. I learned that in the Junk Force with that little village,
4 Tiem Ton—that shrimp village. If you give the people security, that's all they wanted.
5 They wanted to just live and sell their shrimp up in Ben Tre. We used to send junk-boats
6 and convoy them up there so they could do that. I always thought we were there to help
7 the people. I had one thing that I used to argue with the other guys about, "Let's make
8 these Vietnamese do it themselves. Make them clean their guns and make them clean
9 their ammunition themselves because we're not going to be here forever." People would
10 look at me like I was nuts but that's kind of what I thought my job was. What could one
11 guy do with eight boats? You had to train people. I think that's why RAG 23-31 was so
12 good, because I stayed there long enough to implement some of those programs, you
13 know.

14 JS: Yes, sir.

15 EC: In one year, you just get to know your people and you're gone. I stayed there
16 long enough where I could tell them, "You're not doing this now." They'd say, "Okay,
17 okay. We do, we do." I think that's why when we needed those guns, they always
18 worked. Of course, I was there long enough to—they saw that the system worked. It
19 worked for us. It had to work for them, right?

20 JS: Yes, sir. So by the time that your time ran out there in Vietnam, that you were
21 to return to the States, by 1970 when you ended up coming home, you had the idea to
22 think that things were going well for the unit then?

23 EC: Well, I thought the Mang Thit had calmed down after Tet. After Tet, it
24 calmed down. I think the Vietnamese forces killed all them people. I think the rest of
25 them, the political situation was—I think that their bosses in the North told them to lay
26 low and that the Americans are going to leave anyway. That's the feeling I got because
27 they just quit. We'd steam up and down that Mang Thit and for weeks there, there
28 wouldn't be any problem. I think Tet really hurt the VC.

29 JS: Right, right.

30 EC: The political situation was that, I think the powers that would be in the North
31 told them, "Lay low now. We'll just keep these people occupied a little bit. They're going

1 to leave pretty soon.” That was the feeling I had. Talking with the sailors, they always
2 said, “The politic man will defeat us.” They read the newspapers every day and of course,
3 I guess the Vietnamese papers was talking about it too.

4 JS: Yes, sir. So by the time you left, even though things had quieted down, did
5 you have a feeling that eventually that things were going to go bad?

6 EC: I did.

7 JS: Yes, sir.

8 EC: I had the feeling that the North Vietnamese were keeping us busy and letting
9 us withdraw out of there. I talked to the guy that relieved me and that’s afterwards. He
10 said, “The word come down they couldn’t go on operations with them anymore.” So what
11 good is an advisor if he doesn’t go?

12 JS: Right.

13 EC: I was teaching school at the Navy Inshore Operations Center, Vallejo. Our
14 curriculum changed a lot. When Commander Bohn asked me to go back, I went back in
15 ‘71. I was supposed to stay eight weeks and things had really changed.

16 JS: Yes, sir. How had they changed?

17 EC: The advisors spent all of their time guarding their possessions. We had a lot
18 of problems with the sailors. They didn’t know the advisors. Let’s see, Ton, he had made
19 captain by then. He went on a big operation in the U Minh Forest.

20 JS: Okay.

21 EC: He told my boss, he was a commander over at Ca Mau, “I want Chief Canby
22 to go with me. I don’t want anybody else, but I want him to go with me.” I went on a
23 five-week operation with him. They had two ranger battalions in there, and they really
24 swept that place.

25 JS: Did they find much?

26 EC: We got in some pretty heavy firefights there.

27 JS: Was it with the NVA (North Vietnamese Army) this time?

28 EC: I’m sure they were—some. Of course, we had the new boats. They held up
29 well. We had a flame-boat and we had the water-cannon boat. That water cannon thing
30 stopped the bunkers on the side of the canals, I’ll tell you that. Boy, that thing had two-
31 thousand pounds of water pressure coming out of that monitor, they called it. They got

1 them off fleet tugboats and put them on those RAG monitors. They were quite a situation,
2 believe me. They'd man those things and the dirt would fly and the logs would fly. The
3 shooting would stop. Of course, the flame-boat, what the Americans did is put enough
4 stuff in the well-deck of those monitors to give you a seven-minute burn. Not just a
5 "shick-shick", there was a seven-minute burn. That slowed them down too. They took a
6 lot of fire, those water cannons, and flame-monitors. I guess that operation was pretty
7 successful down there in the U Minh Forest. They said it was. I come back and my boss
8 says, "You're never going again on an operation like that." I said, "Well, you said I could
9 go." He says, "Saigon says, 'Why were you there?'" I said, "Well, I was there to help him
10 call in air if he needed it," which was true. They had Black Ponies, but his English wasn't
11 that good. When we needed them, I put them in. That's why he wanted me. I know it is. I
12 made one more operation on the Soc Trang Canal.

13 JS: Okay.

14 EC: We raised some bridges so the tango-boats could get under them. I was with
15 the security force. That was the last operation I made. When he asked me if I wanted to
16 go home, I said, "Yeah, my time's up here and I'm not doing anything anyway." I was
17 just sitting on that little base.

18 JS: Was this also in 1971 period?

19 EC: Yeah.

20 JS: Okay. Yes, sir.

21 EC: So I come back to the States. By then, I had almost thirty years in and
22 Commander Bohn called my detailer. He said, "Why don't you send him up to Fallon or
23 Hawthorne or some place. He lives up there." I lived at Walker Lake and that's why I got
24 stationed at Fallon. I retired at Oak Knoll. I went to hearing school up there. They asked
25 me if I wanted to retire. I said, "Yeah, I'll go. I got thirty years in." So I never went back
26 to Fallon.

27 JS: Right. What year did you retire?

28 EC: '73.

29 JS: '73.

30 EC: September.

1 JS: After you came back to the States, did you follow the war on TV and in the
2 newspapers?

3 EC: No.

4 JS: Okay.

5 EC: Because I knew that we were going to desert them people. Which we did, by
6 the way.

7 JS: Yes, sir. When it all came to an end, when Saigon fell in April of '75, what
8 was your reaction to it, to the way the war ended?

9 EC: My reaction was that we didn't do what we said we were going to do. We
10 told the Vietnamese that we are going to leave there and if you lose a plane, we would
11 replace it. If you drop bombs, we would replace it. If the North Vietnamese come over
12 the border, we'll give you air-support. That's what I read anyway. President Ford didn't
13 do any of that. He left them to their own—I got a friend of mine that was with Vaughn up
14 there in I Corps, that civilian that run that was—

15 JS: Oh, Van?

16 EC: He was with him and he said, "Them soldiers had sixty rounds of
17 ammunition, some of them. That's all they had." He said, "When I got out of there, I took
18 a sampan to a destroyer out there. That's how myself and my boss got out of there away
19 from the ARVN division because they ran out of ammunition. They had to run away." He
20 said, "We killed 5,000 North Vietnamese at Pleiku, so somebody fought." They can say
21 they didn't fight. That marine wrote a book about Vietnamese marines holding that whole
22 tank corps on that road. What is it—the *Road Without Joy*, I think, waiting for the
23 airstrike that never come. I didn't follow it that much.

24 JS: Yes, sir. Based on your experiences and what you know from the time that
25 you spent with the South Vietnamese, what do you think about the perception of them
26 among Americans? And the way they've been written about in history that, what you just
27 said, about that they didn't fight, that they were cowards—what do you think about that?
28 Could you comment on that, the way they've been treated in history?

29 EC: I think it's like American units. Some units are good, and some units are bad.
30 I think that the Popular Force units, when they got the MAT teams in there, I think they
31 went out and did their job. I think the Viet Cong were hurting. I think if we would have

1 kept our promises to them, they'd probably be a country today. Like I said before, there
2 was two bad companies in that battalion of the 9th Division. When they changed
3 leadership, those guys changed completely. They got to be pretty good companies. When
4 I first went to RAG 23 and 31, they had an officer there that he wouldn't go in the Mang
5 Thit Canal. They relieved him on the spot. He was a bad officer for that. We got
6 Lieutenant Commander Tinh. He was a good officer. He did his job. That's what I think.
7 They had good and bad. I still think myself, maybe you've heard this before, that
8 Vietnamese didn't like killing Vietnamese. You've probably heard that from other guys.

9 JS: Yes, sir. I have. I've heard it from the Vietnamese themselves.

10 EC: Yeah. You know, I lived with them people. I didn't live in an American base.
11 The Navy advisors lived with them people. You could pick up things like that. A lot of
12 the time—I think now, if you reverse things, that you would have an entirely different
13 feeling after they knew what those reeducation camps did to them. When we thought
14 there was North Vietnamese, there was an entirely different feeling. They'd say,
15 "Soldiers, we fight soldiers now." Before, they'd say, "Oh, we fight rice-farmer." Like,
16 what are we doing with these guys? I think the North Vietnamese used the Viet Cong as
17 fodder at Tet. Well, they did the wave, but you didn't see them down in the Delta getting
18 their butts kicked. That was my feeling for a long time living with those guys. They just
19 didn't have the feeling to go kill Vietnamese. They did it but I don't know if I would
20 have the feeling to kill Americans.

21 JS: Right. Yes, sir. Before wrapping up the interview, if I could ask you just a few
22 broad questions about the war to get your idea on some of the larger issues? First of all,
23 looking back on your experience in Vietnam, could you talk a little bit about what you
24 think about American involvement in Vietnam and also about your own involvement? Do
25 you think the U.S. should have been there to begin with? And how do you feel about your
26 own service in Vietnam?

27 EC: I think we should have been there helping those people. I'm proud of that
28 RAG unit that I served with because they did everything they were told to do. Whether
29 they liked it or not, they did it. A lot of times, I felt that they took some casualties that
30 they didn't have to take to not injure civilians. I don't know. It seems one way or another,
31 the North Vietnamese were more motivated or something than the South. I don't know if

1 they were afraid of the communists killing them or what. A lot of times they'd shoot
2 rockets in places that seemed like that they could have done better—the Viet Cong. They
3 seemed like they shot in places to make explosions. Maybe they felt the same way I felt.
4 They didn't want to kill Vietnamese. They did it because that was their ideology to win. I
5 think that they could have shot them better now. Like I said, when I went to U Minh
6 Forest, I think they had some North Vietnamese Regular Army. I'm not sure, but I think
7 they did. They shot much better than the other people. I don't know. I was there in '64—
8 '65 rather. I don't know if they could have held out without us. I think the North would
9 have overpowered them. I think to start with, the North Vietnamese Army hierarchy had
10 much more experience than the South Vietnamese people. I don't know. That's just my
11 opinion.

12 JS: Okay. All right, just a few more questions.

13 EC: Okay, anything.

14 JS: What did you think about the media's coverage of the war? The way the war
15 was portrayed in the media back in the United States?

16 EC: I don't know. It was like anything else. There weren't many Dickey
17 Chapelle's out there, let's put it that way. I think at the Caravelle Hotel, they had their
18 briefings. They sent a guy out to take a few pictures of American casualties and that was
19 it. I had two stay with me five days in the junk base. They were pretty good. Brown was
20 one of them. He was a photographer. Chiopi, Lou Chiopi was the other one. They went
21 on operations with us. They got shot at pretty good. They saw what it was down there. I
22 had Dickey Chappelle with me a week. They couldn't shoot enough at her to scare her
23 off. Boy, she was a tiger. She wanted to get the information of what was happening on
24 the ground. She had her boots on the ground. Boy, I'll tell you. We went on a couple land
25 operations and she tagged right along. She pulled a F-2 carbine out of her luggage,
26 paratrooper style. She says, "You guys don't see this, but they're not going to capture me
27 either." She had her boots on there. That's why she got killed up there with the Marines,
28 up in a mine or whatever. She was a real horse. She wanted to know what was happening
29 down there. I don't think we had as many media getting their boots on the ground as they
30 needed. They'd have a briefing at the Caravelle and that was it. I think Mr. Cronkite
31 spoke way out of terms before the battle was even over. If he would have come to Vinh

1 Long and saw the Battle of Vinh Long or the Battle of Ben Tre where we didn't have
2 American units, maybe he would have changed his mind. I guess he sit in the Caravelle
3 up there at Saigon. I don't know. The Vietnamese run them out of Vinh Long. They run
4 them out of Ben Tre. The PBRs helped them at Ben Tre. They had two divisions in there
5 helping them. They'd give them a lot of firepower. They had to, they had the American
6 advisor compound surrounded. The PBRs did run them out of there. They got on both
7 sides of that thing and they'd really give them support. I think the media did the Military
8 a big disservice. Like I read one day, we won every battle and lost the war.

9 JS: Yes, sir. What do you think about Vietnam today, modern-day Vietnam, and
10 the relationship that the United States has with Vietnam today with trade and tourism and
11 things like that?

12 EC: As far as the Delta and that goes, what I hear is that we won. Saigon, they
13 say, is a bustling economy. I haven't been there, so I don't know. I've had guys tell me,
14 "The rice farmers are rice farmers again." They told me that they couldn't even see the
15 gate in Vinh Long. There's probably not a base there anymore. I think if that's true, if
16 they have a bustling economy—I got a jacket here, a winter-jacket made in Vietnam. If
17 they're employing people and the economy in the South is what they say it is—I don't
18 know, I haven't been there. I'd think we'd say we won the whole thing. I haven't been to
19 Hanoi, but I had a friend of mine was up there. He said, "It's dark and dreary up there." If
20 Saigon is a bustling economy and Vung Tau has five-star hotels and casinos, I'd think
21 that's what we wanted in the first place, for people to better themselves. I know that's
22 what I wanted. One time, I got 500 kites and eighty pounds of seed from Jolly Green
23 Giant. I'd give the people the seed and a Filipino come down to the junk base from Ben
24 Tre and showed them how to plant those seeds and how to make crops. Once we got the
25 profilating cavalries out of there and those people were alone, man, they grew carrots and
26 watermelon. They were happy people. The kids, we passed out those kites. We had jolly
27 green kites all over the Delta. Jolly Green Giant, you know, the corporation. I thought
28 maybe if we could just do that every place and come on that thing at the end—they had
29 pigs and chickens everywhere that we brought in there. At Ca Mau, at that base, the Navy
30 base, they had 400 pound hogs there. They were doing it just like the Filipino guy taught
31 them. Wash the pigs every day, feed them that feed every day, clean them up, and when

1 they get so big, you sell them or eat them yourself. That's what they were doing. We had
2 all kinds of Rhode Island Red Chickens there at the base. They had troughs made for
3 them. They had roofs made for them, just like that Filipino told them. If we did that,
4 where it's progressing that way now in the Delta, that's what we wanted in the first place
5 I think. It bettered the people's livelihood. They told me at the Mang Thit Canal and up
6 there at Ben Tre that the French made all those people dig those canals. That's no way to
7 do. No wonder they hated the French. I don't know. You've been there, so I don't know.
8 I heard Vung Tau is a paradise.

9 JS: Yes, sir. It's a very nice place now.

10 EC: If you go on the website, you see nothing but five-star hotels.

11 JS: That's right.

12 EC: I think we won that much. In like Vinh Long, the orphanage, the advisors
13 supported that. Those nuns taught those kids how to do things and how to work. They
14 changed them all the time. They worked in the kitchen a while, then they worked in the
15 sewing class for a while making things. I'm sure some of them are working in business
16 now. That's just my opinion. I haven't seen it, but I've seen pictures of hotels on the
17 internet. I talked to people that's been there. I think really that's what most of the
18 advisors wanted in the first place, to have those people come along and just not be
19 bothered with a war and make a good living and live peacefully. I had a friend of mine
20 lost his leg in a canal and he went to medical school. He was a doctor and he went down
21 there. He says he didn't see a soldier or a sailor all the time he was in the Delta. He saw
22 some policeman. He said he did see some PBRs with National Police on them. I'm sure
23 they do that. He said the people were friendly. Of course, they were glad to see him
24 because he had three or four chests of medical supplies. He held MEDCAPS. That's my
25 opinion. I just think that's neat that we got an economy going like that.

26 JS: Absolutely. Did you find out what happened to any of your Vietnamese
27 counterparts? Did any of them make it to the U.S.? Do you know?

28 EC: Not that I know of—oh, yeah, one. One commander from the 4th Riverine
29 area did. He lives in Atlanta. Of course, he speaks English like an American. He was a
30 graduate of Saint Peter.

31 JS: Okay.

1 EC: So he was highly educated and he was a good commander too. He run 4th
2 Riverine good. I heard he made it to Atlanta, but that's the only one I ever seen. I'm sure
3 them guys I was with, they shot them all. I'm sure Commander Tinh and them—I'm sure
4 that they didn't make it. I'd bet on it. I don't know. I haven't heard from any of them.
5 JS: All right. Is there anything else you would like to say? Anything else we
6 should cover in the interview before bringing it to an end?
7 EC: I don't think so. Is there anything else you would like to learn?
8 JS: I think we covered it pretty well. Why don't I go ahead and stop the recording
9 now and bring the interview to a close?
10 (Interview audio ends)