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**The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Elpidio Fahel
Conducted by Kelly Crager
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Transcribed by Emilie Meadors
Edited by Ayden Case**

1 Kelly Crager: This is Kelly Crager conducting an Oral History Interview with
2 Elpidio Fahel. Today is June 28, 2010. I am in Lubbock, Texas, on the campus of Texas
3 Tech University and Mr. Fahel is joining me by telephone from his home in Houston,
4 Texas. Mr. Fahel, to begin this interview, I'd like to ask some biographical information of
5 you if I might. Could you tell me when you were born and where?

6 Elpidio Fahel: I was born in Kansas City, Kansas, on July 12, 1944.

7 KC: So, you have a birthday coming up before long.

8 EF: Yes.

9 KC: What were your parent's names?

10 EF: My father was Bonifacio Tuzon Fahel, and my mother was Julia Frances
11 Mills. My father came over to the Philippines in 1917 and when he landed in San
12 Francisco there was a large Filipino community in Kansas City, so he made his way back
13 to that location there. During that period of time my father worked on the railroad as a
14 cook on the passenger trains and then became involved in being a chef in other locations
15 in Kansas City. My mother was just a housewife. My father was fifty years old when I
16 was born and my mother was, I think, forty years old when I was born. I have one brother
17 who was eleven years older than me and a sister who is sixteen years older than me.

18 KC: Wow, so you were truly the baby of the family.

19 EF: I was truly the baby of the family.

20 KC: Absolutely. Well, describe life growing up there. I assume you grew up in
21 the Kansas City area?

22 EF: No, actually my father relocated the family to Los Angeles, California, in
23 1945 and grew up in an area called West Los Angeles which is right next to Santa

1 Monica. About three and a half miles from the beach. He became a chef at the Miramar
2 Hotel and was involved with the preparation of salads and desserts at the hotel. One of
3 the things that I remember was that my father's hours were—he'd go to work at around
4 two-thirty (2:30) in the afternoon and not get home until around eleven-thirty
5 (11:30)/twelve o'clock at night. In doing this, he would get up every morning while I was
6 going to school and fix me breakfast and then when I came home from school, he had
7 some hot chocolate and toast ready for me. I usually got home when I was in grade
8 school around between two-thirty (2:30) and three o'clock from school. The school or
9 location that I grew up in was what I would consider a lower-middle class. The large
10 majority of individuals living in that area were actually Japanese-American and I would
11 say the majority of all the friends I had growing up initially throughout elementary school
12 were Japanese-Americans who were born in the internment camps during World War II.

13 KC: Oh wow, very interesting.

14 EF: Yeah, my father got his nationalized citizenship in 1947. One of the things
15 that I know from talking with my father and one of the things is because of my age or his
16 age when I was born and his hours, I really never had that much time to talk to my father.
17 I was never really close to him as I would want to have been growing up was his—you
18 might say his respect for the United States. One, giving him the opportunity to come over
19 here and have a different life than he had in the Philippines. Also, what the United States
20 did during the Second World War in reference to the liberation of the Philippines once it
21 was taken over by the Japanese and then giving them the independence. That was
22 something that he was very proud of, and a few times mentioned to me how much he
23 loved the United States for doing that aspect during the war. My mother growing up,
24 worked as a person in the electronic industry—packing things for shipping. Again, she
25 would go to work at eight o'clock in the morning and get home around four, four thirty
26 (4:00/4:30) so when I was growing up, I was one of the latch-key kids who would come
27 home and basically have no supervision until my mother came home. We would come in;
28 I'd have my hot chocolate and toast and just go out and play and do my thing.

29 KC: Very good. That sounds like your father had a pretty serious impact, I guess.
30 Did you find that there was a sense of pride and patriotism built into your family because
31 of your father's experiences?

1 EF: Yes, there was. I think it manifested more in me because my brother and
2 sister actually grew up in the Kansas City area and with my relatives on my mother's
3 side. My mother had seven brothers and sisters and all the cousins from that side of the
4 family were really more age related to my brother and sister than to me. I think I had
5 maybe one or two cousins that were my age that I really didn't have that much to do with.
6 But prior to relocating to Los Angeles, my brother and sister and the cousins basically
7 were a close-knit group and they maintained contact with each other all through their life
8 where I, from a standpoint, did not maintain that contact with the family. My father did
9 not have many relatives, real close relatives. I say brothers or sisters in the United States.
10 He had several nieces and nephews. When we located to Los Angeles, one of the
11 memories I have is how the family members stopping—that were coming from the
12 Philippines would stop in Los Angeles and say hi to him and talk to him and bring him
13 news of the family. And then in their departure going back, would stop at the house. Most
14 of the ones that came over were nieces that were going into nursing. So, there's that
15 aspect of it. Going back to the question concerning the patriotism, I mean it was really
16 manifested in me because of the stories and then what was happening and getting me
17 interested in reading war novels. As I was growing up, that was one of the things that I
18 constantly did was read different war stories all through that time. My patriotism and
19 sense of duty, you might say, was manifested in that early time. I was able, even with the
20 individuals that were with the Japanese-Americans that I played with, even there, there
21 was a sort of a hidden pride that we had beaten the Japanese during the war, but I never
22 let it show in reference to my friendship.

23 KC: That's very interesting, you should say that. Let me ask you this. It will
24 probably require you to speculate a little bit. What was the attitude of the Japanese-
25 Americans that you played with as a kid growing up? Toward the country or toward
26 society as a whole, given the internment camp situation.

27 EF: Y'know, it was one of those things that I didn't realize what that effect would
28 be on them until after I got out of, say, left home, got into the Army, and maybe read
29 more about what the impact was. Growing up playing with them, I never really sensed
30 any negative to it. The one thing I remember that they did—I can't remember what day of
31 the week it was, but one day of the week they would all go to a Japanese school where

1 they would learn to speak Japanese and learn about the Japanese culture. I never sensed
2 any resentment from the children. Their parents were all extremely hard working. It
3 seems like when this was in, y'know, in early memory was about '53/'54 timeframe,
4 y'know, getting on with their lives and succeeding and providing everything for their
5 family. So, from that perspective I never really sensed any animosity or comments about
6 it. The ones that were my age were born in the internment camps, but their first memories
7 were actually being back at home with their family. I do not know if there—the
8 speculation is that their parents never really talked about their time in the internment
9 camps with their children. It was probably until they got later, maybe they grew up and
10 what was happening. At that age there really wasn't that much publicized as what we did
11 as far as forcing the Japanese into the internment camps during World War II.

12 KC: Okay, what was school like for you there in Los Angeles? How well did you
13 do?

14 EF: Well, it was one of those things I was extremely good in reading, and reading
15 comprehension, but the rest of school in academics I was not too good at. It was one of
16 the funny things—I could remember when I got to high school because there was this
17 reading test. I could read and comprehend what I read very well. You might say it's top
18 of the class, but my control of the English language and other problems I had. They said,
19 "Well, you're bilingual at home." Which I wasn't. My father did have an accent in
20 speaking, but my mother and my brothers and all that very rarely—y'know all spoke
21 English. The only time there was a Filipino dialect would come in was when my cousins
22 or other people would come in, that spent time with my father, and they would go and
23 talk and speak in a language that I couldn't understand, and we'd go from there.

24 KC: Now, while you're growing up there in LA, were you aware of the larger—
25 geopolitical sounds pretty heavy, but the Cold War is raging while you're growing up.
26 Did you get any sense of what that was all about or was it affecting your life in any way?

27 EF: Yes, because of the aspect of the bomb drills where we'd have to go in class
28 and somebody would yell, "Drop" and we'd have to drop on the floor and cover our
29 heads. Also, there was the news coming out at the time and I could remember vividly in
30 reference to the Korean War and when MacArthur got relieved of his command and
31 Truman. One of the aspects in reference to Harry Truman, one of my uncles actually

1 served with Truman in the First World War in his unit and when they opened the Truman
2 Museum in Kansas City, I was actually there at the time, so it was one of those things that
3 Harry Truman was in my—a great president because I actually saw him. I didn't meet
4 him, but I saw him and was there. So, I knew that there was a Cold War. I knew that our
5 enemy was the communist and again—one of the things at my young age, I did a lot of
6 reading in reference to the newspaper and current events and history was my favorite
7 subject. That was the other subject I did outstanding in was in history. I was aware of the
8 circumstances and the tension that was going on in the world during that period of time. I
9 think then, y'know, at that time there was also the reading I was doing, was building up
10 my patriotism and desire to serve my country. It was one of the things that as I was
11 growing up, I had my little toy soldiers that I played with all the time. I had an aunt and
12 uncle that lived in the town of Hiawasse, Arkansas. It was just a gas station and a
13 general store in the northwest corner. I spent a summer there. I had the revel Sherman
14 tank and Jeep with a 37-millimeter cannon and about ten soldiers. That's what I played
15 with for three summers and I had the soldiers out in the yard and played with them in the
16 dirt and all that. I had always been somebody that was—idolized the military and
17 dreamed and played within the military.

18 KC: Okay, that sounds very typical, but certainly much more focused towards the
19 service and awareness it sounds like. What about high school? How was high school for
20 you?

21 EF: High school was a blast. I played basketball, not varsity, but I played
22 basketball. I lucked out and my best friend in high school was one of the more popular
23 guys in high school. His father was—his name was Scott J. Scott. His father was Walter
24 Scott who was a set director for 20th Century Fox and won an Academy Award. The high
25 school that I went to, drew from our area—which is the lower-middle class area and then
26 an extremely upper class of the Pacific Palisades, Beverly Hills, Brentwood, and
27 Westwood where UCLA was. The school was about four miles from UCLA. So, I got
28 exposed going in high school, you might say, to the different classes and different aspects
29 of wealth that were in the area. Quite a few sons of movie stars attended the school. So,
30 there's that aspect of seeing the teen idols and things like that that I was exposed to. Also,
31 later on in my life was it got me to a position where I wasn't overwhelmed with, you

1 might say those people that were the Hollywood characters and being overwhelmed with
2 them as an individual.

3 KC: And what did you want to do when you were through with high school?

4 EF: That was a good question. I just floated through high school, had fun, played
5 basketball, and socialized. I got good grades when I had to, which was every—so I could
6 be eligible for basketball the other semester I didn't do well. So, it was like all of a
7 sudden, when I graduated it was like, "Hm, what am I going to do?" Y'know, I really had
8 no goal to go to school or do anything. So, once I graduated from high school, I just
9 basically didn't do anything. And then my father came and said, "Well, what are you
10 going to do?" I said, "Okay." And applied to and was accepted to Pepperdine College in
11 Los Angeles. I attended there for a year and dropped out. I like to say that I attended
12 Pepperdine at the old campus in the middle of Los Angeles. The year that I was there we
13 had race riots in Los Angeles, and I can remember sitting on top of the library watching
14 the fires and everything that was going on all around the campus. So, once I got out of
15 there I had to go—the other thing that happened when I was at Pepperdine was the Cuban
16 Missile Crisis. I can remember standing outside the student center where they had a
17 television with a bunch of other guys watching the progress of what was happening and
18 the talk going around about enlisting and joining the military if something happened.
19 That was the first inkling I had of really being proactive and doing something even
20 though, like I think mentioned, growing up and playing with the soldiers, one of my
21 dreams have always been to lead troops in combat, but I was never really active and
22 trying to say, "Okay, I want to join the military and do things like that." It's just a dream
23 that I had from reading and seeing all the movies that came out during that period of time.
24 I started work for a company, Scanton Electronics. I met my wife and then I got my first
25 draft notice and then the vice president of the company that I was working for had some
26 pull with the local draft board and wrote them a letter and I got deferred for about six
27 months. My wife Mary and I got married, went on our honeymoon in Las Vegas and
28 when I came back from Los Vegas there was my draft notice to report in thirty days. In
29 thirty days, I reported for the draft and started my military venture.

30 KC: Started from there.

31 EF: Right.

1 KC: Now, let me back up just a little bit so I can get the chronology straight here.
2 When did you graduate from high school? Year?
3 EF: I graduated in January 1962.
4 KC: Okay, January of '62. Like you say, you're at Pepperdine during the Cuban
5 Missile Crisis and all that.
6 EF: Right.
7 KC: So, you get your draft notice in, what would this be? '63 or '64?
8 EF: Actually, I got my draft notice would be in '65.
9 KC: Okay, it's 1965, okay.
10 EF: Right.
11 KC: So, you just get married, come back from your honeymoon and thirty days
12 later Uncle Sam has changed your life considerably.
13 EF: Yes.
14 KC: Now this is 1965.
15 EF: Right, it was in September of '65.
16 KC: September of '65. So, the US involvement in Vietnam actually having troops
17 on the ground past the advisor stage of—the US is physically involved in Vietnam at this
18 point. Did y'know about the war in Vietnam? Were you following it at all?
19 EF: I knew from reading the papers and watching television that we were actively
20 involved in Vietnam. It was starting to build up. Listening to some of the news
21 conferences with Johnson talking about his involvement. I think one of the things I
22 remember about it during that period of time was the fact that the 1st Cav was over in
23 Vietnam. I think the Ia Drang Valley happened in November of '65. And that was right
24 after I went into basic training, but the fact was that prior to that, I remember reading
25 about the deployment of the division because of just the size and the commitment of the
26 additional forces over there. My awareness was what was in the newspapers and on
27 television news about Vietnam.
28 KC: And what was that? Explain to me what you remember from the media
29 coverage. What were you hearing about the war?
30 EF: It was basically that we were deploying troops over there. Also, I remember
31 the news coverage with the assassination of the President. I can't even remember his

1 name, Diem (both), when he was—that was overthrown and some of the talk at that time
2 was that there would be a greater involvement in Vietnam. I can't remember when that
3 was. Was that when Kennedy was in?

4 KC: It was just before Kennedy was assassinated. It was early November of '63.

5 EF: Okay, because that I remember just because of the news and what happened
6 and our involvement and then when Kennedy was assassinated the talk of where we
7 would go and then Johnson starting to commit more troops to Vietnam, but that's just
8 basically it. The part of—at that time while we were going over Vietnam is something I
9 really believed in at the time was that we were there to stop the aggression of the
10 communists and to stop the Domino Theory that acts and is presented as far as, y'know,
11 if one country falls, all of Southeast Asia would fall.

12 KC: Right.

13 EF: So, at that time, I myself, from a patriotic standpoint Vietnam was where the
14 communists were making a stand after Korea and that we needed to stop the communists
15 during that period of time.

16 KC: Let me screw up our chronology a little bit and get a little bit off topic. You
17 mentioned the Kennedy Assassination. What do you remember about the Kennedy
18 Assassination? Where were you, how did it affect you?

19 EF: I was at home and my mother came in and woke me up and said, "Kennedy
20 had been shot." I remember waking up and saying, "Oh, that can't be." And going in,
21 sitting in front of the television and watching that story develop. It was just, to me, it was
22 like, "How can that happen?" It was a shock because when—my parents were very
23 supportive of the Democratic Party and voted very loyal to Roosevelt and Truman.
24 Kennedy was their savior; you might say after the years of Eisenhower. I actually,
25 y'know, thought Kennedy walked on water. Y'know, the Camelot vision. To me it was
26 just a shock, and it was just a stun thing. I just remember sitting in front of the TV and
27 just watching it. Y'know, the whole four or five days of the event.

28 KC: Alright, let me take us back to your time in the service again. Now, when you
29 received your draft notice in 1965, it's not like you were receiving your draft notice in
30 1967/1968 where you knew that if you were drafted you were almost certainly going to
31 go to Vietnam. What did being drafted in 1965 mean to you?

1 EF: Y’know just, I think it was when I got drafted, I remember, “Now this may be
2 a chance to fulfill my dream of being in combat.” I felt that chances are that I would
3 probably go to Vietnam at some point in time, but it was one of the things of looking
4 forward to. My time in basic training, it was miserable at Fort Polk, Louisiana, because it
5 was in November/December. It was cold, it was miserable, but I remember—to me
6 having a good time. I look back and yea it was fun. All the skills that were taught to me
7 during that period of time were skills in the back of my mind that I knew that I would
8 need to may say fulfill my dream of being in combat. So, I took it very seriously and it
9 was at that time because of my test scores that they were considering me for—y’know, I
10 was told that I may go—be eligible to go OCS (Officer Candidate School). I remember
11 my platoon sergeant, Sergeant Doyle B. Allison, who had served in the Korean War
12 when he found out that I was on the list of potentially going to OCS. He pulled me aside
13 and he said, “Son, when you go to OCS, I’ve got some words of advice. You don’t want
14 to be first, and you don’t want to be last. Stay in the middle of the pack.” And that was
15 good advice because that’s what I did when I got to OCS. I was never first in anything,
16 and I was never last. I was in the middle of the pack. So that whole time I never had to
17 do—I never got harassed like everybody else.

18 KC: Well, let me back up a little bit. I want you to tell me about your time at Fort
19 Polk in basic training. You’re leaving your wife out in Los Angeles. What was it like for
20 you? You would have been in your early twenties here going to Fort Polk. Take me
21 through your daily routine. What was basic training at Fort Polk in 1965?

22 EF: Fort Polk in ’65, when I got there, I went to the replacement group and then
23 signed to the company. Because I had a year of college, I was made a squad leader. We
24 were an open barracks. Two squads on the first floor and two squads on the second floor.
25 We were in the first squad. I remember that one of the first things we had to assign was
26 individuals that would walk fireguard because we had the coal burning heat. It was my
27 responsibility to select and schedule for the fire guards to walk the floor. We would get
28 up in the morning first thing. The platoon sergeant would come in and wake us up, the
29 lights would come on and we would go and shave and dress and get our barracks ready
30 for inspection—morning inspection and fall out to formation and march over to the mess
31 hall. We’d go into the mess hall line, and we had to traverse the horizontal bars and I

1 remember when I first started doing that I couldn't get, but maybe three or four before I'd
2 drop off. I thought I was in good physical condition going into basic training and I was
3 shocked from an Army standard I was not in good physical condition as far as being able
4 to doing any of the physical training and exercises. Go into the mess hall, get out food,
5 get in, get out, go back, and then we would start our training depending on what cycle
6 we're going into, go through our training until lunch time, go back and have our lunch.
7 Go back to training around five, five thirty (5:00/5:30) depending on where we were at.
8 Come back, evening meal, and then after that it was cleaning the equipment and getting
9 ready for the next day and lights out at nine thirty (9:30), ten o'clock (10:00). And it was
10 just that regimental type thing. The other thing we had first thing in the morning was our
11 PT (Physical Training). We'd start off with PT after—I don't know, I can't remember if
12 it was before breakfast or after, but like I said for the first week and a half, two weeks it
13 was—I thought I'd die from that.

14 KC: Well, obviously you made it through.

15 EF: Yes. (laughter)

16 KC: When you were in basic, you mentioned that your drill instructor was a
17 veteran of the Korean War. Did he offer any sort of insight or advice about, "Look, this is
18 what combat's going to be like." Or "You're going to have to do this" or "You're going
19 to have to adjust this way." Or was it just basic training 101 where you were screamed at?

20 EF: The drill instructor, he was very calm. He wasn't one that was screaming and
21 hollering. He was one, I think realized that we were going to go into combat. When we
22 were talking or having time or going through a certain phase of training, he would try to
23 say how important it was in reference to your survival. All the troops in that platoon
24 really looked up to him because he wasn't the screaming and hollering platoon sergeant
25 that the other two or three platoons had, he was the calming one. The others were—I
26 remember the other two or three drill sergeants—platoon sergeants did not have combat
27 experience. He was the only one. He tried to instill on us, y'know, the importance of one
28 learning this. Your basic skills will keep you alive. Go back to your basics. You will need
29 it.

1 KC: That word basic really has a meaning there then as you saw it. What did you
2 hope to do when you were finished with basic? Were you thinking OCS or were you
3 thinking of going somewhere else?

4 EF: At the time I wasn't—OCS was there, but I also knew the next training that
5 would go through before I would have the opportunity to go to the OCS would be the
6 advanced individual training and would just take it to the next—or Advanced Infantry
7 Training (AIT). I graduated from basic training and flew back to Los Angeles and got
8 with my wife. We drove to Kansas City, Missouri, where her parents were at. So, she was
9 going to stay in Kansas City, during that period of time while I was in advanced training.
10 That was like a two week leave time frame there, so it was one of those things. So, my
11 time with my wife, we'd been married since September, and we had thirty days and we
12 another two weeks. So, I had more time with the military than I had with her. At the time
13 I was still young, and she was young so at that time neither one of us were thinking
14 Vietnam overseas. So that was not in—I don't think it was an issue. I know for me it
15 wasn't. I went to Fort Jackson, South Carolina, to get my Advanced Infantry Training.
16 That training there was not as strenuous as the basic training. They gave us a little bit
17 more free time. We actually got passes on the weekend to go into Colombia, South
18 Carolina, to do different things and then go back in. So, the thing I remember about
19 advanced training was just the aspect of the other weapons that we were exposed to that
20 were the next level up from the basic infantry rifle. There was the M-14 put—the
21 automatic rifle, the M-79 grenade launcher, the M-60 machine gun and some other crew
22 served weapons that we trained on. Like I said, the regiment was not as difficult, the PT
23 wasn't as strenuous and more free time.

24 KC: Did you train on the—were you introduced to the M-16 at this time?

25 EF: Uh no.

26 KC: Or just the M-14?

27 EF: Just the M-14. We knew that there was an M-16. I think we got a
28 demonstration of it, or they showed it to us, but all of our training was on the M-14.

29 KC: Okay, okay. So how well did you say you did at AIT at Fort Jackson?

30 EF: Y'know, I think both in basic training and AIT I did exceptionally well as far
31 as making it through, not getting in trouble, and feeling comfortable with myself with

1 what level of training I received and the skills that I developed as far as looking forward
2 to making a—to doing a good job in my time in the military.

3 KC: Right. When you finish AIT, I assume then you were told, “Look, you can go
4 to OCS. Your scores are here, you have the opportunity to do that.” Is that the way it
5 worked out?

6 EF: I got notified prior to graduation from AIT that I’d be—that I was selected for
7 OCS, but I had not been assigned a class. So, once I graduated from AIT, I was assigned
8 to a signal battalion that was a training battalion at Fort Jackson. Basically, I was cadre
9 there and I just walked the troops to class and sat in class with them. I was there for about
10 twenty days before I got my orders to OCS.

11 KC: And where was OCS?

12 EF: OCS was at Fort Benning, Georgia.

13 KC: Fort Benning, okay. Now, you’re going to OCS. You’re going to come out as
14 an officer. You’re drafted, but you’re going to come out as an officer. It looks like things
15 may be falling in place for you to kind of achieve this childhood dream. Talking about
16 leading troops in combat.

17 EF: Yeah, once I was selected to OCS then it was that realization that my journey
18 was about to actually take an active step towards that dream of leading troops in combat.

19 KC: You feel pretty good about this?

20 EF: I felt real good about going to OCS. And again, I remembered what my—
21 Sergeant Allison said so it was good words of advice for me.

22 KC: Yeah, in a lot of ways in life.

23 EF: In a lot of ways in life. There were a lot of pushups and low crawls that I
24 didn’t have to do because of that advice.

25 KC: Okay, well tell me about the OCS at Fort Benning? What was that like? This
26 would have been like, what, early ’66 probably?

27 EF: Early ’66 and it was something that reality—I do not remember the first six
28 weeks of OCS.

29 KC: Why is that?

30 EF: Because they would get us up at five thirty (5:30). We’d go out and do all
31 sorts of PT functions. The training was in leadership or marching and it was just a fog

1 because they were screaming and hollering at us and getting us to run everywhere. It was
2 just complete chaos you might say, to do anything. You never had any time for ourselves.
3 Like I said, I was trying to make—in the back of mind don't be upfront, don't screw up
4 so you stand out. Just try to be in the middle of the pack. Even being in the middle of the
5 pack we still had to run everywhere. We'd low crawl across the parade fields and we'd
6 get up. We'd finish the day's training. At evening the TAC officer was there telling us
7 what to do. Screaming and hollering at us. It's just like we didn't have any time to really
8 think. We just moved. It was during this period of time that I think we started out with
9 over 160 in the class and our class graduated 110.

10 KC: So, the others washed out in effect.

11 EF: Washed out, quit. That usually happened within the first six weeks.

12 KC: Did you ever have the point where you said, "Wow, this might not be for
13 me?"

14 EF: No, I never did. It was one of the things I think my personality was when they
15 yelled at me, I knew they weren't really yelling at me. It was, y'know, the system and the
16 process. It was like I never took it personal, so I never got really upset. I think that there
17 are times from a physical standpoint I said, "I don't know if I can continue low crawling
18 this far." But from a mental aspect I was never driven where what was happening would
19 say, "Why and I doing this? This is ridiculous." Part of that was because my dream was, I
20 knew that for me to complete my dream, I had to graduate.

21 KC: What other kinds of training? I would assume there would have been some
22 classroom going on here. What was the classroom like?

23 EF: Yeah, what we got, y'know, besides weapons training. Then we got into what
24 I really enjoyed and excelled at was when we got into squad and platoon/company tactics
25 and working on the exercises where we'd go out and function as a platoon. Somebody
26 would be in a leadership position. During those exercises there were several times that I
27 was picked at being a platoon leader or a platoon sergeant or a squad leader on different
28 exercises. Then in the classroom, quite extensive hours of just sitting in the classroom
29 going over platoon tactics that were one, initially developed during the Second World
30 War then into Korea than getting into the specifics of the tactics that were lessons learned

1 in Vietnam. That part I thoroughly enjoyed. That was probably the only time I almost got
2 in trouble by having too high of a score on a test.

3 KC: (laughing) You care to discuss that?

4 EF: Yeah, basically I aced the platoon tactics test and I think I had the third or
5 fourth highest score in the class. It was like, "Oh my God." Usually when anybody
6 excelled in a class like that, for some reason when the test results came down, they would
7 always be the one that the TAC officers would call them out and put them up and have
8 them do something to put them back into place.

9 KC: Encouraging you to stay in the middle, once again.

10 EF: Right, encourage you to stay in the middle or not to stand out. I think I lucked
11 out by, y'know, when I did that, I never got picked. I think that also was—we got into
12 that high level training after eighteen weeks. After eighteen weeks you become a senior
13 candidate. When you become a senior candidate, you wear your blue helmet. You're
14 basically treated more as an officer than as a candidate. So, the stress of the physical
15 training and the harassment changes over night. The day that you turn blue, a senior class
16 will come in for two hours they completely harass you. They wake you up, they take you
17 outside and make you do pushups, low crawl, spray water on you. Just make your life
18 miserable for two hours. Then you're handed your blue helmet and said, "Okay, now
19 you're one of us." And at that time, during the first eighteen weeks every place we would
20 go we had to run. When you become a senior candidate, you have the privilege to walk
21 everywhere.

22 KC: That must have felt pretty good.

23 EF: It made it real nice. The same thing is when the harassment in the mess hall
24 eating when we became the senior candidate, that stopped. So, we could eat in peace and
25 quiet.

26 KC: One of the things you mentioned a moment ago was lessons learned from
27 World War II, Korea, and Vietnam. Because the US has been involved in Vietnam long
28 enough for lessons to be learned there. What sort of lessons learned were you receiving
29 from the Vietnam Conflict?

30 EF: I think one of the major ones I seem to remember was in reference to security
31 which was, I think, in all wars of making sure you have your security out. Don't take

1 things for granted. The aspect for Vietnam, booby traps. How to look for booby traps and
2 ambushes. Not to wear sunglasses. Things like that, y'know, the aspect of it. Knowing
3 where you were at so that you could call in your artillery and fire support and the
4 importance of the fire support superiority that we had as far as artillery, helicopter
5 gunships and the Air Force were critical for any type of involvement that we would have
6 in contact.

7 KC: You mentioned booby traps as one of these things. Did you go out into the
8 field and practice different kinds of booby traps that you might encounter? Bouncing
9 Betties or whatever it might be?

10 EF: Oh yeah, we got the displays of them and look at them and then we would go
11 into areas like on a trail and they would have some of them there to look at. Trip wires—
12 they would have examples for us to look at so that we would be familiar with it. I think
13 that—I say that hands-on training was great to just be able to see and do that. Now, I will
14 say that during OCS, one of my weaknesses was map reading. For whatever reason I
15 could not do well map reading.

16 KC: That could get a guy, a young Second Lieutenant in a lot of trouble.

17 EF: I know. When I went over to Vietnam. That was one of the things that really
18 bothered me.

19 KC: I assume you were able to overcome it?

20 EF: Uh, yes.

21 KC: Alright, what was your sense of how the war was going for the United States
22 and Vietnam while you were going through OCS? Because now there's probably a higher
23 chance that you're going to find your way into this conflict.

24 EF: Well, there was no doubt. I think when we were in OCS, y'know, that was
25 one of the things that was always mentioned to us was, y'know, "You're going over to
26 Vietnam. You're going to assume the role of a platoon leader in Vietnam." That was
27 focused into us. I think at that time, all around being an OCS the propaganda was that we
28 were winning the war. Y'know, we had massive troops, the Ia Drang Valley was
29 publicized quite extensively as far as the tactics with the helicopters. Since the 1st Cav
30 predecessor which was the 11th ACR—11th something—combat assault group took the
31 training at Fort Benning. They were really pushing that we were winning the war. We

1 were being the aggressors in it. They downplayed the body count. In some ways, when
2 they talked body count to me, I'd look back and think about the Korean War, World War
3 II, and even the Civil War and the mass casualties. I'd say, "Gee, that's not that bad."
4 Y'know, there was that sense that we were going to deploy. We were winning the war.
5 Even the press media at that time was not as negative about the war. There's still negative
6 about it, but it wasn't to the level of being really, say, hostile. The anti-war
7 demonstrations were not as prevalent as they were later on. They didn't get as much news
8 coverage at that time. There was this one thing, again, some ways the press was not being
9 aggressive and being in anti-war as it was later on.

10 KC: Now, troops in combat in Vietnam, this was a different type of war than we
11 had seen in Korea, and we had seen in World War II. We're obviously very aware of that.
12 What were they doing to prepare you for taking a platoon? You got thirty-five; you've
13 got forty guys who were with you. How do you practice going out on these patrols and
14 this search and destroy type of approach as opposed to the more traditional ways that the
15 US had done it before? How did they get that into your head? How would you approach
16 that?

17 EF: Y'know, looking back I do not think in OCS they did really a good job at
18 that. From a standpoint where you took a leadership role you were leading, y'know,
19 another group of OCS candidates who basically knew what they were doing. So, you
20 didn't have the leadership problem of trying to get the men to, y'know, have to develop a
21 confidence in you and a respect in you that you knew what you were doing in leadership.
22 We knew the basic tools of what we had to do to get from point A to point B. The tactics
23 that we may have to use but we were sorely missing that leadership quality. How do you
24 get the men to follow you in doing that?

25 KC: That brings up a very good point. I've often wondered about this. In OCS,
26 you're dealing with people who are roughly or equal in terms of intellect and ability.
27 That's why you're all there at the same time. When you go out into the field, when you're
28 out in combat, you're dealing with people who maybe don't have the mental abilities or
29 aren't up to the level that you would have been. You go from working with guys who are
30 on your level to having to lead men who are, for all intensive purposes, below that level.

31 EF: Right.

1 KC: How does that translate? How do you do that?

2 EF: For me, I was very lucky. When I graduated from OCS, I was assigned to the
3 5th Battalion in the 31st Infantry at Fort Rucker. It was a battalion that was being activated
4 at that time. So, what we received when I got down there, there was a Major who was a
5 battalion commander. We had two Captains, and the rest were First and Second
6 Lieutenants. I was assigned to A-company as a platoon leader, and we received troops
7 fresh from basic training. Our objective was—our mission at the time, we were told, we
8 were going to train a separate battalion that had five companies to go over to Vietnam as
9 a replacement group, as a group. I was fortunate that I had that period of time where I got
10 basically troops, like you mentioned, that did not have the same socioeconomic
11 opportunities that I did, did not have the same education level, or did not have the same
12 desire that I had, or the rest of OCS did. So, I had that period of time from when I
13 graduated OCS with that unit going through with advanced individual training as a
14 platoon leader where I had to train basic troops and get them motivated in reference in
15 going through the training and gaining respect as a leader on that. Where other ones that
16 graduated from OCS, quite a few of them, their next assignment was TAC officer in
17 OCS. So there was a lot of them that went over to Vietnam and then were put into a
18 platoon leader's position that really never had that opportunity to lead and be a leader of
19 Regular troops. And I think that really hurt.

20 KC: Absolutely. It's kind of the stereotypical kind of view we get of the green
21 Second Lieutenant straight out of OCS who's thrown in with a bunch of guys who've
22 been there for up to, y'know, nine/ten months whatever it be. It clearly was a very
23 difficult position to put a young Second Lieutenant in. This didn't happen to be the case
24 with you. You had the opportunity to work with these men. That does sound like it's very
25 serendipitous, very valuable.

26 EF: It was, we spent eight weeks at Fort Rucker going through what was the level
27 of Advanced Infantry Training. Then we received orders that we were going to Fort
28 Benning and relocated to Fort Benning and that's when we found out that we were not
29 going to Vietnam, that we were going to Fort Benning to be the support troops for the
30 infantry school. Still, at that time there were certain levels of training that we had to go
31 through as being a support battalion as far as—I can't even remember the term. Y'know,

1 platoon tactics where they would grade you on platoon tactics. We still had to go out in
2 the field and to function as a company or a platoon developing tactics to attack or move
3 into an area and sweep and clear and do things like that. Again, I had problems with my
4 map reading. My map reading hadn't improved yet.

5 KC: Did you ever find yourself getting in any hairy situations at this time because
6 of the slack of ability?

7 EF: No, because when we got up to Fort Benning, one of the replacements was a
8 Sergeant from the 1st Infantry division from Vietnam. Because we didn't have a good
9 cadre of NCO's (Non-Commissioned Officers), he became my platoon sergeant. He was
10 a good map reader, so I learned to seek his guidance in my map reading.

11 KC: And probably seek his guidance in a lot of other ways.

12 EF: Oh definitely. It was one of the other things that Sergeant Allison told me
13 when he said, "When you get into a leadership position, your survival is based on your
14 NCOs." So I was, again, very fortunate. I got some guidance and even I knew that from
15 all the reading and growing up and reading my books about World War II and Korea.
16 They all talked about the value of the NCO. So, I always had a respect for the NCO, and I
17 knew I was going to use them to help me get through and assist me because where I saw
18 a big failure of a lot of my peers in Vietnam was their lack of respect for the NCO.

19 KC: Hmm, very interesting. Were you disappointed that you were going back to
20 Fort Benning rather than going to the war?

21 EF: No, because when I turned blue at OCS, Mary relocated down to Fort
22 Benning and when we went to Fort Rucker, she stayed at Fort Benning. So, this was the
23 first time since our marriage that I was stationed—we were together for any period of
24 time. So not going to Vietnam as a unit really didn't bother me because I knew I was
25 going to end up going anyway. So, it was like, "Now, just wait until I get my orders,
26 spend time with the family."

27 KC: Right, right. Was it difficult on your marriage to be apart so early in the
28 going?

29 EF: Looking back on it, yes it was. After I got out of the Army in '77 we got
30 divorced and I think my time in Vietnam and some other things at that time, I think I
31 failed to recognize one, what the separation did and two, the impact of what Vietnam—

1 how it changed me. There are some things I'll get onto later in reference to the
2 relationship and how I basically denied that the Vietnam War impacted me in certain
3 ways.

4 KC: We'll definitely get into that later as we move through. Now, you're here at
5 Fort Benning. How long are you going to stay here?

6 EF: We got to Fort Benning right before Christmas and then I actually stayed until
7 April of '67.

8 KC: Okay, so you were there for a good little while then.

9 EF: Yeah, about four or five months.

10 KC: Okay, let me ask you once again, what were you hearing about the war?

11 EF: At this time, there was a massive buildup, the body count was becoming
12 something that was alarming. We heard, y'know, from a standpoint that the local VC
13 (Viet Cong) elements were not really doing that well. It was the influx of the NVA
14 (North Vietnamese Army) in certain areas that were creating the problem. The war was
15 still going positive. Westmoreland said, "Y'know, we just needed an X number of more
16 troops to provide the security and get on with defeating the enemy." At the time we felt
17 confident in early '67 that we could defeat the enemy.

18 KC: Now, you mentioned that the body count was becoming alarming. Are you
19 talking about the number of dead Americans or the number of dead Vietnamese?

20 EF: The dead Americans. I think it was in '67 that it really started—because I
21 knew I was going, that all of us suddenly the body count numbers started meaning a little
22 bit more to me. Y'know, they'd have the weekly reports, the list would appear in *Army*
23 *Times*. One of the things from my prospective because I spent eight weeks in Fort Rucker
24 and then the time I spent at Fort Benning in March/April timeframe, a lot of my peers in
25 OCS were already going over to Vietnam.

26 KC: When do you get orders for Vietnam?

27 EF: I got orders to Vietnam in mid-March of '67. And the reporting date to depart
28 sometime around the 10th of April I believe it was.

29 KC: Okay. What effect did this have on your wife and your family?

30 EF: At that time is when I told you, that's when my wife started having serious
31 concerns and you could see that on her face of the fear of that. She was, y'know, aware

1 of—just as any wife would be, of the possibilities of going to war and the risk that was
2 involved with that. Even though I was very, you might say, positive towards it because
3 here I was getting my dream. I did not have the same reservations about going as the rest
4 of the family did. My father was very proud of me once I got commissioned. Again, like I
5 said, we had very little contact growing up, but that was probably, once I got
6 commissioned, when we went to Los Angeles prior to my departing to Vietnam in my
7 uniform, that was probably one of the proudest times that he had with me that I
8 remember.

9 KC: Let me ask you this, and maybe a little unfair to ask, but I'll do it anyway.

10 EF: Okay.

11 KC: You've got a wife, you've got a family; they care for you dearly, they know
12 that you're going to be shipped off to this war, but yet you're looking forward to it to
13 some degree because this is something that you've always felt that you wanted to do. Did
14 you feel that there's any sort of selfishness on your part thinking, "Gosh, I want to do
15 this, but I'll be taking this kind of toll on them." Was there any sort of conflict for you
16 there?

17 EF: No conflict, I think the conflict came after the fact in my later years, looking
18 back on it realizing, "Gee, I was selfish on that." But at the time it was, y'know, I didn't
19 feel selfish. I didn't even think about it. Y'know, I was happy. That was one of the bad
20 things from my perspective looking back is that, that attitude was not the best for family.

21 KC: Right. How do you prepare yourself and your family for your departure to a
22 foreign war?

23 EF: Ah, y'know at the time what we did is we made sure from a personal
24 standpoint all the legal documents that were required were proper and the insurance was
25 in place and all of that. Tried to talk to talk to my wife in reference to what she should be
26 doing. She would be staying with her parents while I was over there in Kansas City. It
27 was one of those things that that was the preparation. Just getting ready and being
28 confident that I was going to make it back. I never had any doubt, really, that I would not
29 survive. That was never a thought in my mind process on both tours.

30 KC: Okay, here it is April 10th, 1967. It's time for you to report. Take me through
31 the process. Where do you go to report and tell me about the trip to Vietnam?

1 EF: Okay, before that I'm going to say that from Fort Benning my wife and I
2 drove up to Kansas City and it was in Kansas City prior to parting that I found out or we
3 found out that she was pregnant with my daughter.

4 KC: Oh wow, what kind of effect did that have on you?

5 EF: That, you say again, gee, I was concerned about that, but part of the
6 preparation was getting her when we found out the fact that she was with her parents and
7 all that, she'd be taken care of so it would be no problem there. It made me think a little
8 bit about maybe something could happen, but again it wasn't something I really thought
9 about. I think we were happy that it was happening and, in her mind, the fact that she was
10 pregnant, and something happened to me she would have something of me with our
11 daughter. There was some comfort in that.

12 KC: Sure.

13 EF: But got out to California and spent time with my parents and then I said
14 goodbye to my wife in Los Angeles and flew up to Sacramento to fly out of Travis Air
15 Force Base in Sacramento, flew out of Travis.

16 KC: So you're flying out of Travis. Was this one of the charter flights?

17 EF: It was a TWA Charter.

18 KC: Okay.

19 EF: And I got on that and packed full of troops. There was, I'd say, ten to fifteen
20 officers who sat at the front of the plane. It was just one open base and we set up there.
21 Didn't know anybody on the plane so we flew and took off there at McCord (Travis),
22 went through the processing which, to me, is very simple. I just walked in with my
23 orders, gave them the deal, and they said, "Go over there and sit down, we'll call you
24 when the plane loads." Flew to Hawaii, got off on Hawaii, had a meal, got back on the
25 plane. I think we flew to Guam, landed, meal, then we flew to I think it was Okinawa,
26 landed in Bien Hoa in Vietnam.

27 KC: Land in Bien Hoa, alright. Describe what Bien Hoa was like. You get off the
28 plane. What do you experience?

29 EF: The ungodly heat. I could not believe how hot it was cause that was in April,
30 it was in the dry season. I remember when the plane coming in, I was looking at, "Gee,
31 look at all that stuff burning." All of a sudden it was all this black smoke all around the

1 place. It was the guys burning the shit which I didn't know they were doing. We landed
2 and it was just ungodly heat and at certain points in time the smell was different. Y'know,
3 it was the sewer smell. I think it was the 90th replacement battalion there that I was
4 assigned to and went there and signed in. They said, "There's where your barrack is.
5 You'll stay there. When we get your unit of assignment we'll come and get you." And I
6 went in there and threw my stuff down and sat there and waited. I remember going out
7 the door and looking and a deuce-and-a-half (M35 Cargo Truck) pulled up on the side of
8 the road with a bunch of Vietnamese in it, soldiers. They got off the truck and took a leak
9 at the side of the road. It's just a vivid memory. I said. "Oh my God, that's what we're
10 fighting for?" My biggest fear when I went to Vietnam, my fear was that I would be
11 assigned as an advisor to a Vietnamese unit. That would have clearly crashed my dream.

12 KC: You did not want to do that at all.

13 EF: I did not want to do that.

14 KC: Why?

15 EF: One is I don't think I could have eaten their food. My father being a chef, I
16 got spoiled with eating and the type of food preparation and the way I heard, y'know,
17 back when some of the guys talking about what the Vietnamese advisors would eat. It
18 was just that I couldn't survive on that. The other thing was, I just didn't really feel that
19 that would be the type of leadership that I would want. I wanted to lead American troops
20 in combat and not the Vietnamese because of the language problems and some of the
21 stories that we'd share about the capabilities of the Vietnamese units and that was one of
22 the things that always seemed to go in. You'd find out talking about the different levels
23 of skill and professionalism at the different levels of Vietnamese Armed Forces.

24 KC: Now you're in Bien Hoa and you've got the heat, you've got the smell,
25 you've got a variety of concerns I would imagine. You're at the ninetieth replacement.
26 Describe that experience. There you are on the plane, you trained with all these people,
27 you're taken away from all these people, and you're an individual smack dab in the
28 middle of Bien Hoa. You're a Second Lieutenant and there are ten billion of them,
29 probably seemingly anyway. What was the experience like, the environment like in the
30 90th?

1 EF: Oh, it was like hurry up and wait. Y'know, I knew where the mess hall was.
2 They'd serve meals and we'd just go in and eat. When you weren't eating, you'd go back,
3 and you'd sit in the barracks and try to stay as cool as you could out of the sun and just sit
4 there and do nothing. So, it was like you just sit there and it was like, "Gosh, I hope my
5 map reading improves. Where am I going to get assigned? Am I going to go up into the
6 mountains or what?" There was this whole thing of what would be the next step and
7 when.

8 KC: And when was the next step? When did it happen?

9 EF: It happened in about three days. They called me up and I found out I was
10 assigned to the 3rd Brigade, 4th Division at Dau Teing by the Michelin Rubber Plantation.
11 The 3rd Brigade of the 4th Division was the separate brigade that was attached to the 25th
12 Division down at Cu Chi where the first two brigades of the 4th Division were up north at
13 Pleiku. They were up north, and we were down here so I found out I was going and
14 staying just northwest of Saigon. Y'know, they gave me a time to be at the airfield. I'd be
15 picked up and I'd be taken with some other individuals up to that unit to be assigned. I
16 went to the airfield to get on the craft and found out there was like seven to eight of us
17 that were going at that time to Dau Teing to the 3rd Brigade. I was the only officer that
18 was on the plane. The rest were all PFCs. So, it was a short flight up there. There were
19 maybe less than forty-five minutes. We landed at Dau Teing. There was a jeep there that
20 picked me up and took me to brigade headquarters. Went into the S1s office, gave them
21 my paperwork. He said, "Okay, we're assigning you to the 2nd Battalion, 22nd Infantry
22 and we'll have a jeep take you down to battalion headquarters." The jeep took me down
23 to headquarters, met with the brigade—the battalion executive officer, got briefed on it,
24 called the First Sergeant from Bravo company. He came up to battalion and took me back
25 to Bravo Company. This was around four thirty (4:30) in the afternoon. He said, "Okay,
26 we'll probably get you on a chopper up to the company sometime tomorrow. So, what
27 you need to do is we'll get your field gear issued to you. This is the hooch you'll be
28 staying in. Pack away your stuff there and here's the mess hall and we'll come and get
29 you in the morning. If there's any additional in-processing, we'll get you ready."

30 KC: Alright now here you are again. Second Lieutenant, been through OCS, find
31 yourself in Vietnam. You've got the rest of this day to think about what it's going to be

1 like once you are part of this unit. You've got a year to go here. What sort of concerns do
2 you have? Do you have concerns about your performance, your mortality? Do you have
3 concerns about the men, how you'll be accepted? What's going through your mind
4 between the First Sergeant telling you, "Here's where you'll go, we'll pick you up
5 tomorrow." In the time you're picked up?

6 EF: All of them. I think mortality was an issue, my main thought was, "Gosh, I'm
7 gonna have to read a map." That still bothered me. My ability. Because if I couldn't read
8 a map and lead them in to get from point A to point B, I'd lose complete respect of the
9 men. Y'know, they'd have had no confidence in me. The aspect of what the men were
10 like. Were they experienced troops? Y'know, did they know what they were doing? What
11 was the leadership? What was my company commander going to be like? Is he somebody
12 that's going to help me or is he going to be like some of the horrors you hear about
13 certain company commanders?

14 KC: Right.

15 EF: So, it was just all of the things sitting there and saying, "Map reading was the
16 main thing and then the leadership. In the end, could I fulfill my dream and be a success
17 at it or would I be a failure at it?" When the first round was fired, what would my
18 reaction be? I think that was the other thing. I thought about leading troops in combat, but
19 again, until that first round goes over your head or the first explosion, you really don't
20 know how you're ever going to react and take all the skills and training and function or
21 am I just going to put my head in the dirt and hide? That was all those emotions coming
22 up. I would think about my wife and my future daughter, how they were doing. I wrote a
23 letter to them saying, "This is where I was at. I'm doing fine." So that they would know
24 where I was at and what unit and everything else.

25 KC: Okay, the next day comes. The chopper picks you up, takes you out. How far
26 outside of your basecamp was B Company?

27 EF: B Company was about ten miles north into Warzone-C. I flew out. The
28 chopper that picked me up was an H-23, the old bubble helicopter. Naturally, this is the
29 first time I ever rode in a helicopter. I was sitting in there and grabbed the Plexiglas
30 above my head and, y'know gripped. It was like, "Oh my gosh." The pilot somewhat,
31 like, I thought he'd like to make sure the first-time riders had an experience because he

1 was doing all sorts of things at low level. It was just y'know, "Get me down out of this
2 helicopter."

3 KC: All that time at Rucker and Fort Benning and you never rode in a helicopter?

4 EF: Never rode in a helicopter. So that was the other experience. It was like, "Did
5 I leave my fingerprints in the Plexiglas?" My hand was almost just frozen to it. It was
6 only like a ten, fifteen-minute flight. So, it wasn't long, but it was an experience, oh man.
7 Actually, we landed at the battalion headquarters. Colonel Ralph Julian was the battalion
8 commander. He brought me in and greeted me and welcomed me to the battalion. Called
9 the Bravo Company commander to come and get me. After I met with and talked with the
10 battalion commander I just went outside his track because the 2nd Battalion 22nd Infantry
11 was a mechanized company with 113s from battalion. And waited outside his track and
12 all of a sudden, I saw the dust in the distance coming and somebody said, "Oh, here
13 comes Bravo 6." Which was the company commander. His name was James (John)
14 Bialkowski. And he jumped off the top of the track and came walking towards me and he
15 was wearing black gloves. It was like, "What am I getting myself into?" He greeted me
16 and really didn't say anything to me. He told me to get on the back of the track and the
17 track took off, went to the company area and he said some things to me which I don't
18 remember. The platoon leader that I was replacing came up and his name was Scotty
19 Coonce. He came up and took me back to the platoon area. He introduced me to the
20 platoon sergeants and squad leaders and said he was going to spend one or two days—
21 said he was going to spend three days with me, but he only spent a day with me.

22 KC: Well, it'd be hard to stay if you didn't have to.

23 EF: Right, I found that out later, too. Again, I always say that I was very fortunate
24 again. The 3rd Brigade, 4th Division came over as a unit from Fort Lewis. So, I basically
25 had all the initial troops that trained with the battalion and the company at Fort Lewis and
26 came over to Vietnam in November of '66 as a group. They were very experienced. My
27 platoon sergeant was a Korean War veteran. All of my squad leaders were E6s with over
28 seven, eight years experience.

29 KC: Oh wow!

30 EF: So, I was given, really, a perfect situation as far as a young Lieutenant with
31 the group. So, I had extremely experienced NCOs that I realized, y'know, again very

1 fortunate. Like I said, sometimes I look back and say, “Y’know, somebody was watching
2 out for me because things just fell into place on that.” I want to go back to when I was at
3 Fort Benning with the 5th Battalion, 31st Infantry. The First Sergeant that I had at that
4 company, his name was Earnest Murray. A World War II veteran who jumped into
5 Normandy and glided into Arnhem. So, he had a lot of experience on that. The day that I
6 left, departed the company to go to Kansas City and leave for Vietnam, his words of
7 wisdom said, “Sir, listen to your NCOs.” He goes, “They’ll get you through.” And that
8 was it. Again, seeing that I had a good, experienced group really helped me in my initial
9 orientation into the platoon. The platoon leader took me around and introduced me to the
10 squad leaders and the platoon sergeant and then spent time with each of the squad leaders
11 who would introduce me to the men that were in the squad. I think about twenty-eight
12 men in the platoon.

13 KC: Alright, tell me what it was like to come into this platoon. They’ve been
14 together, they’ve been in Vietnam for a while. You’re brand new. You’re a cherry
15 Second Lieutenant. How did they accept you?

16 EF: Basically, my feeling was, they’d say, “Okay, we’ve got a new lieutenant.”
17 Well, we’ll see what he does. Y’know, they were pretty confident as a platoon that they
18 knew what they were doing. I got the sense that they weren’t going to let me screw them
19 up. So, y’know, they were watching me and if I did anything they were going to do what
20 they knew tactically needed to be done whether I gave them the order to or not. It was
21 like, y’know, a sense of, “Don’t get in our way.”

22 KC: Now, did you sense that right away?

23 EF: I sensed that right away.

24 KC: Did you resent it or were you grateful because of it?

25 EF: I was grateful. From a standpoint I realized I wasn’t going to get in their way,
26 and I knew there was a process that I’d have to use to gain their support and confidence
27 and that I would not do that on day one. It would be a process over time. And it was how
28 I would act during the day with them. One, I think was key was would I listen to what
29 they had to say? If I got a mission from the company commander and brought it down to
30 the platoon, how I would give and what our operation order would be if I was open to
31 recommendations to how to do it and follow their direction in a way. I knew that’s what I

1 had to do. Unless I knew there was something completely off the wall that didn't make
2 sense, but who was I to tell these guys that had been in-country for four, five, six months
3 what to do? I later found out as far as replacements, I was one of the first replacement
4 officers in the battalion. Y'know, it's like they got there in November, so it was about
5 five, six months into tour that they started getting replacements in. That I was one of the
6 major ones to get in that initial group. The other replacement Lieutenants, they had for
7 platoon leaders before were all those that came over with the brigade but were in staff
8 positions or non-platoon leader positions that were rotated through.

9 KC: Were you nervous at all when you met your platoon?

10 EF: Yes, extremely nervous. Again, it was I knew what impression would I make
11 on them? From a body language, how I communicate with them. What were their
12 responses to me be? I was nervous and you might say scared that they may just write me
13 off as one of those Second Lieutenants a "Ninety-day wonders" and not worry about it
14 and not be there to support me.

15 KC: Right, anybody give you a hard time?

16 EF: Nobody gave me a hard time. The only person who gave me a hard time was
17 the company commander.

18 KC: Okay.

19 EF: Later on I found out, as far as the company commander he was not respected
20 by the men.

21 KC: Okay. Well, why don't we stop there, Mr. Fahel, and we can pick this up at
22 another time?

23

1 Kelly Crager: This is Kelly Crager continuing an Oral History Interview with Mr.
2 Elpidio Fahel. Today is June 30, 2010. I am in Lubbock, Texas, on the campus of Texas
3 Tech University and Mr. Fahel is joining me again by telephone from his home in
4 Houston. When we last left off a couple of days ago, Mr. Fahel, we had you with your
5 company. You joined B Company, you have met the men, you discussed how it was a
6 group that had been together for quite a while and came over together out of Fort Lewis
7 in Washington and that really worked to your advantage in terms of what they knew and
8 your comfort level with them. So, if you would, pick up the narrative there and we will
9 discuss things that come to mind as we go along.

10 Elpidio Fahel: Okay, well like I said I joined B Company and for the first thirty
11 days that I was with the company, it was a mechanized unit so a lot of it was just getting
12 to know—like I said, the men and how the functioned. Also, during that thirty day it was
13 relatively quiet as far as contact with the enemy. We had sporadic sniper fire at times.
14 There were some mortar rounds that came, y’know, at least we knew we were being shot
15 at, but nothing serious. Our two sister companies did have some heavy contact during that
16 period of time. A month prior to joining the company on March 21st, the battalion was in
17 a large battle at Suoi Tre. They won their Presidential Unit Citation there and the Battle
18 of Suoi Tre was the largest single short battle in the Vietnam War. Close to over six
19 hundred VC were killed and they had, I think, was close to eighty US casualties or more.
20 The VC—two regiments attacked the firebase that was supported by the 3rd Battalion,
21 22nd Infantry, and why I’m relating to this is this is one of the things that the men really
22 talked about when I joined of what their action on it (Their action was at the battle). The
23 two other sister battalions in the 3rd Brigade, the 2nd of the 12th and the 2nd of the 22nd
24 basically came into the battle just as things were really desperate for the firebase. The
25 enemy had hit the first line and occupied the first line of defense. They actually captured
26 a Quad-50 and started to turn it on the perimeter, but one of the 105 (105 millimeter
27 Howitzer) gun crews saw it and knocked it out with direct fire. It was one of those things
28 just at this dire moment when both battalions broke into the clearing. The Mech unit, R
29 Charlie—Recon and Charlie Company were in the lead. They broke in, went online and
30 basically just swept through the perimeter. Within twenty minutes, the battle was over.
31 The Mech got in. They were telling all sorts of, y’know, the stories of what they did, how

1 it happened, and everything. It was quite interesting from my perspective of hearing,
2 y'know, these war stories. This was really confirming the ability of the men in the
3 platoon and in the company to really do their job.

4 KC: That's really interesting. Let me interrupt you here, I'm sorry. What do you
5 learn about the men as they're telling these stories and as you're listening to it? Do you
6 get a sense of who they are and how they act and how they relate to each other?

7 EF: Oh, that was it. In that first thirty days getting to know them and their
8 interaction within the platoon, y'know, their strengths and weaknesses. It was easy to
9 identify who the strong defacto leaders were within a squad. The take-charge men. The
10 individuals that if a platoon sergeant or a platoon leader was down, would be able to step
11 forward and continue on and the men would follow. Basically, the men that I had in my
12 platoon were, I'd say, from Chicago or from Texas. There was always this bickering
13 between the two cultures within the platoon and different squads. It was fun to watch that
14 interaction. You could imagine, if some other platoon came over and said something to
15 one of the men, y'know, it didn't matter. They all stood forward and, y'know, they were
16 going to jump 'em. It was just sitting and listening to them and watching them, how they,
17 at the end of the day would be able to pull into our defensive positions with our tracks.
18 They would just jump off the tracks and start doing what they needed to do at the end of
19 the day as far as setting up their defensive positions, laying in their claymores, trip flares,
20 and cleaning their weapons and getting ready in case something would happen. They
21 were able to function really without too much leadership on my part, but it gave me the
22 chance to really observe and see what the requirements were from my perspective to
23 make sure what they were doing.

24 KC: Now, you're going to have to rely on your platoon sergeant and y'know that.
25 You have this advice that you've got to rely on your NCOs. Tell me about your NCOs in
26 the company, in particular your platoon.

27 EF: All the NCOs in the company were experienced. Our First Sergeant was a
28 veteran of the Second World War and served with Merrell's Marauders. He was like a
29 god to the men. In some ways, if you saw the movie, "We Were Young Once", the
30 Sergeant Major of the battalion, that's what Sergeant Warner was like. He took no guff,
31 but he was out with the men. Really, one of the first things I remember seeing of him is

1 seeing him on top of an APC (Armored Personnel Carrier) firing the .50. But the men just
2 respected him and that flowed down to the other NCOs that were within the company.
3 We had in the company and the battalion—My prospective had tremendous and capable
4 NCOs during the first portion of my tour. As my tour went on and we started getting the
5 replacements, we saw that disappear. What happened was in the initial phase when I was
6 a platoon leader where I really had platoon sergeants and squad leaders that could do
7 their job that had minimum supervision the longer, I was in country, the more active I had
8 to take in dealing with the platoon sergeants and the squad leaders to make sure they were
9 doing their job. When I say that is, they knew how to look out for the welfare of the men.
10 When we were not on patrol we were back with our tracks. Y'know, they would do the
11 things to make sure the men were okay. They had clean clothes. They made sure the
12 medics would go around and pass out the malaria tablets. If there was a problem, they'd
13 call the medic over. They had that sense of taking care of the men. The men in general
14 had that feeling towards their brothers in the field.

15 KC: Do you think it could have been possible that—you said that the NCOs, at
16 first, were top notch and they did what they were supposed to do, but later, as the
17 replacements came in, they weren't able to do that quite as well. Would it also be
18 possible, or would it also help to explain this by the fact that you were learning as you
19 were going along, and you knew more about what needed to be done instead of just these
20 guys. Maybe not being as good, but you were evolving.

21 EF: Yeah, that's true. I was evolving in my knowledge because I had that group
22 of men to look at and understand and learn from them. It was not the case as we went on.
23 When I say that, when I took over all my platoon sergeants—squad leaders had at least
24 seven years active duty. So, they'd been in the Army awhile. As time went on, we started
25 getting the NCOs from the NCO academy or ones that were in the unit and promoted up.
26 So, we lost that experience of working—y'know, of time within the military in that
27 aspect of understanding the role—really the role of the NCO. Not necessarily all in
28 combat situation and in contact, but more in what I'd say as the garrison type when we
29 were back with our tracks. Because we were in a mechanized unit, we could carry
30 everything in our tracks. I mean, it was just fantastic that you had (things) to keep your
31 paper dry to write letters on, you had changes of clothes. Mechanized, we were able to

1 get resupplied every night. They brought in a hot meal every night. They brought in beer
2 and soda in the mail. Anything we needed, that came in. It was great in that prospective.
3 The downside was, we never got back to our base camp. We just stayed out in the field
4 and functioned like that all the time. We would see our base camp as if we would go in
5 the north gate and come out the south gate. We'd stop in the middle of the road and get a
6 refueling and a resupply and go out. We never spent extended time in the base camp.
7 Unlike the other Regular infantry units would spend time in the field and then they would
8 rotate back and spend time in the base camp. I think the aspect of it is as the war
9 progressed, what I saw is that there were fewer and fewer of the—I wouldn't say Senior
10 NCOs, but NCOs that had time in the military weren't, for some reason, getting out to the
11 field. Y'know, they were staying back in the rear areas or doing something that we—as
12 time went on, it was not the case. When I left the field, y'know, my platoon sergeant was
13 an E5. He had gotten promoted to E5 from an MP detachment that was guarding Saigon
14 when we went through the infusion, and they brought a bunch of MPs and put them in
15 infantry units. So, it was one of those things then on that—And the same thing I noticed
16 was when I got over my second tour, it was just the lack of good quality NCOs that just
17 made it so much more difficult from a leadership position.

18 KC: That sounds very risky to move an MP to the field. That's pretty strange—

19 EF: I found out—found out all of them were basically—they were trained infantry
20 through basic training and AIT and when they came over to Vietnam, they put them in
21 the MP battalion, and they were providing—their function was more of an infantry
22 function providing base security and doing limited patrols around Bien Hoa and Long
23 Bien. So, it wasn't as bad as just bringing an MP that was on traffic duty.

24 KC: Right, sure. Alright, if you would, take me through the function, the purpose,
25 and even the TO&E (Table of Organization and Equipment) of a mechanized unit. The
26 triple deuce was a mechanized unit.

27 EF: Right.

28 KC: Tell me about the role function, the TO&E, of a mechanized unit.

29 EF: Okay, starting a battalion we had a Lieutenant Colonel in command, his four
30 staff officers, the S1, 2, 3, 4. The S3 (Operations) was a Major, the battalion executive
31 officer was a Major. At the time, we had three-line companies, Alpha, Bravo, and

1 Charlie. Each of them commanded by a Captain and had a platoon leader, a 1st or Second
2 Lieutenant as platoon leaders. First Lieutenant or the senior Lieutenant in the company
3 would be the company executive officer and a First Sergeant. Each company had four
4 platoons, three rifle platoons that consisted of four, M-113 Armor Personnel Carriers and
5 then a fourth platoon that was within the company which was our 81 (millimeter) mortars
6 that were organic to the company. The company commander had his command track, a
7 communications track, and a maintenance track and an M-47 BTR maintenance. Each
8 company had their maintenance section in the field with them. While we were in the
9 field, we were very self-sufficient. Our primary weapon in a squad I had—a platoon, I
10 had my four tracks. We had our .50 caliber that was mounted on the tracks. We had our,
11 at the time, the M-60 machine gun. One mounted on the track. We carried two additional
12 machine guns in each of the tracks. When we went on dismounted patrols, our personal
13 carriers would move to a certain location, provide security either as a platoon with just
14 the four tracks where I'd leave the driver and the gunner there and one other person, and
15 then take the platoon out or the company would be together. It was great from a
16 perspective by having everything in our tracks. We could carry twice or three times our
17 basic load of ammunition and all we needed to carry was water and rations for the noon
18 meal, you might say. We would come back to our longer position at night. When I'd go
19 with my platoon—my platoon command section would be myself, my platoon medic, my
20 company RTO (Radio Transmission Operator), and the RTO for our 81 section forward
21 observer. I had my four rifle squads with me. Each of them would carry at least two M-60
22 machine guns, M-16s, the M-79s, and a bunch of grenades. Like I said, because we didn't
23 have to carry anything else, we could carry a lot of firepower with us. So, when we were
24 dismounted my platoon, I think had the equivalent fire power the Regular Infantry
25 Company out in the field.

26 KC: It sounds like it when you talk about the number of M-60s especially.

27 EF: Yes, and y'know, I think our TO&E only authorized one person per squad,
28 but, y'know, over there people were able to get some other ones.

29 KC: Sure, sure. Now, what were the strengths of a mechanized unit as opposed to
30 a straight leg infantry unit, would you say?

1 EF: The strength of a mechanized infantry unit was one, the fire power that was
2 associated with it, like I said, we had our direct/ indirect fire support with our 81s readily
3 available that we could call in and didn't necessarily have to go through the artillery for
4 clearance. If the platoon got in contact, those tubes were ready to just drop down and start
5 laying down some 81 mortar rounds within minutes after the initial contact started. The
6 tracks would be in a position, and they would be monitoring the movement of the
7 platoons. Usually what they did, if—the company would maneuver with two platoons out
8 and one platoon in so with the three 81 tubes, they would lay one tube on each platoon
9 and just follow its movement so that if something happened, they could readily get in.
10 We were required as we moved to constantly call in our position so that we'd know
11 where we were at so we could bring in fire support. That's where these thirty days before
12 we had any contact was great because during that period of time, I really improved my
13 map reading skills and listening to my platoon sergeant telling me or my squad that I
14 accompanied all the time where I would be at. My platoon sergeant made the
15 recommendation that I stay with the first squad because the first squad was basically the
16 strongest squad as far as leadership and that he would take and be with our second squad
17 which was our weakest element. We had the leadership of the platoon was with the
18 strength and then with the weakness.

19 KC: Very interesting, very interesting. Now, what would you say were the
20 weaknesses of the mechanized versus the straight leg?

21 EF: Y'know, it's hard to say what the weaknesses are. I think overall looking at it,
22 a major weakness of mechanized unit it was that we could not go into all areas because of
23 terrain or jungle. We were limited in where we could take our tracks. We were tied to our
24 tracks. If we couldn't bring our tracks where they could support us in some way, we
25 weren't going into that area. Again, I can't think of any weaknesses. When I was in my
26 second tour, I was with a Regular infantry unit and there were many times that I said I
27 wish I had my tracks.

28 KC: Right, sure.

29 EF: I think the strength of the fact that we didn't have to carry everything on our
30 back gave us the ability to be much more mobile. When we were on the ground, we could
31 move so much faster than a Regular infantry unit when we patrolled in areas.

1 KC: And of course, you're also not having to do as much walking which is a huge
2 part of it. And that water usages I would assume would be lower. And all these other
3 things that weigh into it.

4 EF: Right.

5 KC: Did you find that having the tracks, the M-113s off in a distance somewhere
6 when you dismounted, did you find that to be difficult? Were they more specially targets
7 from VC mortars or something like that?

8 EF: No, when we were dismounted the VC never hit us when we were not with—
9 I mean never hit just the tracks by themselves without the platoon's full force there. The
10 times that we were in contact was either when we were in a night defensive position
11 where everybody was in with the tracks or when we were separated from the tracks and
12 moving into contact areas. The other times when we got hit was when we were moving
13 on a road from point A to point B. A few times we would be ambushed during that period
14 of time. I think our big fear, say as a disadvantage mechanized was the RPG (Rocket
15 Propelled Grenade) was a very effective weapon against it and mines on the roads or
16 right off the roads was a very effective weapon. That's why if you see pictures of the
17 troops in Vietnam, they're always riding on top of the tracks versus inside.

18 KC: Because of the issue of mines.

19 EF: Right, it would be a bit easier to get blown off of it than be stuck inside.

20 KC: Yeah, and RPGs as well I would assume.

21 EF: Right.

22 KC: Okay, while we're on the topic here, describe for me the M-113. Tell me
23 everything y'know about the M-113.

24 EF: Basically, the M-113 was an aluminum hull that was a basic square shape.
25 We started out with gas engines that were very susceptible to fires and the VC knew
26 where our gas tanks were so they would target with their RPGs then fire. We had a center
27 mounted .50 caliber machine gun that was mounted. We had a cargo hatch that was open
28 all the time. A rear ramp that would lower when we had stopped and had to go in and out
29 and all of that. The radios we had I think it was a PRC-47s was the platoon leader
30 company commanders net and then the PRC-25s were at each of the squads. That was
31 another advantage of a mechanized unit is that when we went dismounted, we had, as a

1 squad, would have a PRC-25 for communication. So, we had some very effective
2 communications when we were mounted or dismounted. Speed, they functioned pretty
3 good on roads. Y'know, twenty-five, thirty miles an hour. We could function during the
4 rainy season. We actually did a lot of work off the roads into the rice paddy areas into
5 other terrain that would able our tracks to get in. We're still limited in certain areas, but
6 the rainy season did not limit us just to the roads. It was I think a very effective Armored
7 Personnel Carrier in the way it was designed. It was designed to carry a squad plus a
8 driver and a track commander. The driver sat at the front at the slope. The track
9 commander would sit and man the .50 caliber. As the platoon leader, I sat on two, C-
10 ration boxes to the left rear of the .50 caliber gun and set up there holding onto one of our
11 whip antennas as we rode so I could see everything. The communication helmet that I
12 had on, one ear was listening to the company command frequency and the other one was
13 to my platoons—I mean to my squads.

14 KC: Alright, now you haven't had any experience or training with a mechanized
15 unit in your time at Rucker or Benning or anything, had you?

16 EF: Uh, we had introductions to it where, y'know, "Here's your M-113." And
17 they went through the basic maintenance that was a required on it, and the
18 communications. We rode around in it a few times, but as far as any additional training
19 on the tactics or different aspects of it, not at all.

20 KC: Okay, so this thirty days that you had before the attack with the enemy was
21 really, really vital as you're trying to figure these things out, I would assume.

22 EF: Oh, it was. It just gave me that opportunity one—Again, get a comfort level
23 with myself and my ability. As we mentioned before I always questioned what would
24 happen when I finally got in command. Would I be able to gain the respect of the men
25 and what would happen. Learning the men—getting one in the thirty days just being able
26 to get used to the climate. I think I lost twenty to thirty pounds during that first month. It
27 was just unbelievable the amount of weight you lose initially when you get over that
28 environment and you start moving around. Learning the maintenance that they performed
29 on the tracks was somewhat different than what we were told back at Benning from a
30 point of few that was field expedient. This is what you had to do. There were certain

1 things you just didn't worry about in your track maintenance. It was like we wanted to
2 make sure the track ran, and the .50 caliber fired.

3 KC: That's very simple, but yet a very fundamental importance. (Laughter) Okay,
4 now you are going out on a mission. You've got your orders whether it's a small platoon
5 size mission or if it's part of an overall company or whatever it may be. Take me through
6 the planning phase, take me through the operations; what you're doing, how you're
7 placing your men, the tracks, what you're looking for. Take me on a sweep, if you will,
8 prior to your first contact.

9 EF: Okay, initially what would happen is that in the morning or usually in the
10 evening after the battalion commander met with the company commanders. The company
11 commander would come back in the evening, call us to his track and say, "Okay, this is
12 your mission for tomorrow. The mission tomorrow is we're going to move mounted as a
13 unit to this location here. At this location we'll set up a daytime company Laager position
14 and I want the first and—I had the 3rd Platoon. I want the 1st and 3rd Platoon to move
15 out, dismounted, 1st Platoon going and patrolling this particular area going up here. 3rd
16 Platoon, you go this way here." That was basically our order. I would go back, get my
17 squad leaders. Say, "Okay, we're going tomorrow dismounted to this location—I mean
18 mounted, and once we get there we'll go dismounted. Our order of march will be the 1st
19 squad, 3rd squad, 2nd squad." What I would do was on a daily basis when we were
20 patrolling, rotate the squads so they would—rotate the point squad and the point men on a
21 regular basis. Depending on the terrain, it was a very open terrain. We had to decide on
22 what type of formation. If I had to go on line with my squads abreast and spread out over
23 a great distance or be in a column formation or what. It would just depend on the terrain.
24 If we were in thick jungle, I would usually move them in more of a single file just
25 because of ease of movement. We would always have, even if I moved single file, the
26 first squad would be moving in a file. The next squad would have some flank security out
27 a short distance. In thick jungle it was difficult to have flank security out too far as far as
28 maintaining contact with them. Most of the time we would be in thick jungle or bamboo
29 would be single file just to be able to move a little bit easier with the troops. We would
30 move and we'd move out, we'd get to a certain point. We'd take a break. I would be
31 constantly monitoring the progress by just counting my paces within the command group

1 and my platoon sergeant, we would both have about three or four people counting paces.
2 Then when we'd stop, "What's your pace count?" and we'd all get in numbers. "Okay,
3 we're close enough. We should take an average of it and say, "Okay, we're in this
4 general area." It was difficult if you're in a triple canopy jungle to really know where you
5 were at in your pace. Usually, we would try to get within three, four hundred meters of a
6 location. Again, with the experience that I had with the men; they did a very good job of
7 knowing—having their pace count down. And that was one of the things that thirty days
8 gave me the ability to do was really understand what my pace was. So, I knew if I was
9 walking straight, I would count so many paces. If I had the zigzag or go around or climb
10 over something, how that would impact on my pace count as far as distance.

11 KC: And you're all on the same page with this. With the pace count?

12 EF: Yeah, we would go walk for a while. We would stop for a break and when we
13 stopped for a break, we sort of formed a small perimeter, so we had 360 coverage in case
14 something happened. We'd move out again and move to a certain point. If we had an
15 objective to go to and we reached that objective we would secure the objective, look
16 around, search. The majority of the time it was like we were just sweeping through a
17 certain area. We'd go up so many meters. They'd say, "We want you to go two thousand
18 meters up here than we want you to go west for another five hundred then back down."
19 Sort of making a complete loop out into an area than circling back into an area and back
20 to our platoon area—company area.

21 KC: Okay, when you are walking through the bush or walking through the jungle,
22 wherever it may have been, how often would you take these breaks?

23 EF: I would take breaks if it was at least every thirty minutes we'd take a stop.
24 Part of that was that would be when I would call in my location and just verify
25 information on that. If it was extremely hot and we were going through bamboo, there
26 had been times when it was every ten minutes you'd stop and at least let the people that
27 were breaking trail on a point take a break. Depending on which squad was up front, I'd
28 let them somewhat decide how movement was going and depend on them to say, "Okay,
29 we need to take a break." I'd let them sort of dictate the speed of movement. They knew
30 from, y'know, their experience initially that if they had so many meters to cover and goes

1 to a certain point how fast they had to do it. So, it wasn't where I had to ride them
2 "Y'know, you need to keep pushing, you need to keep pushing."

3 KC: Right, which is also a good thing for morale and their opinion of you. If you
4 can give them your head, then they can take care of it on their own.

5 EF: Right.

6 KC: What's it like, tell me, from your physical perspective, what is it like going
7 through and sweeping through an area with heavy bamboo or triple canopy jungle? What
8 are you going through personally?

9 EF: I am almost exhausted. I could not believe how difficult it is to move through
10 the bamboo. When I say that, when we went dismounted, I had carried a CAR-15 which
11 was the M-16 short version. I had my flack jacket on, I had a pistol belt with my water
12 and a .45. It's just unbelievable to me how that bamboo would grab my flack jacket or
13 my pistol belt or something. You're moving forward and if you're walking it grabs you,
14 if you're crawling—and a lot of times we had to crawl through the bamboo. Just crawling
15 through it and just getting your—the equipment that we had, which was hardly anything,
16 caught in the stuff. It was just like, "Gee, I don't know how the Regular infantry guys do
17 it when they got their whole pack on." It was just extremely difficult, it was hot, you had
18 to watch out about getting dehydrated.

19 KC: How much water did you carry with you?

20 EF: I had two of the two-gallon, what do you call it? I can't even think of the
21 term. You carry your water in it. I had two of them. Canteens.

22 KC: Canteens.

23 EF: Two-gallon canteens. Some men carried more. The other thing, which I
24 started out, I start out with a full basic load of ammunition for my M-16, but after awhile
25 I made a decision whether it's right or wrong is that, y'know, if we get in contact, it's not
26 good for me to be wasting time shooting people. I need to be doing something in
27 command as far as maneuvering, keeping the battalion commander and company
28 commander advised to the situation. So eventually I cut down and instead of carrying a
29 full basic load, I just had four magazines. Y'know, I had an ammo pouch on each side,
30 and I was carrying two magazines in each one. I just got back. The only grenades that I
31 carried were smoke grenades so I could mark my position or mark the enemy's position.

1 My RTO carried, I want to say about eight or nine smoke grenades. Speaking of RTOs,
2 my first RTO was Thomas Isbicky from Chicago. Besides carrying the PRC-25 Radio, he
3 said if he was going to get in contact, he wanted fire power. So, he also carried the M-60
4 machine gun.

5 KC: M-60 and the PRC-25?

6 EF: Yeah, it was amazing. Sometimes we'd be going through the bamboo, and
7 he'd just be cussing a blue streak, but he wasn't going to give up that M-60.

8 KC: That brings up a good point. What are the men doing? What are they saying?
9 How are they moving through? What is their attitude going through something like this?

10 EF: I think most of them are, y'know, they're just moving along following the
11 person in front of them. They are somewhat dependent on the people that re on the point
12 to alert them to any particular problems. They do keep somewhat alert about what's
13 going on. I think my observation is most of the time if you weren't in the front, you were
14 just following the person in front of you. Y'know, somewhat day dreaming.

15 KC: Right, as crazy as that sounds, it's human nature.

16 EF: Yeah, I even got sometimes I'd just be walking along the people in front of
17 me and I'd just lose track of time and be thinking about other things. All of a sudden, the
18 radio would crack, and I'd have to answer it and give some direction or somebody would
19 ask me a question.

20 KC: Another thing that's human nature is complaining, griping.

21 EF: Oh yeah.

22 KC: What kind of things are these guys saying? What kind of gripes do they have
23 while they're going through this? What are their communications to each other?
24 Girlfriends, or are they razzing each other? What's that like?

25 EF: When you're out on a patrol, they were more razzing their buddy about,
26 "Can't you take this? Move on." Y'know, "Why are you walking so slow? Get on with it.
27 I'm not going to give any cigarettes." (Laughter) Type thing. "You should have brought
28 more water if you want some of my water." That type of thing. It was when they got back
29 to our tracks at night that they would go and talk about family because the mail would be
30 there and that's when they would do their other socializing. But out on patrol, it was just
31 razzing other fellow soldiers like the other troops would do.

1 KC: Well, and that makes an awful lot of sense when you're out in the field and
2 you're humping the bush. You've got to be alert; you've got to be awake. You have to
3 have a certain toughness about you to go through these motions. When you get back, you
4 realize that danger is off, I would assume, and it's a little bit easier once the work is done
5 to be able to look at these other things and talk about family and be a little more kind to
6 each other, I guess.

7 EF: Well, I think the other aspect is, with the men, again because they'd been
8 together so long. Y'know, they really knew each other. That was one of the really
9 fascinating things to me was how close they were as a group. Even now after forty-five
10 years they're still what we call, "The boat people." That's the ones that went over on the
11 boat have a completely different relationship as a group than anybody else that was in the
12 battalion.

13 KC: Of course, that makes sense as well. One of the main problems, of course, in
14 the US military experience there in Vietnam was the one-year tour and the rapid turn over
15 and all these kinds of things. When people were together from the very beginning, of
16 course, they're going to have that different kind of relationship. Again, it's earlier in the
17 war and a whole variety of things go into that, I'm sure.

18 EF: I think the other thing was, that particular group had gone through some
19 heavy contact. They were in Operation Attleboro, Junction City with and with Soui Tre.
20 They had a lot of heavy engagement and heavy contact. So, when they were out
21 patrolling, y'know, they knew, y'know, they were just following the person in front of
22 them, but they also knew that the shit could hit the fan at any point in time. They were
23 alert in that respect. The other thing was that I noticed with them—and this was the first
24 group compared to my second time, they really knew the importance of maintaining their
25 weapons and making sure their weapons were clean and the weapons functioned, and
26 their claymores were checked out. So, they had that sense of, y'know, I've seen it and I
27 know what's going to happen or could happen so I'm not going to take any chances. That
28 was a completely different attitude than when I was on my second tour.

29 KC: Alright, you guys have made your sweep. You've gone around, you've come
30 back to where—you're point of departure, you're back on the tracks, and you're going to
31 settle in for the night. You're going to settle in for the night. Tell me about that. How

1 does it set up? Tell me about the setting up the defensive perimeter, who's on watch,
2 eating, talking, all of that. Take me through that evening.

3 EF: Yeah, we would either laager at night in a company-size laager position with
4 just the company or in a battalion size. Within a company-size laager we'd be out and
5 then the company would all join up around four-thirty, five o'clock we would close the
6 perimeter and start setting up. The company commander would, as we moved in to a new
7 location. What we would do is if they set up during the day at the location, they would
8 move to another location at night. So, the VC, if they knew we were there, wouldn't have
9 already started laying in their mortars or planning for it. So, we tried to move on a regular
10 basis. We would move as a company or if another platoon was out and had not joined the
11 company, we would be moving into the position and the company commander would say,
12 "Okay, 1st Platoon, North. 1st Platoon, 3rd Platoon, 2nd Platoon around the clock."

13 Using that, we'd use the 1st Platoon, or a platoon would take from twelve to four.
14 Another one would take four to eight and then another platoon would take eight to
15 twelve. The 81's and the two-command tracks, and maintenance tracks would be in the
16 center of the perimeter. Depending on the terrain, if it was a wide-open field, we would
17 function differently. If there was not as much clearing to our front, then we'd use our
18 tracks to move forward and knock down the bush and try to give us at least ten, fifteen,
19 maybe twenty meters of cleared ground before our tracks. We'd go in position and it
20 really, from my perspective, my track was always not at either flanks. I was usually in the
21 center track either on the right center or the left center track online. We would dismount
22 our .50 caliber machine guns and move them into a fighting position. Each squad would
23 have two fighting positions to the left and to the right of their Armored Personnel
24 Carriers. So, at night they would dig in position. There are claymores position, trip flares,
25 and just unload a lot of the ammo and put it by the fighting positions. The fighting
26 positions were usually to the front of the Armor Personnel Carrier. If the VC came in and
27 they would attack and see the APC's. Our fighting positions were usually in front of them
28 by a few meters and off to the left or right. If we were able, they would build some
29 sandbag protection around it. If we were in an area, we would put some overhead cover
30 in on that. Chow would be flown in along with our POL and mail. Once it was set up, the
31 company commander would already have told us which platoons go first and then they

1 would just rotate the platoons. When it was my platoon's turn to go eat, I'd send two
2 squads and then two squads would man the perimeter and then they'd bring it back and
3 go get their chow and then come back. They would bring all their chow back to our
4 perimeter position. Then they would—during this time, they were setting up, the drivers
5 and the track commanders were pulling maintenance on the track or pulling the track out
6 of its position, to go back to where the POL (Petroleum, Oil, and Lubricants) was. It was
7 brought in on a blivit. They would fill the APCs with their POL and then bring it back in
8 position.

9 KC: Okay, so you got the position, you got the chow. You are set up for the night.
10 Tell me about the personal parts of this. The human interaction, what's going on within
11 this perimeter?

12 EF: Within the perimeter we had the requirement that each platoon had to send
13 out a listening post. One hundred, to one hundred and fifty meters in front of our position.
14 There was also a requirement to send an ambush patrol out each night. That rotated
15 within the platoons. Ambush patrol was usually a squad-sized patrol. The patrols would
16 meet with the company commander and platoon leader of the particular platoon that was
17 going out. Get his patrol position or his ambush position and where he was going. They
18 would depart after darkness to move to the ambush position. Ambush positions were
19 usually anywhere from seven-hundred-fifty to one-thousand meters from our position so
20 that they were able to, if something did happen, to quickly get some reaction forces to
21 their location or they could quickly get back to our position. We would pick—I would
22 pick a squad to do the listening post and that listening post was a three-man listening
23 post. They would go out, establish their listening post. After it got dark, they would have
24 a landline for communications back to their squad as far as communicating with us. Once
25 they got into position they would communicate back their location as far as where they
26 were at from the perimeter so that I could notify the company commander of the location
27 so he could plot that in. They would do some pre-arranged plotting for artillery fire
28 support for the ambush patrol and for the perimeter around with the company forward
29 observers putting in positions. They would not fire those defensive fires unless there was,
30 I'd say, to fire them in and to actually position them unless we were in an area that we
31 knew was extremely dangerous and we expected potential contact. Then we would fire in

1 some pre-arranged targets so that they could easily call those targets in and start adjusting
2 the fire in case we got hit. After that, the men had their meal and it started to get dark,
3 they would somewhat quiet down and be talking. Most of the talking they would be doing
4 and exchanging pleasantries between the group was during the daylight hours. Once it got
5 dark, it sort of quieted down. Each squad would set up the rotation of who would be on
6 first watch and the time element that was involved with it. They would pretty well get to
7 sleep rather quickly. Or quiet down once it got dark.

8 KC: Now, you set up this perimeter that you said, being concerned with a Viet
9 Cong ground attack. What happened if mortars were to be rained down on top? What
10 would you do then?

11 EF: If mortars would come in, we would—when the enemy would drop the
12 mortar rounds down the tube, you heard them coming and the first one was dropped
13 down the tube. When you heard it there would be a call for incoming. I slept in my track
14 with the cargo hatch open. If somebody yelled, “Incoming!” I quickly reached up and
15 closed that. Our ramp was up and the door in the ramp was open. I’d close that. The men
16 would just hunker down in their fox holes. The ones that were close enough at times
17 would maybe be able to get back and get into their tracks. Sometimes if they were
18 sleeping, y’know, the one manning the fox hole, the people that are also in that foxhole
19 may be a few yards behind them in another dug out position. They could easily get into
20 the tracks or under the tracks. Y’know, I don’t remember that many times that I got
21 mortared in the company position, really. A few times was when the battalion was
22 together, there was a greater chance of being mortared when the whole battalion was
23 together because that’s sixty-four something tracks. You had a much larger perimeter so
24 the error factor in dropping it down and hitting the target is not as bad.

25 KC: What kind of air support would you typically have? Or would you?

26 EF: Air support we had gunships, initially the Huey’s, the gunships, and then the
27 Cobra gunships. There are times where we had contact where we actually got Air Force
28 support.

29 KC: Would this be with like a Forward Air Controller (FAC)?

30 EF: Yeah, a Forward Air Controller. There was usually a Forward Air Controller
31 flying in the brigade’s area of operation ready to respond to any one of the three brigades

1 that may be in contact. Also, it's my understanding that they had some other ones that
2 were on alert position in case we got multiple units in contact or heavy contact that
3 needed the Forward Air Observers to come in.

4 KC: While you were in heavy contact, and I think I know the answer to the
5 question, but what would you prefer to see? You got a FAC overhead. He's calling in
6 whatever is available. What would you prefer to see over a scene where you were in
7 heavy contact?

8 EF: I think, y'know, I would rather see the gunships come in. Mainly because the
9 gunships could bring the rounds in a little bit closer to where my contact was as far as
10 danger close. The Air Force, some of those bombs you have to have them far enough
11 away, so they don't hurt you. I would prefer the gunships.

12 KC: Alright, now you have set up the company. You've explained that very, very
13 well and what you're doing and how you're doing and why you're doing it. So, take me
14 through that first thirty days, again, of the things that are going on. What you're learning,
15 what you're seeing, what you're doing before we get you into first contact.

16 EF: First thing was, again, was learning the men. Then it was getting climatized to
17 the heat and the weather and being able to function. Sort of like the first time I went on
18 patrol. You asked how often we had breaks. Well, once I had platoon it seemed like every
19 five minutes, I'd stop the platoon and say, "Let's hold up while I gain my breath and get
20 it under control." (Laughter) So, but then with sitting and—the other times we were back
21 at the company position, it was getting to know the men. Sitting down and talking,
22 listening to them talk about their experiences and talking about their family. Trying, from
23 my prospective to show that I did have a concern for the man. That I wasn't going to
24 come in and seek glory by trying to get a bunch of medals. That was not my objective. I
25 let them know that my objective was to get every man home that I served with. I told
26 them, y'know, when something happens, we get in contact. My role is to bring as much
27 fire support in to help you. Whether that's getting a sister platoon in, bringing artillery
28 our 81's, gunships or Air Force in. My role, as I saw it, was to provide you the support so
29 you can close and kill the enemy. Getting used to talking on a radio. You go through an
30 OCS, and you get to talk on a radio a little bit. Then it was like, "Okay, now I have to talk
31 on a regular basis to my company commander and maybe the battalion in commander?"

1 It's like, "How do I make sure I know how to press these buttons right. Let's make sure
2 I'm talking to my platoons and not the company commander." There was a toggle switch
3 that you had to press. There were a few times I was talking to the wrong person.

4 KC: That couldn't turn out well.

5 EF: Well usually it was okay. I never said anything bad. He'd just come back and
6 say, "3-6, who are you talking to?" Yeah, our call signs, the company commander was
7 Bravo-6, the platoon leaders were 1-6, 2-6, 3-6, my squads were 3-1, 3-2, 3-6—or 3-3,3-
8 4. If you went through the whole thing, my call sign if I was identifying myself to the
9 battalion commander or the higher headquarters—and our battalion was Fullback, I'd be
10 Fullback Bravo 3-6, was my call sign. So, it was just that learning experience. The
11 biggest question that I had during that thirty days as it progressed, was when contact does
12 come, how will I react? That was my next question I was constantly rolling in my mind
13 was on that. Like I said, the company commander with his black gloves, nobody really
14 spoke too highly of him in a way I was scared of him, tried to stay out of his way.
15 Fortunately, I had another platoon leader that liked to give him a hard time that he kept
16 focused on that platoon leader. Again, the middle of the pack. (Laughter) In that thirty
17 days it was, y'know, the confidence and the ability to be able to talk on the radio. The
18 ability to know where I was at on the ground and to be able to call that location properly
19 and to monitor that. To be aware of what was happening. Y'know, just picking up some
20 of the sounds as you walk through the jungle. If things got quiet would that mean
21 something? Or just watching the platoon as they were moving, watching their arm and
22 hand signals and watching how a man was moving in front of me and his body language,
23 would be a certain way. Does that mean that he spotted something or what was
24 happening? It was just that comfort level on it. Like I said, it was that thirty days, was
25 great to get me that amount of time to do that. We went off several mounted operations.
26 We would move great distances on a lot of dismounted operations in rice paddies, in
27 areas that were triple canopy jungle. Areas that were with a lot of bamboo. Areas that
28 we'd come into, and we'd find on several occasions we'd come into an area and find
29 hooch's, where we found rice. Evidence that the VC were in the area recently, but no
30 contact.

31 KC: Tell me about the other officers in your company.

1 EF: Okay, my company commander, John Bialkowski was a bit strange. Our first
2 platoon leader was Tom Tracy. He was a former police officer in New York City. The
3 2nd Platoon leader was a guy named Addison and he had joined the company about a
4 month before me. Tracy joined it a week before me. Bialkowski had three—let's see,
5 inexperienced company—platoon leaders when we came in. I felt, as far as the other
6 platoon leaders and some of the comments that my men had made, felt very comfortable
7 with the actions of the other platoon leaders. There was Tom and Addison. Neither one of
8 them were the type that was trying to say, y'know, "I'm going to come here and I'm
9 going to win medals. I'm going to charge forward." They were pretty laid back and
10 working and all that. Tom Tracy's the one that gave Bialkowski the hard time. Just
11 because I think he was from New York.

12 KC: How did he give him a hard time?

13 EF: Every time the company commander would do something, Tom's reply was,
14 "Why?" He wanted a full explanation. And if he didn't like it, he would go, "I think
15 that's stupid." So, he constantly challenged the CO (Commanding Officer) at times.

16 KC: That's very interesting. It's kind of nice to have someone in your platoon
17 who will do that.

18 EF: Yeah.

19 KC: So, you don't have to.

20 EF: Right.

21 KC: Or in your company I mean.

22 EF: Yeah.

23 KC: Alright, we've been going through, you've been explaining this to me, your
24 outfit for about an hour now. Now what I would like you to do is explain to me—that
25 first month is over. Tell me about the mission in which you had your first contact. What
26 was that like?

27 EF: The mission we were operating in, the area north of the Michelin rubber
28 plantation, south of the road junctions that run east/west above the area in upper
29 Warzone-C. It is an area that is approximately, I would say, about ten clicks from where
30 Soui Tre was at. It was a heavily reinforced area for the VC and NVA (North Vietnamese
31 Army). This particular area is a free-fire zone. If you see something, you don't have to

1 get permission to shoot. You just start shooting. Which was nice. There are several times,
2 y'know, my men before would see that. We were operating in a battalion laager. We
3 moved out—as the Bravo Company moved out. My platoon went in one direction and
4 our first platoon went in another direction. We patrolled, mounted, dismounted for the
5 majority of the day and around three-thirty in the afternoon we were ordered to join the
6 company at a laager sight that we would be establishing for the battalion, but we'd be the
7 first company in. So, we moved into that position initially went in and we just sort of set
8 up a company perimeter waiting for the battalion to come in to find out what the battalion
9 was going to do. At this time, the company commander called the 2nd Platoon leader
10 over and gave him a mission of moving out of our position to the north to the road
11 junction of Highway-13 and Highway-22 in the area. The platoon moved out mounted.
12 They got to the road junction and when the first APC approached the road junction it hit a
13 mine. For whatever reason, the platoon leader was in the second APC, started to move his
14 APC up to the side, it got hit by an RPG. The third APC also got hit by an RPG. The first
15 and second APCs had a total of seven men killed almost instantly from the RPG
16 explosion and the mine explosion. The platoon sergeant was actually in the fourth APC
17 and took command of the situation and started laying down a base of fire. The other
18 aspect of the after-action report was that the platoon, as they approached this potential
19 trouble spot did not dismount so they had no flank security out. Once we heard the
20 contact and then we got word from the platoon sergeant that basically three APCs had
21 been destroyed and he was fighting for his life.

22 KC: How far back were you, by the way?

23 EF: We were only back about fifteen hundred meters. So we weren't that far
24 behind. The company commander gave the order to move out. Tom Tracy and the first
25 platoon moved out; I followed him. We moved to within about two hundred meters of the
26 contact area and dismounted. The company commander had already started bringing in
27 artillery support and our 81s to the area north of the road junction. And that pretty much
28 kept the fire safe. He was having the platoon sergeant of the second platoon was directing
29 the fire. As we were moving, the battalion commander got to the position above the
30 contact area and him and his fire liaison officer took over the fire mission support. Once
31 we got within 150/200 meters of the contact area of the 1st Platoon and my platoon, we

1 dismounted and the company commander ordered the 1st Platoon to move forward,
2 dismounted to relieve the second platoon. My orders were to hold in place. The first
3 platoon moved up into the contact area, started receiving fire from the northwest and
4 northeast along the road and requested that my platoon move up. My company
5 commander gave my platoon the order to move up and to secure the area to the east of the
6 road junction both north and south. The road junction road basically was an X and we
7 could divide it to the Northeast, Northwest above the road into the west/east of the road. I
8 gave the order to move out with my first platoon—the first squad being the strongest
9 followed by my second squad which was my second strongest. I had the platoon sergeant
10 bring up the rear with the weaker squad. We moved up and started taking sporadic fire
11 from the enemy positions. I don't know if they were firing at us or just firing in general
12 towards the contact area. We got up to the road junction. I made a decision to move my
13 first squad across the road to be north of the road and kept my other two squads south of
14 the road. Tom had taken his platoon and it had also moved one squad north of the road.
15 We had the road that ran north/south from the 1st Platoon on the west side and then my
16 platoon was on the east side of the road providing security and returning fire. During this
17 time, the artillery was coming into the north of us, and they were slowly bringing the
18 rounds back into the contact area. The fire was more of a blocking fire to get the VC if
19 they were trying to run away from us and get out of the area versus, I think any concern
20 that they were still in the area. After-action-report indicated that they had walked in to
21 less than a squad sized. Maybe six, seven VC that were like an early warning outpost.
22 That's what hit them. The initial fire from the VC lasted less than a minute and was able
23 to inflict that many casualties out of the close to thirty-five men that were in the platoon
24 when they went into that road junction. Only eleven came back without any wounds. So,
25 I was there providing security, talking to the company commander, listening to what was
26 happening. They brought in the recon platoon. By this time, the battalion had moved up
27 to where we were initially in our laager position. The battalion commander landed in that
28 position, got on his track, and with the recon platoon moved up to the contact area. The
29 time he got there, the contact was over, so it was a cleanup operation evacuating the
30 wounded, and KIA's (Killed in Action). Maintenance came up and made a determination
31 that two tracks were completely destroyed. We needed to leave those in place. The one

1 track was hooked up and pulled out of the contact area. They evacuated the casualties
2 back to the battalion area where medivacs came in and evacuated them. Then they started
3 to pull back. Tom and my platoons pulled back to where our tracks were and then closed
4 back with battalion. The time we closed back with battalion was, I'd say, about eight
5 thirty at night. It was dark. The last phases of the withdrawal from the area was in the
6 night.

7 KC: What kind of fire were you receiving? You said there were only six or seven
8 of VC probably—in fire.

9 EF: The initial contact, the second platoon had was with a mine and an RPG fire
10 and then small arms. Probably AK-47s. When we moved up in the area and started
11 receiving rounds from the north, it was primarily AK-47s. My feeling now is that was
12 that early warning group. They knew we were down there because you could hear
13 mechanized. That's one of the problems with mechanized. You always know where
14 they're at. They were in a position to give early warning in case the battalion decided to
15 move further north along the road. So, when we got into the contact area most of the fire
16 was just sporadic AK rounds aimed at in general where we were at. I don't think there
17 was any, I'd say, direct fire at my platoon, but you couldn't tell. There were rounds that
18 were still cracking above you and tree branches were falling down. You still had the
19 artillery rounds going up and some shrapnel from the artillery would every once in a
20 while, whiz through the air and knock a few branches down.

21 KC: Any enemy casualties?

22 EF: None.

23 KC: None or none found you suspect?

24 EF: None.

25 KC: None, okay.

26 EF: I think just from the way the initial attack happened and with the initial
27 hitting the mine and then quite quickly, two tracks being hit with RPGs they were able to
28 get out. The platoon really, once they got hit, didn't know where they were at. They
29 didn't know what happened.

30 KC: And they just disappeared after that?

31 EF: They disappeared after that.

1 KC: Sure. Alright Mr. Fahel, what about your performance? This is the first time
2 you were concerned about this from day one. "What am I going to do if I come into
3 contact with the enemy? How am I going to perform? How's it going to work out?" So,
4 tell me, what is your opinion of how it worked out?

5 EF: Well, the first thing is I didn't panic. I was able to keep calm under that type
6 of fire and keep reporting to the company commander what was happening. I felt
7 confident in what I was doing. I was surprised that I really had no fear. I wasn't
8 concerned about, y'know, am I going to get hit or what was going to happen. I was
9 focusing on maneuvering my platoon and calling and keeping the company commander
10 advised to what's happening. When we closed the perimeter at night, one of the first
11 things I did was get my squad leaders and my platoon sergeants together in my track and
12 have an after-action-report and just ask them what they thought of my performance, what
13 we could have done better, y'know, what was happening. Their basic comments were,
14 "You did okay, sir. Don't worry about it." No other great detail. So that made me feel
15 good is that they weren't highly critical. I didn't sense any hesitation from them in saying
16 that, but I think the other thing was is that, yeah, you were in contact, but it maybe not be
17 real contact type of a scenario. So that was the issue. I think, y'know, I felt very
18 comfortable that I was in that type of contact. Again, being fortunate that the initial
19 contact wasn't something that was really horrible for me, it was horrible for the
20 company's 2nd Platoon, but from my platoon and for me personally, it wasn't that bad a
21 contact. It was, again, a kind of contact I could really learn from and realize what I had to
22 do. I even asked the company commander, y'know, "How did I do on the radio?" and he
23 said, "Okay." But he wasn't chewing me out which was good. I could hear him chewing
24 out on the company freq. I could hear him chewing out Tracy about moving faster and
25 some information on that. Again, I kept a low profile.

26 KC: Right, stay right there in the middle.

27 EF: Yeah, and that was on the 17th of May of '67.

28 KC: 17th of May. Now, it took some courage, I would think, to ask your squad
29 leaders and platoon sergeant to come together and talk to you about your performance.
30 That couldn't have been easy.

1 EF: Well, I think it wasn't that it was—I never even thought about it. For some
2 reason, I thought the only way I could learn is I needed their honest opinion. Was there
3 something more from a tactical position? Should I have maneuvered you differently?
4 How could I have been better using the resources type thing? Not so much, y'know, how
5 I performed. It's how I performed and what they expected of me, and did I do what was
6 expected as a platoon leader? Y'know, I never even thought about how difficult it may
7 be. I just wanted to know an honest opinion. Again, it would be a building step if I—it
8 was the first chance to build additional respective men on the way I handled myself.

9 KC: That night, once everything is taken care of, you're lying there I guess in
10 your APC, your M-113. What are you thinking about?

11 EF: I was rehashing the battle of what I did. Trying to say, "Okay, I moved out, I
12 put my platoons online and moved out. We got on the ground, reported." I tried to go
13 through all the steps to, y'know, evaluate. "What could I have done better? Did I do
14 anything that I shouldn't have done? And is there something I should have done that I
15 didn't." I kept going through it and I couldn't really identify anything I could have done
16 different. When I say that is, part of it was my mission to go and secure the right flank
17 and the squad on the north and stay there. So, it was like getting in position and just
18 staying there and keep reporting. There was not where I had to do a lot of maneuvering
19 and functioning and calling in our air support or artillery support. It was just getting to
20 the contact area and securing it.

21 KC: Well, this is 17th May 1967.

22 EF: Yes.

23 KC: Pick up your first tour on 18th May of 1967.

24 EF: 18th May. Later that night on the 17th the battalion found out that they left
25 one of the KIAs in the contact zone. The mission was given to 1st Platoon to move out at
26 first light into the contact zone and retrieve the remains. The rest of the company, which
27 was the weapons platoon, my platoon, and the one track of the 2nd Platoon to remain in
28 the battalion laager position until the 1st Platoon came back and was—medevac'd the
29 remains. While the 1st Platoon was doing that, the battalion moved out to Fire Support
30 Base Fang. They would cut trail through the jungle then got on that road that was the
31 north/south road and moved about eight clicks to where the fire support base was. Tom

1 Tracy came back with the remains and with the 1st Platoon. We waited for the medevac
2 to come in. They came in and evacuated the KIA. Then we moved out. We moved out
3 with the 1st Platoon in the lead. The company command group with his personnel, APC,
4 his convoy maintenance vehicles, the one track of the second platoon, and my platoon
5 was the rear guard of the company and also the rear guard of the battalion. We followed
6 the battalion trail through the jungle and then got on the road where they did. As soon as
7 my last APC got onto the road, my platoon was ambushed. We got RPG rounds fired at
8 us and small arms fire and machine gun fire from the north of the road. The first RPG
9 landed short of my first track. So basically, they had set up the ambush to get where it
10 could basically engage my whole platoon of four tracks as far as the length of the attack.
11 My tracks had anywhere from twenty-five to thirty meters separation between the tracks.
12 They waited until my last track got on the road. They fired an RPG at that track, it landed
13 short. We started taking fire and the small arms was whizzing over our heads and hitting
14 our APCs. As soon as the fire started, I dropped down into the track and got on the radio
15 and let the company commander know we were under attack. The men were magnificent.
16 That first RPG that hit the ground on the lead track hit before they opened fire with the
17 other weapons. As soon as it exploded, the four .50s on my tracks swung to the north.
18 Actually, the lead track was already facing to the north. The second track had his to the
19 south and, y'know, they rotated. All four of them began firing their .50s into the north of
20 the road. The men had dismounted from the tracks and were on the south side of the road,
21 which was a small berm, returning fire. At that time, we had the track drivers, the .50
22 caliber gunners in each of the track and I was in my track. My track was the second track
23 in line returning fire. They fired two or three more RPGs, fortunately none hit, but we
24 were taking a lot of small arms fire. The battalion commander was actually flying above
25 the area and they had already had prepositioned artillery targets along the road so that
26 they could immediately call-in fire if something happened. Very shortly, the artillery
27 started coming into the north of the road. As the first rounds hit, we were still getting
28 sporadic small arms fire. Maybe five or six minutes we were still getting sporadic fire.
29 They were calling in the artillery and the battalion commander notified me that they had
30 two gunships on station and then he was gonna bring-them-in. I made it clear that I
31 wanted, y'know, the rockets. The fire was to the north of the road, so it was pretty good.

1 He gave me word that the gunships were coming in. I sort of looked up and saw the
2 gunships coming in. The first gunship came in, dropped his rockets to the north of the
3 road. The second gunship came in and it was like the rockets were bracking us. One pod
4 went to the left, one pod went to the right, south of the road. It was like, "Oh shit." So I
5 just ducked down into the track. The rocket that hit to the south of the road hit about
6 twenty-five, thirty meters behind where my men were. We lucked out there from friendly
7 fire. It was just that looking up there in slow motion and seeing all that coming at us. We
8 called the company commander and told him to stop the fire in the gunships. They're not
9 firing to the south of the road. After the gunships made their run, we sat there for a short
10 period of time doing some recon by fire but did not take any fire. So, once it was
11 determined that everything was quiet, the company commander gave the command to
12 move out. They had not moved the rest of the company in case of—I started to take
13 casualties or needed the support. He wanted the basic company just right there. As soon
14 as he gave the command to fire, the 1st Platoon track, lead track of the company got hit
15 with an RPG-7 right at the .50s gunners position to kill the .50 gunner.

16 KC: So, they were waiting for you. They knew what they were doing.

17 EF: They knew what they were doing. So, it was the type of thing you saw. They
18 knew that the battalion path. They knew the company was left behind and gee, they're
19 going to follow up and follow the battalion. They knew what was happening and they had
20 positioned a good ambush. I think, again, what saved my platoon was they were bad
21 shots. They didn't hit anything—They fired, I think, four RPGs at us and not one hit my
22 platoon, hit my tracks. They fired one at the 1st Platoon and hit the track. I also think that
23 the rapid response of my .50 gunners to turn and start laying down the .50 as quick as
24 they did also prevent additional casualties on my side or any casualties on my side
25 because of that action.

26 KC: Those .50 would certainly make an impression.

27 EF: Oh yeah, loved the .50.

28 KC: Now you said that you had gunships coming in. Were these Huey's at this
29 early time or were there Cobras that you had there?

30 EF: These were Huey's.

1 KC: They were Huey's, alright. So, the 1st Platoon gets hit in the middle of all of
2 this. Right after your platoon has been hit, the 1st Platoon has been hit. Pick up the story
3 there and take me through what happens next.

4 EF: Well, the 1st Platoon was hit, and they determined that the .50 gunner was
5 killed, but they also determined from the prospective of the track was not damaged
6 beyond the .50 and the gunner being killed. They just moved out in column, and we
7 moved up to the fire support base where it was located at. We just moved there with no
8 further contact or incident pulled into our position in the perimeter. Then they evacuated
9 that KIA and did some pairs on that particular track. Had the platoon sergeant who had
10 already started getting the resupply of our ammunition for the platoon and started pulling
11 maintenance and checking with everybody. Then again, I called the platoon sergeant over
12 and asked how I did, and he said, "You did well, sir. You did good." So, I think that
13 particular action helped solidify that respect of the men because we were finally in
14 contact and it was nice heavy contact that, again, the platoon was extremely lucky that we
15 didn't take any casualties.

16 KC: So, it wasn't a concerted effort on behalf of the VC to really nail the
17 company or the battalion as it was moving down the road to the firebase. It was a smaller
18 thing.

19 EF: It was a smaller thing, but again, you judge by the success they had the day
20 before. So that's what I think they were looking for was just to be able to pick off a small
21 unit which is a platoon size, which is just something they could basically, in their mind,
22 could handle and inflict as many casualties in that element and not pick on the battalion.

23 KC: Right, right. That makes perfect sense. Give them the small size or the VC
24 units or tactics and things like that.

25 EF: I think, again, what they were planning on doing again is that they waited
26 until my last track got on the road. As soon as it got on and got parallel to the road and
27 heading down the road, it must have went at least ten meters is when the first shot was
28 fired. So, it was coordinated to get us, y'know, hit the front my platoon and it hit the rear
29 of my platoon. It's basically trying to isolate my platoon. And it could have been also,
30 their hope was maybe that if they were able to isolate me and the rest of the company
31 kept moving, then they would have been able to cross the road further up to my front and

1 come back down the side and do something that because the company commander kept
2 the rest of the company ahead of me, may have changed their concept of what they were
3 going to do. You never know on that. I looked like they were trying to isolate me or my
4 platoon.

5 KC: Alright, this is the first contact that you personally have actually been in the
6 middle of.

7 EF: Right.

8 KC: When the first RPG comes in and you realize what's going on, you realize
9 you're under attack, take me through what you're going through personally. What are
10 you thinking, what are you feeling, what is your body doing? All of that.

11 EF: Ah, the first thing that I did was I knew was, "Gee, we're under attack." And
12 it was like two, drop down inside the track. Probably, you think about it is not a smart
13 thing to do because that's where the RPG would have been. If I would have jumped off
14 the track, I would have not have had any communications.

15 KC: There you go.

16 EF: It was, in my mind, y'know the thing is to maintain my communications. The
17 other thing was that the rapid response of the .50s was, y'know, they were firing, and you
18 had the .50 that was right above me was firing so it was extremely loud. I could hear men
19 yelling and screaming about things, but I couldn't comprehend what they were saying. I
20 could hear the sound of the M-16s firing and the M-60s firing. My first thought was to let
21 the company commander know what is happening. To keep him advised to the situation.
22 You get on and say, "Bravo 6, 3-6 I've just taken RPG rounds, returning fire to the north
23 of the road." And that was somewhat my first response was taking fire from the north of
24 the road and returning fire. After a little while, it was still taking fire, no casualties yet.
25 Tracks still functional. Then he'd call back and say that the battalion commander was
26 above, and he would be calling in artillery and that he would be directing it. "That's fine,
27 keep the fire north of the road."

28 KC: How long would this last?

29 EF: Oh, I want to say all day (both laughing). I think the initial contact of firing
30 from the enemy's perspective maybe not be more than five minutes. It was just a short
31 burst of y'know, of doing it. Again, then it was the artillery coming in and maybe ten,

1 twelve minutes after the initial fire is when the gunships came in. So, y'know, the
2 gunships got there in a rather quick time.

3 KC: Right. So, between the artillery and the gunships they just hightailed it after
4 that?

5 EF: Yeah, I think once—and I think what it is was my experience with the
6 mechanized. If they initiated contact with you and you had your tracks with you, once
7 you opened up with the .50s, they were gone. They were not going to stay there. Because
8 in an ambush position, they did not have cover and concealment and protection as it did
9 in a base camp where they had bunkers built. They'd stand and fight in the bunkers. If
10 they were in, I'd say, the open, exposed to our .50s, they weren't going to mess with that.

11 KC: Sure.

12 EF: That was such a beautiful sight to see. Trees starting to vanish and limbs
13 falling and all sorts of havoc happening with that.

14 KC: Yeah, those are impressive. What about your emotions? What are you going
15 through emotionally? Psychologically, when this goes on?

16 EF: I was on a high. I mean, again, it was my dream coming true, so I was really
17 just doing that. I had confidence from the prior day of talking on the radio and giving the
18 information to the company commander. I knew that the men were outside doing their
19 job and that I was doing my job as far as directing the fire support and keeping the
20 company commander and the battalion commander advised on what the situation was.
21 Once the enemy fire stopped or lessened, I sort of picked my head out and that's when I
22 saw the choppers coming in. I looked around and I could see—once the fire stopped, I
23 had the squads move to the north side of the road slowly, so they took positions on the
24 north side of the road. I asked once they were on the north side of the road, I asked the
25 company commander if he wanted me to pursue the enemy into the jungle. And he said,
26 "No, just secure in place." So, after that was just secure in place, set back. Sort of sat
27 down on the APC bench, took a deep breath, and stood up to see what was happening. I
28 just sat there and watched the men. At that time, when the fire stopped, y'know, a few of
29 them would light up a cigarette and sort of turn on their back and take a sip of water.

30 KC: So, from here you guys move onto the firebase.

31 EF: Right.

1 KC: And what was the name of the firebase again?

2 EF: Fang.

3 KC: Fang; right, right, right. Now, once you get to the firebase, what do you do?
4 Like you said, you usually just roll through. PO&L and roll on through. What did you do
5 in this case?

6 EF: Well, this firebase they airlifted the 105s in and the 155s, so it was a forward
7 firebase. We just went in and what we did was the battalion secured the firebase that
8 night. We pulled into position, took up our position on the perimeter, put out our security,
9 found out there would be some ambush patrols going out. My platoon was not picked. It
10 was the 1st Platoon that was picked that night. We just sat in position. I remember I was
11 out looking at my road wheels' oil level. Somehow, I remember I was supposed to check
12 the oil level in the road wheels. The battalion commander walked by and just kind of
13 looked at me and kept on going.

14 KC: And didn't say a word about it?

15 EF: And didn't say a word.

16 KC: Hmm. You've mentioned a couple of times that 1st Platoon was picked for
17 this and 1st Platoon was picked for that. Do you think this was a result of the way the 1st
18 Platoon commander got onto the company commander?

19 EF: No, I think what it was more or less is that he had been there a little bit
20 longer, so he knew him, and he just felt a little bit more confidence with Tracy, initially,
21 with the contact and the movement. After the 17th and 18th of May, then it became where
22 Tom and I pretty much rotated our positions. But I think the initial two days or initial day
23 or thirty days he was depending more on Tom and Addison because they'd been with the
24 company a little bit longer and just wanted me to get a little bit more experience.

25 KC: Right, but it sounds like these two days in May were perhaps the thing that
26 gave them the confidence in you to go forward and treat you like one of the others.

27 EF: Yeah, it was. Plus, he only had two of us to pick, Tom and I. We did not get
28 another platoon leader for the 2nd Platoon for about a month and a half. In fact, we didn't
29 get a 2nd Platoon for about a month and a half.

30 KC: What about these losses? They're not your men in your platoon, but surely
31 you would have had some sort of interaction or at least seen these people or the guys in

1 your platoon would have known perhaps some of these guys or these other platoons were
2 killed. What's that like?

3 EF: I can't say that I had any interaction with them, and I wouldn't recognize
4 them. The men did because, again, they went through training. It hit them hard as far as
5 some of the losses on the 2nd Platoon. They were one that when they went for the
6 training at Fort Lewis, some of them—they were not always in the 2nd Platoon. They
7 may have been in the 1st Platoon or the 3rd. It just changes. They had, had interaction.
8 That group as a whole, again the boat people. When they lost somebody, it hit them a lot
9 harder than other replacements that came in after them. That's one of the things that I
10 noticed. It hurt them more than if it was a replacement that came in and got wounded.
11 That aspect of not getting to know your guy in your fox hole that well because if you lost
12 them, you didn't want to have that burden to carry with you. The boat people had that.

13 KC: How did their pain from this manifest itself?

14 EF: A lot of it was anger to go out and just kill some more. A lot of it was
15 directed at the company commander on why you sent them there. His reputation was
16 such—and this is stuff I found out later was that, y'know, he had done something like
17 that before where he'd set out an element hoping it would get hit so he could rush in and
18 wipe out the enemy. So, there was that anger that, "Why did he send him out there like
19 that?" Y'know, there was some talk that he did that on purpose, and he should have never
20 done it. A lot of the men, as far as within the company, did not respect the company
21 commander from things like that that he'd done in the past before I came on board.

22 KC: What do you do as someone who has essentially, on the outside, looking in.
23 At least at this point. You don't know these guys who have been killed, but the guys in
24 your platoon know the guys that who've been killed. They're taking it hard, and they've
25 got these harsh feelings toward the company commander and the emotions that they have.
26 How do you fit into all this? What do you do? Do you stand back and just let them
27 simmer? Do you talk to them? What do you do?

28 EF: I talked to them about the meaning of loss and how they need to feel hurt. I
29 avoided the criticism of the company commander and basically, I would not enter into
30 that discussion, the only time I would get into that discussion was with one of the other
31 platoon leaders. Tom Tracy and I would talk about that element of doing that. Mine

1 would be actually just sit down and listen to them. Let them vent and say, "I understand,
2 you have a reason to be. You need to focus in on your mission and to be able to do your
3 job because you want to go home." Now, that particular thing with the 2nd Platoon, they
4 realized as a group, the error that was not getting out and providing security. So, it was
5 like, "We're not going to let that happen to us."

6 KC: So, it was just absolutely their responsibility for not providing security at the
7 road junction?

8 EF: Well, they blamed the company commander one for going out there and then
9 they blamed the platoon leader for not doing it. "I can't believe they didn't put the
10 security out." Well, the security, y'know, it's like if I don't move into an area and put up
11 the security it's my responsibility for not putting it out.

12 KC: How long did you stay at our base, Fang?

13 EF: I would say about two days.

14 KC: What are you doing in those two days after this contact?

15 EF: Just sitting around eating. Nothing really. Y'know, that's one of the things
16 that I've heard before. Y'know, a lot of times you sit around and do nothing during the
17 day and then you wait to move out and go somewhere. That's what we did. If we were in
18 a firebase, we just took advantage of just being able to sit back and read and write letters,
19 talk. Y'know, nothing of importance. For those that were short timers, they were looking
20 for that one less day they were in potential problems/contact.

21 KC: Rather mundane topic, but a vital topic. Tell me about maintenance in a
22 situation like this.

23 EF: Maintenance, the track drivers took responsibility over the tracks. Y'know,
24 they would lift the trim vane and the hood and check all the fluid levels in the track.
25 Y'know, check all that out. They would check the oil levels in the wheels. They check
26 the tracks as far as how worn they were if the track needed to be placed or a portion of it.
27 They would take the action to disengage the track and replace the track and doing that.
28 Y'know, basic maintenance. I know most of the tracks that we had didn't look pretty.
29 Y'know, they were pretty scarred up with breaking trail through the jungles and things
30 knocked off and scratches and dents in them and bullet holes and even some RPG holes
31 in some of them. Again, it was just checking the engine and making sure it was running

1 and you had the proper fluid levels as far as the transmission and gas. That was the basic
2 maintenance on them. And then the troops, in a stand down period, would be a good
3 opportunity to offload all the items that were inside the track, clean it up, and then repack
4 the track and made it more ordered where they could find things and do things with.

5 KC: Right, right. What kind of toll did the jungle conditions, or the rice paddy
6 conditions, or just the geography in general, what kind of toll did it take on your
7 equipment? And not just the tracks, but your other equipment?

8 EF: The tracks I don't think really—the thing about the jungle as far as the toll
9 there would just be breaking through. Things that were out on the tracks as far as your
10 lights or antenna mounting, they could rip those things off the top. Anything that was
11 sticking out would eventually get ripped off. The rice paddy, you had a problem with
12 mud getting everywhere. Being aluminum, we didn't have too much rust involved with it.
13 During the dry season, you had the dust that would just clog everything up so you had to
14 constantly clean that. Especially the weapons. If we were doing a road security mission
15 during the dry season and driving on the roads, there was all sorts of dust and dirt that
16 kicked up. You'd just be covered with it and everything inside the track was covered. The
17 .50s would have to be disassembled and cleaned. I remember one time we pulled out
18 online, the battalion was moving out and the battalion commander said, "Let's test fire
19 our .50s." So, we just had all sixty-four tracks line up and gave the order to commence
20 firing. I think we had two .50s fire.

21 KC: Wow.

22 EF: Well, sort of embarrassing, but every time we test fired the weapons it never
23 worked. The moment you get in contact it always worked. We never had that problem in
24 contact.

25 KC: Yeah, for an entire battalion to have two of the .50s work, that's frightening.

26 EF: It is, I don't know if that was done intentionally or what. I wouldn't be a bit
27 surprised if they said, "Let's not fire them. Let's see what the CO does." (Both Laughing)

28 KC: Come unglued is what I would do. Alright, well I think we're at a good point
29 today, Mr. Fabel, that we can stop and pick it up at another time.

30

1 Kelly Crager: This is Kelly Crager continuing an Oral History Interview with Mr.
2 Elpidio Fahel. Today is July 7, 2010. I am in Lubbock, Texas, on the campus of Texas
3 Tech University and Mr. Fahel is joining me by telephone from his home in Humble,
4 Texas. Okay, I'm sorry to have interrupted you, Mr. Fahel, pick up the story where you
5 were.

6 Elpidio Fahel: Okay, after we got to Fang, because we had lost so many casualties
7 on the 17th and 18th, the company didn't really do too much. Around the 1st of June, the
8 battalion—or Bravo Company was attached to the 3rd Battalion, 22nd Infantry that was
9 assigned to go down to Saigon to be the reaction force for that area. So, we made a night
10 movement with the 3rd of the 22nd. The 3rd of the 22nd was a Regular infantry unit so they
11 had all their trucks transporting the troops. We followed up in the rear echelon of the
12 movement down there. Completely uneventful as far as the movement. Once we got
13 down to the Saigon area, we were directed to go to Bien Hoa where we set up a perimeter
14 inside the perimeter. Our mission there for the next thirty some-days was just a reaction
15 force there. During the day we would send out one platoon for a different type of
16 operations and security and show-of-force in different areas. We did a lot of training
17 while we were there. It was a nice stand down period because, being in Bien Hoa we had
18 access to all the nice things as far as the PX, the theater, swimming pools, and all the
19 luxuries that were associated with what you say, a big military installation that was in a
20 very secure area.

21 KC: Right, now did you take your tracks with you on this move?

22 EF: Yes, we did. Our tracks went down so most of—all the patrols that we went,
23 we used our tracks to go and make the patrols. There was one incident where our platoon
24 was going out on a mission to pick up and secure a landing zone where a recon platoon
25 was being picked up at. I can't remember the general area, but we were moving along in
26 the Saigon area and the MPs pulled me over wanting my convoy pass.

27 KC: Now, were these American MPs?

28 EF: Yeah, American MPs. So, it delayed me for hours when I called. Because
29 they wouldn't let me move and I had to call my company commander who went up the
30 Chain of Command and about an hour later it came back down and gave me permission
31 to move out and the MP said go. So, it was like, "Gee, we're back in the states again."

1 KC: That brings up a pretty good point having to been out in the field for as long
2 as you were. You guys would be out there for quite a while, of course, like you said
3 because you were largely self-contained or at least to some degree self-contained. What
4 was it like getting back to the more, oh, more business-like lifestyle there in Bien Hoa? In
5 that area of Saigon and then Bien Hoa?

6 EF: It was very difficult. One is that while we were in Bien Hoa proper, we
7 couldn't carry our weapons with us. Our weapons were kept on our trucks, but if we
8 wanted to go to the PX or do anything like that, y'know, when you had your soft hat on,
9 you're walking around, you really didn't care about how you appeared that much. The
10 military bearing and the starched and polished boots were not a thing that we were used
11 to. But that came filtering down that we had to be presentable, or we couldn't leave our
12 little cantonment area that we were in. It created some problems. We had some of our
13 troops that would go to the NCO club or the enlisted men club and get into some scrapes
14 just because, y'know, "We're the bad boys. We're the ones that are out on the field. You
15 guys in the rear area don't do anything." It was an interesting time as far as that. One of
16 the things that we were able to do—they had an R&R area that was on the Saigon River
17 that we went to one day as a company where we had a big barbeque, could play
18 basketball, volleyball. For those that wanted to they could go water skiing on the Saigon
19 River or just take a speed boat and ride up the river. Y'know, it was like, gee, we've been
20 out in the field fighting and then we come back here and find out all the luxuries that
21 these rear area people have. It irritated quite a few of us.

22 KC: Did you resent that, I guess?

23 EF: I guess we did resent it because, again, y'know, the logistics tails. Somewhere
24 I heard, y'know, for every combat troop that was out in the field, the tail was like 22 to
25 30 men back in the back supporting us. Some of the other statistics that I saw later are
26 just the total number that went to Vietnam. The actual number that were the combat MOS
27 that actually were in a combat position and out in the field was a very small percentage of
28 the total troops deployed at any one point in time. Y'know, our foxhole strength. My first
29 tour my foxhole strength was usually a pretty good number. I would say I was authorized
30 forty-four men in the platoon. Now, I was usually averaging around thirty to thirty-five
31 men. So, I was close to that. When I got my command and my company on my second

1 tour, my foxhole strength was authorizing the company was like 150-something and I
2 never got over 90 in the field with me. Our platoons were down to 20-man platoons, 25-
3 man platoon. Y'know, you say you have a company in the field or our battalion in the
4 field, but really, what strength did you have out there?

5 KC: And I'll definitely want to get into that when we get into your second tour, I
6 believe that was with the Americal because a lot of changes take place in between your
7 first and second tour in Vietnam.

8 EF: Yes, but y'know, the Saigon time was—it was a nice stand down. We got our
9 additional tracks to make-up for the three that were damaged from the 2nd Platoon. We
10 got a platoon leader in, Joe Weiss who was to be the 2nd Platoon leader. Y'know, as far
11 as getting all the equipment ready to go and making sure we had everything. It was a nice
12 stand down, but it was like after a while, sitting around and doing nothing all day started
13 wearing on us. It's like, "Gee, we want to get out of this place."

14 KC: And of course, a great example of it was when you tried to leave the place.

15 EF: Yeah, when we tried, we got in trouble.

16 KC: Yeah, you get stopped by the cops.

17 EF: Yeah, we got stopped by the cops. (both laughing) And then I had another
18 incident where we were going in another patrol and moving along and it was my four
19 tracks, it was the third in column threw a track in an area that just veered off to the right
20 and went through some Vietnamese market-place-thing and knocked down a few things.
21 Fortunately, we didn't hit anybody. Or we would have really been in trouble. So, all we
22 had to do was put the road wheel on, call the company commander, tell him what
23 happened, and then I guess a public affair/civil affairs group came out afterwards and did
24 some investigation and paid them for the damage that we did. So, it was like the patrols
25 that we went on were all, y'know, "Why are we doing this?" Y'know we're patrolling
26 mainly, at the time, a very secure area, nothing happened. The only time we fired our
27 weapons was when we went to a rifle range and test fired our small arms, but nothing
28 else.

29 KC: What's that do to the morale of the men?

30 EF: Oh, I think anytime you get back in a garrison area, to me, the initial morale
31 is great because they're back in a rear area, it's safe. They have the niceties where they

1 can take a shower and clean up and have good meals three times a day. After a while it
2 starts wearing on you because this is not what they were used to. You could see the
3 morale, to me, was starting to go down. Some disciplinary problems because of getting
4 into fights and just the whole attitude. Plus, we had, back in that area, then you start
5 fighting the problem of drugs. Y'know, the access to marijuana and other drugs that are
6 just prevalent in a rear area where you didn't have that problem when you were in the
7 field.

8 KC: Now, you saw this as early as the summer of 1967.

9 EF: Yes.

10 KC: Well, I was going to talk about this later, but now that we're on the topic,
11 describe for me—or tell me about your experience with drugs in your unit or drugs in a
12 larger sense in Vietnam and what kind of role they played at their prevalence, etcetera.

13 EF: Well, to break it up again, it's by tours. It was completely different between
14 the two tours. The first tour, except when we were in Long Bien, we really didn't—I
15 didn't see a problem because we were in the field so much. It was, y'know, beside the
16 time in Long Bien, we were always in the field. Anytime you were in the field the troops
17 took care of themselves and they weren't going to let anything happen. We did provide a
18 lot of road security missions on a regular basis. At that time, the Vietnamese would be
19 coming in on the road trying to sell the drugs to them or it was easy access. But the men,
20 I think they policed themselves. They knew they were out there where something could
21 happen at any moment. There was not an issue that much with it. I'd never noticed it in
22 the field. When I became the executive officer back in the rear, it was more prevalent, but
23 it wasn't rampant like it was my second tour. In my second tour it was just in the field
24 again, no problem, but back in the rear area, y'know, you could just walk through our
25 battalion area, and you could smell it. It was so prevalent. We had one hooch one time I
26 walked into, y'know, it's like, "Oh my God, where's my gas mask?" It was so strong.

27 KC: Now, this is the second tour?

28 EF: My second tour.

29 KC: Why do you think there was that difference between the first and second
30 tours?

1 EF: I think, really, there was a changing attitude as far as the war. Y'know, I
2 always like to say in '66, '67, '68 when I was there my first tour, the unit that I would
3 join, the 22nd Infantry, felt that there was a mission that we were there fighting the
4 enemy. One, we were in a free fire zone the majority of the time. So, there was something
5 there we could engage. A lot of the engagements that we had during that period of time
6 were with large scale units where we got hit by regimental sized units or company sized
7 units. So, there was large, prolonged contact with large enemy forces. The second tour it
8 seemed like the men were there because of the protests back home they knew they
9 weren't supported. They knew that we were trying to get out. They were starting the
10 infusion with the Vietnamese and deactivating units over there so the troops said, "I don't
11 want to go anywhere." The drugs were so prevalent and again, like I mentioned, we had
12 our foxhole strength was so low, that the majority of the men were back in the rear area
13 was prevalent. You'd go back to the rear area, and you didn't do anything. You just sat
14 around all day. You may have to pull bunker duty at night, but there was really nothing
15 during the day to occupy. So, it was a lot of free time. A lot of the troops that were
16 drafted into the military, I felt, came from an environment where they were exposed to
17 drugs before they even got into the military. All of a sudden, they had greater access to it.

18 KC: Alright, before we got a little sidetracked on that. You were talking about this
19 move up to help secure this landing zone after then being stopped and all that. So, was
20 there any sort of activity and sort of action at this landing zone?

21 EF: No, we finally got there, we deployed. The recon element made contact with
22 me, came into the LZ (Landing Zone) area. Two or three helicopters came in, landed.
23 They picked them up, left, then we headed back to our rear area or back to Bien Hoa. The
24 whole-time during Saigon there was no action, really. The only thing that did happen was
25 while we were making one of our sweeps one day, we found a spider hole and inside the
26 spider hole was a decrepit Viet Cong soldier malnourished and, y'know, scared to death
27 of us. Y'know, it was my first prisoner that I captured, that my platoon captured.

28 KC: So, what'd you do with the prisoner?

29 EF: We continued on with our sweep and then just brought him back to the
30 company area in Bien Hoa and then turned them over to the authorities. I don't know if it
31 was the Vietnamese that came and picked him up or some MPs.

1 KC: So, did you try to interrogate them in the field? Or just pick him up and move
2 on?

3 EF: No, we didn't try to do anything. I didn't have anybody who could speak
4 Vietnamese. So, we just secured him and just had him follow us along. We didn't have
5 our tracks at the time. We were dismounted, brought him back to our tracks, and then got
6 on the road and back to Bien Hoa.

7 KC: How long did you stay back in the rear at Bien Hoa?

8 EF: We were there almost the whole month of June.

9 KC: Oh wow, that's quite a while.

10 EF: It was thirty days I think it was. So, it was a long time. By the time it was
11 time to move out, we were ready to move out and join the battalion and have something
12 else exciting happen.

13 KC: Well, you mentioned that the second platoon gets a new platoon commander.
14 Joe Weiss, I believe you said his name was. What was he like and what sort of things
15 were you able to talk to him about? I would assume this is his first command?

16 EF: Yeah, he is a fresh deal. I can't remember his source of commissioning. All I
17 remember about Joe was that we came in one day into the hooch right after he joined the
18 platoon and he was sitting down there on his bunk and he said, "What am I doing here?
19 What am I doing here?" He was a good guy, but he was very unconfident. He made
20 himself known that way and he did not stay with the platoon for that long just because of
21 unconfidence and what the company commander did was move him up to and put him
22 with the weapons platoon or the 81 mortars were. Y'know, basically you just sit around
23 all day with the company and not really have to make any tactical decisions. He stayed
24 with the company for a while and then moved up to battalion where he took over the
25 four-deuce. He was always in a position where he really didn't put anybody at risk. Even
26 with the 81s or the 4 deuce he didn't have to do anything. There was a good platoon
27 sergeant, and the gun crews knew what they were doing and so he just had to sit there and
28 watch what they were doing. But it was, I think, even when he came on board just when
29 he went to the platoons, his platoon—you could see that the platoon sensed that, "Oh my
30 gosh, what have we got?" So, you could see their apprehension and the company
31 commander knew from just talking to him that it would oppose a problem.

1 KC: How would this lack of confidence of men in a platoon leader, in any platoon
2 leader, how would it manifest itself?

3 EF: A reluctance to really complete their mission, to question what was going on.
4 If they had a lack of confidence, they questioned everything. Some of them would
5 actually go to another platoon leader and ask them, “Y’know, hey, is this what we’re
6 doing and is this the right thing?” Y’know, it was so obvious when the men lacked
7 respect for their platoon leader. Same thing would hold true if it was a platoon sergeant or
8 even a squad leader. The lack of respect or confidence that the men would have, you
9 could see just the way that unit functioned. You started to have more disciplinary
10 problems within the unit. More bickering between the men. They were scared and they
11 weren’t happy. Y’know, “We’re going back into combat, and we have somebody that
12 may not be able to provide the leadership that we need to make it home.”

13 KC: What kind of advice would you offer to a new platoon leader?

14 EF: My advice when I sat down and talked with Joe he always said, “You’ve got
15 a great platoon sergeant. You need to listen to him, and you need to listen to your squad
16 leaders. Don’t play a hero where you know it all.” It’s the same advice that, y’know, that
17 they gave me. You can function if you let your leadership that’s in the platoon function.
18 One of the disadvantages that Joe had was that he had a good platoon sergeant, but he
19 also had three new squad leaders that had joined the company while we were in Bien
20 Hoa. That’s what happened is that the replacements started filtering in while we were in
21 Bien Hoa that went to his platoon to bring it up to strength. The platoon sergeant had his
22 hands full working with not only Joe, but with the new squad leaders that came in. At this
23 time, these were individuals that were E5s that had draftees into the Army so this is when
24 we started seeing the change in the quality of our NCOs that were in the field.

25 KC: Some of the so-called ninety-day-wonders from NCO.

26 EF: Like the ninety-day-wonder OCS people.

27 KC: Right, right. Very interesting. Well, what else did you encounter when you
28 were back on this thirty-day time in Bien Hoa before you moved back out?

29 EF: Well, one of the things was I told you our company commander, Bialkowski,
30 was a unique individual. He had a small octagon tent, and he would come out of the tent
31 with his gloves on and start walking around the tent in circles. Just beating his fist into

1 one of his hands. He just kept doing that. He'd stop and then go back inside his tent and
2 do his thing. So, Tom Tracy, which was our first platoon leader, came up with a brilliant
3 plan setting up our volleyball net using one of the tent poles on his tent to hold the
4 volleyball net. So, we set it up and we were playing volleyball, and the CO comes out of
5 his tent and turns to—I can't remember which way, but goes in around to where he
6 comes up to where the net is, sees it, turns around, and goes in. So then instead of going
7 completely around the tent he'd go to where that volleyball net was and back. So that got
8 a good laugh. The men enjoyed that, that was fun. That was one of the things we talked
9 about quite a bit.

10 KC: So, he wasn't terribly aware of what was going on around him. It absorbed
11 him whatever it was he was thinking about, I guess.

12 EF: I think what it was, was he hated being stuck in Bien Hoa. He wanted to be
13 where the action was. He wanted to be out there. He felt that in a way of looking back,
14 that he felt this was punishment. As a company commander, what happened on the 17th
15 and 18th of May and that when it came time when the battalion was tasked, it was easy
16 that the battalion commander said, "Let's put them back down there where I don't have to
17 mess with them. I can function with my other two companies up in the combat area and
18 not worry about him."

19 KC: Do you think that was the case?

20 EF: I wouldn't be a bit surprised.

21 KC: I'll be darned.

22 EF: Again, it's like over the years when I've talked—I met with some of the
23 people that I served with when I found out what the men that actually, some of the other
24 company commanders had to say about him. It wouldn't surprise me.

25 KC: Very interesting. Alright, your thirty days at Bien Hoa are up. You're
26 probably, I assume, chomping at the bit to get back out and glad to get the men out of sin
27 city there.

28 EF: (Laughing) Right that was one of the things it was more—from a leadership it
29 was really a tremendous challenge keeping the men out of trouble. Y'know, trying to
30 protect—keep them out of trouble and if they got in trouble, protect them so they
31 wouldn't go to jail.

1 KC: Did you have these instances where they were arrested?

2 EF: We had a few times when some of my men were arrested and one, I had to go
3 down toward where the jail was or the MPs and get them out and gave them a sob story,
4 y'know, that we're a combat unit and blah, blah. So, they were somewhat understanding
5 why the men did what they had to do. They said, "Don't let it happen again." Type thing.
6 "We will throw the book at him."

7 KC: Right, right. How does that reflect on you as a platoon leader?

8 EF: It was a positive that, y'know, again I was out there working and trying to
9 protect the men that when they got into trouble, I was there to get them out of trouble. So,
10 we saw a lot of what they expected to happen.

11 KC: How did it reflect upon you for as far as your superiors were concerned?
12 Knowing that you guys are getting yourselves into a little bit of trouble?

13 EF: The company commander was going ballistic on it. He was taking some guff
14 from the 3rd brigade commander, I'm sure. I don't know it all, but like I said, I think he
15 hated it being there so much that, y'know that was just a minor thing. "That's what you
16 get for sending me down here. If you don't want that to happen, get me out of here"
17 attitude. Fortunately, again, it wasn't just my platoon, it was the whole company. All the
18 platoons were having a thing. Tom Tracy went down a few times and even Joe went
19 down once.

20 KC: These are things you would probably expect from a combat unit in
21 circumstances like that. Okay, now take me out of Bien Hoa. What is your next
22 assignment? Where are you going? Do you go back to your parent unit?

23 EF: Yeah, we went back to the 2nd battalion and just started doing some other
24 missions in that area. One of the first missions that we had to do was actually on the
25 period of time of about the 8th through the 16th of July. At this time also, right after we
26 joined the battalion, Captain Bialkowski was assigned to the brigade, and we got a new
27 company commander by the name of James Bristol. He was a soldier that was enlisted
28 first and got a direct commission, and this was right after the Korean War. He had a lot of
29 time in the military. He was an excellent company commander from a standpoint of
30 looking out for the welfare of the men, keeping cool under fire, and doing the right
31 things. I think it was through his leadership that I always like to say that the Bravo

1 Company became the best company in the battalion. The go-to company. If something
2 happened, it seemed like during a period of time the Bravo Company was always the
3 point for the battalion. But on this period of time what the mission was, was that my
4 platoon was set into an area along the main supply route to set up a position. Company
5 Commander Bristol told me what the objective of the mission was, was to put you in this
6 position. During the day you would provide road security for the convoys supplying
7 between Tay Ninh and Dau Teign. Then at night you'd just be in a defensive position. It
8 is expected that while at night at some point in time, you're going to get it hit. And if you
9 get hit, we have elements of an armored cav. (Calvary) regiment that's at Tay Ninh from
10 the 25th who is in a position to support you. The other two platoons are only about three
11 thousand meters south on the MSR (Main Supply Route) so we can get there. You're well
12 within range of our 81s so they said, "Y'know, just make sure you provide your
13 security." So, we got in position and having that mission, y'know, I requested a lot of
14 extra supplies. When I say that, I got my concertina wire, single-strand barbwire, anti-
15 intrusion devices, extra claymore mines, and basically set up a really good, strong—I
16 felt—defensive position at night. During the day our tracks would pull out and run
17 convoy duty. We'd stay in that area and then come back at night and position ourselves.

18 KC: So, you'd come back to that same defensive position or quadrant that night?

19 EF: Yes, that's why they felt if we would come back to the same position on a
20 regular basis, something would happen.

21 KC: Right, right of course.

22 EF: I wasn't going to take any chances. The men, when I briefed them on a
23 mission, they would—we had our tracks in position. We dug some good deep fox holes
24 to the front of the tracks. We dismounted our .50s at night. You'd just prepare. I'd send
25 out a listening post because maybe fifty meters or twenty-five meters from one point of
26 our perimeter was the MSR. On the far side of the MSR was an open rice paddy area. The
27 VC could sneak up and use the elevation of the MSR to provide some concealment. Once
28 they got on the road, they were wide open. It would not offer as much protection once
29 they got over it. The other side was rubber tree plantations which would offer great
30 concealment cover all the way up through our position because we were actually in the
31 rubber trees. Then we got our LP (Listening Post) out at night. For eight days, nothing

1 happened. On the eighth day my company commander informed me that a platoon from
2 our sister company, Alpha Company, was going to relieve me of position. So, on that day
3 the other platoon from Alpha Company comes up. My company commander says, "We
4 may have you go into another position and do the same thing." Basically, setting us out as
5 bait. So, when the other platoon came in to relieve me, I asked him if he wanted any of
6 these additional claymore mines, concertina wire, barbwire and anti-intrusion devices for
7 his platoon and he said "No." so I said, "Okay," so I loaded it all up on mine. I pulled out,
8 in mid-morning joined the company and the company commander told me that we lucked
9 out. That we were going into our base camp for a stand down for two days. So, we got on
10 the road and moved down to our area into Dau Teign. The first thing we did was clean
11 our equipment and took showers ourselves, got a change of clothes, and then the mess
12 hall had prepared a steak dinner for us that night. At that time, we all had our separate
13 dining facilities or mess halls. They were at the direction of whatever the company
14 commander wanted to do as far as food. And he said, "I want steak." So, they went and
15 scrounged up steaks. So, we had our meal and then the company commander informed us
16 that we had a USO (United Service Organizations) show coming in. So, we had a band
17 and then they informed us that there was a stripper coming in. So, we had a stripper.

18 KC: This just keeps getting better and better.

19 EF: Then we had stag films and all the beer we wanted.

20 KC: Wow.

21 EF: By eleven thirty, the company was wasted. Y'know, everybody just went
22 back to their hooch and crashed. Then at approximately—I would say between 1 and 2
23 A.M in the morning the platoon that had occupied my position got hit. We got alerted to
24 move out for reinforcements because they had gotten hit very hard is what we heard. So,
25 it was like, "Oh my God." It was like, "Go find people that can drive a track." So, I found
26 four men that were not too drunk that knew how to drive a track. They were the drivers. I
27 got two men that were semi-conscious that put him up on the 2 of the .50s. I took and
28 manned a 50. The rest of the men were just thrown into the back of the APCs. We were
29 ordered to move out. My platoon was put in the lead and the order was, "Move out with
30 your lights on," at night. Not a good mission. We pulled out and we had two helicopter
31 gunships flying above us the whole time. I just remember, "God, what are we doing here

1 going down a main road that has been mined or ambushed?" We got a platoon that was
2 ambushed in their night position taking heavy fire and heavy casualties and we move out.
3 It was an extremely scary scenario because the men were really in no condition to fight.
4 Of course, the company commander knew that, I knew that, but the battalion commander
5 didn't, and nobody was going to tell him.

6 KC: Sure.

7 EF: So, fortunately nothing happened. We pulled off the side—got up to the
8 contact area. When we got to the contact area the rest of Alpha Company was already
9 there; the cav. unit was already there. The contact had ceased. They pulled us, we pulled
10 up and pulled off into the rice paddy that was on the other side of the road and just sat
11 there in the morning. And gosh, it was so miserable because of the mosquitoes. That's
12 one thing I remember was the mosquitos were so bad as we sat in that rice paddy. The
13 next morning, at first light, we got up and walked through the contact area where the
14 other platoon had been hit. They had, I think, 3 kills, 24 wounded out of 33 in the
15 strength of the platoon and three of their APCs were destroyed.

16 KC: Oh wow.

17 EF: So, it was like that's where I was twenty-four hours before.

18 KC: Wow.

19 EF: We were given the mission to sweep through the area which we did and went
20 out and tried to find any signs of the VC, NVA in the area. We did find where they had a
21 mortar-tube positioned, but really, no other contact. It was obvious that the platoon—my
22 feeling was that the platoon that followed us in position did not take the appropriate
23 action as far as setting up and manning their defensive positions. To have that much
24 contact and damage done in a period of time like that. Y'know, again, they found out
25 later they did not have any of the anti-intrusion devices or trip-flares out like I did. They
26 did not have any of their concertina up or barbed wire strung between the trees. That's
27 one of the things we did is that these days we got up and at night we strung single-strand
28 barbed wire with warning devices and beer cans with rocks in them, y'know, around the
29 perimeter so if somebody tried to sneak up on us, we may get some early warning. Plus,
30 we had an LP out. They didn't even have that.

1 KC: Wow. Now, where did the VC come from? Did they come from the rice
2 fields or the rubber trees?

3 EF: They came from the rubber trees.

4 KC: So, they came behind them then.

5 EF: They came in through the rubber trees which offered them the greatest of
6 concealment. Also, that area, if you followed them on the map, y'know, let into the
7 jungles and into the, y'know, area where easy movement mass troops into that area. I
8 never got any information that I received as far as the size of the elements that attacked
9 them, but it had to be, to me, a considerably large force to do it. The other thing which
10 created a problem for them there was an extensive amount of beer cans in our defensive
11 position. When my platoon was there, we limited the amount of beer that we had for the
12 men in the field. I think after this incident I think the battalion commander actually
13 stopped beer for a while in the field. It was one of those things that was a terrible thing. It
14 made me think about retrospect, the importance of security and not taking chances and
15 never taking the easy way. Y'know, I did not know the platoon leader so I can't say
16 anything about it, but just looking at what happened and the tracks that were destroyed
17 and the number of casualties was just—all I could think is that the VC were watching me,
18 and they saw the defenses of how we set up and felt that it would be too much of a risk.
19 When they watched me pull out and this other platoon come in, in lack of defensive
20 preparation, to say, "Hey, we got somebody here." To do it, y'know, when I pulled out to
21 hitting them that night.

22 KC: Do you think your men picked up on that, too?

23 EF: I'm sure they did. I mean, I think the men picked up on that so you could
24 hear, "Boy, they weren't prepared. They should have hit us. We were ready for them."
25 The cockiness within the platoon. This was the first time when I say the platoon started
26 having a cockiness of really doing a good job. Y'know, we're the best.

27 KC: That's got to make you feel pretty good.

28 EF: It did, it did make me feel good because I think there was a sense within the
29 platoon and then again, because our 2nd Platoon was so weak. The 1st Platoon was, I'd
30 say, as far as experience and capabilities, our two platoons were the same. Y'know, the
31 company commander could pick either or. And that's what was happening for the rest of

1 the missions, it was either or of our platoons. For the 2nd Platoon was never given a
2 mission.

3 KC: Alright, after this engagement here in mid-July or early to mid-July of '67,
4 where do you go next?

5 EF: Well basically, we patrol the roads, provide road security, going on sweeping
6 operations and nothing really exciting happens as far as contact with the enemy. The
7 platoons, I'd say, we'd go in and secure a lot of areas, make sweeps, find caches of
8 weapons and supplies. What is interesting, to me, looking back is that y'know, Bravo
9 Company at the time was a charmed company if you ever heard how certain elements are
10 just charmed and have good things happen to them. We were charmed. It's just like that
11 date in July, Bravo Company goes in, and nothing happens. Then Alpha Company comes
12 in and gets hit. There were several instances where Bravo Company would sweep
13 through the area and do something and then Alpha Company would come in and get hit.
14 On several incidences that's what happen. Alpha Company was a company that had all
15 the bad karma going on and it was always getting hit. I think that was something,
16 y'know, even the men in Bravo Company started making comments about Alpha
17 Company is the unlucky company. One of the incidents that happened, somewhat
18 comical, was in August. The battalion was making a movement, and I was the lead
19 platoon for the battalion going through this area that was mostly rice paddies and few
20 creeks. We had a streambed creek that we had to cross. So, we came up there, the battalion
21 halted behind me, and I sent two men across that walked across with water up to their
22 waste. There should be no problem for my tracks. I'd send my third squad track across. It
23 gets to the far bank, tries to go up the far bank and can't get up. He backs up and he must
24 have backed up into a bomb crater because the track sinks. So, after it sinks it's basically
25 sitting there with just the .50 caliber hatch open and we're seeing it tilted. One of the
26 funny things is it had a bilge pump on it and as it was sinking, the pump started and as it
27 sunk and I have, y'know, the men standing on a track trying to figure out what to do, you
28 can see—I got pictures of it where the water is still pumping. One of the men who can't
29 swim too good blows up his air mattress and paddles it to the dry land. We finally hook
30 up four or five of our tracks chain, a daisy-chain and pull it out. By this time, the
31 battalion commander had already gone ballistic, and the company commander had gone

1 ballistic and had bypassed us and found another crossing point. We pulled the track out of
2 the water and one of the funny things is, if you've seen the cartoons where they open the
3 door, and all the water comes out and everything comes out with it? Well, when we
4 lowered the ramp of the track. Everything was in the track came out with the water. That
5 was a funny incident there. The men sitting there trying to figure out what's happening.
6 Like I said, the battalion commander using all sorts of words. Then the company—he's
7 flying a helicopter above so it's like, "Oh great." So, y'know, that was in August and then
8 in September we have those—there's the Nui Ba Den, the Black Virgin Mountain, that
9 sticks up in III Corps. Great navigational aid. You can see the mountain; you can figure
10 out where you're at. It just sticks up from nowhere. One of the things about it is at night
11 you can set up and sit around it and look at the VC with lights moving along in the
12 mountain on the trails of the mountain.

13 KC: That's got to be kind of creepy.

14 EF: It is knowing that. So, we had the mission to— in Nui Ba Den there's an area
15 called The Saddle where you have the high peak of Nui Ba Den that goes down into a
16 saddle area and there's another little hill next to it. Our mission was to go dismounted and
17 climb it and go up The Saddle. Which was not too encouraging knowing that as we were
18 there at night, we could see the VC in the area and knowing they occupy the area. So, we
19 go up there and start climbing this mountain. Some of the worst vegetation and terrain
20 that I had to operate on that first tour, climbing that. The big boulders down and it's like
21 if somebody falls down there, they would never be seen again because it was so deep. So,
22 we climbed up and for about three or four hours we just made our way slowly up The
23 Saddle area. It started raining which made it even more hazardous because it became very
24 slippery on the rocks. Long story short, the company commander says, "Okay, we've
25 done enough mountain climbing for the day. Let's head back down." So, we head back
26 down, get into the rice paddy area, go back to our tracks. Again, that night we look in and
27 you could see right we were at. You can see the lights moving along the mountain. So
28 that was like the 1st or 2nd of September.

29 KC: Let me ask you this at this point. Being a mechanized unit, how did you feel
30 about dismounting like that? And not just dismounting walking through a rice paddy, but
31 dismounting and climbing a mountain?

1 EF: Well one, being mechanized it was not so bad because all we had to carry was
2 our ammo and some water. It wasn't as difficult if we had the full combat gear as a
3 Regular infantry unit to carry with us. Being mechanized we did not like going where we
4 were separated from our .50 calibers. It was always nice knowing that our .50s could
5 support us. We also knew where we were at that if we got into contact, it would be easy
6 for the APCs to move out and get into position where they could fire, fire support with
7 their .50 calibers because it was all flat terrain. There was not too much water there. They
8 were only about fifteen-hundred meters from the base of where we started climbing up so
9 they could get there in a relatively quick manner.

10 KC: Now, what was the point of this short mission to climb a mountain for this
11 period of time and back down? Was it trying to find contact? What was the story?

12 EF: Who knows, y'know that's one of the things I think as a rifleman in a
13 foxhole, those poor guys never knew what the mission was. All they knew was they
14 would get up and move out. Nobody told them anything. Platoon level we knew a little
15 bit more, company level we knew a little bit more battalion. So, as you went up the chain
16 of command, the mission became more clear. I think it was just to go in and it was a
17 recon by force being a company size. Going in and seeing if we could develop
18 something. We knew the enemy was there. Would they try to do something, or would we
19 find the mysterious door that would open into the inside of Nui Ba Den and find where
20 they had tanks and trucks and all sorts of things inside of it.

21 KC: Right. (Laughter)

22 EF: It was one thing nobody really knew. It was like, "Just go up there and get
23 down." So, we got down that night and looked back and said, "Gee, we're lucky." The
24 next day we're ordered to move out going north of Nui Ba Den to provide road security
25 and just do some searching into the tree lines and jungles just north of that area to see if
26 we can see any indication of VC activity. Our Alpha Company, again, the unfortunate
27 company, is driving along the road, looks over, and spots some VC at the base of the hill.
28 And that they were basically at the base of where we just went up. The company
29 commander alerted the battalion commander that we saw VC and he was to engage. He
30 pulled out with his tracks and started moving up with his tracks. He got to, I would say,
31 about five hundred meters from the base, dismounted his troops, and started moving up

1 and was ambushed. Another exciting time for the Alpha Company got hit real hard. I
2 can't remember how many people that it had killed, but I would say it had five or six
3 killed. I know one of the ones that was killed was the platoon leader and he had been in
4 my OCS class. So, I knew that. What happened was after they got hit, the battalion
5 moved in the rest of the companies there for support. We moved in some 155 artillery
6 pieces that direct fired into The Saddle area. They had Chinooks helicopters coming by
7 and dropping CS canisters, 55-gallon drums. I don't know how many airstrikes were
8 brought in. In the area before it was—you could see the jungle contact area that was
9 pretty much just all you could see was rocks. For a day and a half that's what happened.
10 They just bombarded that area until we said, "Okay, let's pull out and leave." And we
11 pulled out after they'd taken the casualties. So that was in, what, September?

12 KC: September, right.

13 EF: On September 16th or 15th my daughter was born.

14 KC: Tell me about that. How do you find out and how does it make you feel?

15 EF: I had gone out and taken my platoon out on an ambush patrol north of Soui
16 Da. I had—excuse me, I had gotten in position and it started raining and the company
17 commander—I can't remember what time, it was after midnight, called and just basically
18 said, "Bravo 3-6, I just wanted to let y'know that you're a father. Mother and daughter
19 are doing fine. Out." And that was it.

20 KC: How did he find out?

21 EF: Through the Red Cross.

22 KC: Red Cross? Okay.

23 EF: Yeah, the Red Cross had communicated with Mary. When the baby was born,
24 contacted the Red Cross and they had a process in place to notify and let them know
25 which unit I was in. They made the notification. I remember just lying there in the rain
26 and I think it was the first time that I really started thinking about my own safety, getting
27 back alive, and just started thinking. Thoughts running, y'know, I really got to do certain
28 things to make sure I make it back. I think that's when a certain question what I'm doing
29 here, the fear that's associated with being in the rain. Having, at the time, there was Soui
30 Da had an 8-inch Howitzer that would fire and when it fired over our heads it was like a
31 freight train coming in. We had some feeling on that. So, it was just a very, for me, scary

1 night. From the time that I received that information until the morning when we were
2 able to pull out and get back to the company area. Usually when you go into an ambush
3 patrol, y'know, I was able to sleep and just take my turn on guard and being alert. At this
4 time, y'know, I just couldn't do it. All sorts of—the message at that time I did not know
5 what the name was, because my wife and I had picked out several different names, so I
6 did not know which one she picked. So, I had this, “How is she doing? What am I going
7 to do?” This was in September, so it meant I had about six more months of duty, but I
8 was also looking at it at the time, “Okay, after six months, oh shoot, it's coming time for
9 me to have my six months as a platoon leader. I should be getting out of the field pretty
10 soon.”

11 KC: Let me ask you this, you've been notified there in the field and you're
12 thinking about all these different things. The things you've got to do to survive. Did you
13 view that as a good thing or as a bad thing?

14 EF: At the time, I think it was a bad thing because all of a sudden was I going to
15 get super cautious? My feeling was that sometimes you could get too cautious. You
16 needed to provide your security and do the things that you had to do, and you were
17 trained to do. If I would become so cautious and did not act as swiftly in a situation,
18 would I hold back? Where, in reality the best action would have been to move forward.
19 So, there was that hesitation on what my actions would be. I had this other thing above
20 me saying, “Okay, you need to get back.” Well, should I attack, should I withdraw? Do
21 I need to move back?” The company commander just told me to move quickly. Do I
22 move as quickly as he wants me to? So, while that type of questions, y'know, what I
23 would be able to do, started coming up. Where I never had anything in my mind
24 questioning actions and why I would take an action.

25 KC: Now, as you look back on it, would you rather have not been told that night,
26 wait until you get back to at least a night Laager or to a base camp before you found out?

27 EF: No, I don't think so. I think looking back on it, just to be able to find out
28 about it as soon as possible I think was the right thing. Y'know, if I would have gotten
29 back and the CO said that, and I would have said, “Well, when did you find out?” And he
30 would have said, “Seven hours ago I would have said Well why didn't you tell me then?”
31 So, from retrospect finding out then was good because at least there, I had, say, until we

1 packed up and moved out in the morning, time to think without having other things going
2 on. It was sort of like I could go through this whole scenario of the what-ifs and what I
3 should be doing and coming to the realization that what I need to do was continue doing
4 what I'm doing.

5 KC: Right.

6 EF: And not let that influence my tactical decision making.

7 KC: Alright, I wanted to get those questions out of my mind while they were
8 fresh. Now, pick up the story there. You've just been told about your daughter. Pick it up
9 from there.

10 EF: Basically, like I said, I went through all this thought process of surviving and
11 getting back and wondering what the baby looked like. I got up in the morning, went
12 back to the company area, the Laager position and as soon as I got back went directly to
13 the company commander and asked him if he had any additional information and he said
14 no. The only information that he had was what was given to me last night. Later in the
15 day I did get a message from the Red Cross again, giving the name of my daughter,
16 Candy, and that the mother and daughter were doing fine.

17 KC: So, you've got a new daughter.

18 EF: Right.

19 KC: You haven't been married all that long.

20 EF: Right.

21 KC: And you've got six months in-country. You've talked about the things that
22 you thought about initially. About caution, about what am I going to do to get back, and
23 all these kinds of things? How does that play out for the rest of your tour? You've got
24 half a tour to go.

25 EF: Well, one thing was is that I did not get out of the field in six months. I got to
26 stay in the field for almost nine months as a platoon leader. It also put me in from a
27 contact—the extended contact into an area that was the worst contact I'd been in, in both
28 tours in November. It made me, y'know, after each contact, rethink what my actions
29 were. Did I do the right thing from one, looking out, again, for the welfare of my men and
30 did we do the right thing for the men? Type thing. Part of the thing was knowing that I
31 had to be in the field. I had to get the negative out of my mind of being, "Okay, my six

1 months were here. Go another fifteen days, I'm still here." It kept going in through
2 October then into November and part of December finding out I'm still in the field. What
3 am I doing here?

4 KC: Did you ever find out why they kept you there?

5 EF: What?

6 KC: Did you ever find out why they kept you there?

7 EF: Yeah, I was such a good platoon leader. I say that, but again, if you're not
8 doing your job, they get rid of you. I think at the time, for whatever reason, the company
9 commander decided he wanted to keep me there. Then in October, y'know, when I
10 should have come out. I actually should have come in within six months, which was
11 sometime in September. In October, I don't know why, but in November, Captain Bristol
12 was giving up command and we'd get a new company commander. So, the though
13 process there was like—And Tom Tracy who was the first platoon leader—And this is
14 probably the main reason—He went back to become the company executive officer. We
15 got a new platoon leader in. So, from the company commander's perspective, I was the
16 seasoned platoon leader, and he didn't want to have three new platoon leaders to worry
17 about. When Tom left and we got the new platoon leader in, it was at that time that my
18 platoon became the point platoon, it seemed like, all the time.

19 KC: Who was this new platoon leader for B Company?

20 EF: His name was Bill Donald. He was a very confident platoon leader, but from
21 day one, he had friction with Bristol. When I say friction, he was from New England, and
22 he just questioned everything Bristol would do. Y'know, just a very difficult person to
23 work with. So, I think when he realized—Even when I talk to Bristol about two years
24 ago, the first time I talked to him since Vietnam, he had brought up Donald's name as
25 being, "the difficult one."

26 KC: After all these years.

27 EF: After all these years. It's sort of like you remember—it's like you remember
28 troublemakers and you remember your good guys. You don't remember the guys in the
29 middle of the pack.

30 KC: Right.

31 EF: But the problem was now, I wasn't in the middle of the pack anymore.

1 KC: You've been searching for the middle of the pack the entire time and now
2 you found yourself out of—

3 EF: All of a sudden, I'm no longer in the middle of the pack.

4 KC: Right.

5 EF: And the 2nd Platoon leader—no, I take that back. Donald was the 2nd
6 Platoon leader that came in. Bill (Dean) Springer was the 1st Platoon leader that came in.
7 Donald, 2nd Platoon, was the one who did all that. Springer was a new platoon leader, a
8 good, confident platoon leader. Donald was a confident platoon leader as far as tactically.
9 He just irritated the company commander. Springer was just new on the streets, so he was
10 getting his feet on the ground. Again, the problem that we started to have in August, we
11 started getting infusion where we were taking a lot of our long-term boat people that
12 came over were starting to be rotated out of country. They were sent to other battalions so
13 we wouldn't lose everybody at one time. So, we started having just a lot of new people
14 coming in. It was the August/September time frame that the first real, say, replacements
15 came in. The boat people call the replacements, those who came in, in August or
16 September, were the replacements.

17 KC: What did you think about the overall turnover like that? This one-year
18 rotation system? What kind of effect did it have on your platoon and your company as
19 well as the overall American forces in Vietnam?

20 EF: I'm always looking back. When you're over there you love the idea of getting
21 out in a year, but looking back on it I think we should have had the concept like we had
22 in Korea and World War II. You were there for the duration, type thing. That knowledge
23 that is gained in the first six or seven months and experience you lose because if you
24 were a troop, you come in and it takes you six, seven months to really get good and
25 knowledgeable and be efficient. You're there for maybe four or five months more where
26 you're really performing at the level you should be. Then all of a sudden, "Hey, I'm
27 getting short timers." So, you get a short timer's attitude kicking in at ninety days. And
28 then they start and may not be as—they become over cautious and its sort of like—I read
29 the statistics of troops killed in Vietnam. It's like in the first 30-60 days and their last 60
30 days of problems that they would have. So, I never—looking back on it, I don't think it's
31 a good concept. Even today I know that I keep in contact with our second battalion out of

1 Fort Drum quite a bit now, and they're deployed to Afghanistan now. Those troops go
2 over as a unit and stay there. I can see that in looking back, y'know, the boat people, how
3 well trained they were and how they were able to, I think, hit the ground running much
4 more efficiently than the replacement troops were. The replacement troops, again, all of a
5 sudden you got into a thing with some of the other troops, I really don't want to get to
6 know. So, they were always somewhat distant. Y'know, a lot of times when you go to a
7 reunion, the only thing they remember is their nicknames. They don't know the person's
8 name. They were real close to the person that was in their squadron or in their fireteam as
9 far as knowing somebody, but who was in the next squad or the other fireteam is a bit
10 vague where the boat people knew everybody that was in the platoon or the company.
11 These men really had very limited knowledge of who they were serving with.

12 KC: What kind of effect do you think that has?

13 EF: I think that's a negative. Y'know, it's sort of like a band-of-brothers. When
14 you're fighting for your brothers, I think you fight more aggressively, and you're really
15 concerned about it and you want to do your best. If you don't know somebody, you said,
16 "Y'know, I'm not going to stick my head up. I'll let Joe do that." So, I think it had a
17 negative effect on the way of the unit fighting together as a team. I think some of the
18 teamwork is not as strong as it would be with the team being there on a non-rotational
19 basis. The fact of knowing that you're going in and you only have a year. One bad thing
20 is that there's a lot of animosity build up between the enlisted men and the senior NCOs
21 and officers because they're in six months and then they're out. The platoon leader gets
22 out, but I'm still stuck here. And while I'm stuck here, I got to teach somebody else. I got
23 another green lieutenant coming in that doesn't know what he's doing.

24 KC: Tell me about how you deal with that? What do you say to them? How do
25 you get them acclimated to what's going on?

26 EF: It's very difficult. Because of being in the field in the mechanized unit, the
27 contact that I would have, say in my platoon, the contact I had with my platoon is I had
28 great contact with the men that were in that first squad that rode in on the APC that I rode
29 in. The men that were in the other three squads, I did not have as much contact with. I
30 think the other thing was from my perspective my first tour, at the end of six months they
31 still saw me there and at the end of seven months I was still there and at the end of eight

1 months I was still there. Y'know, it made it a little bit easier for them because I stayed
2 there with them. And basically, by the time I got out of the field, every person that had
3 come in when I joined the platoon, every person that was with the platoon, I think there
4 was only two to three, maybe four at the most that had not rotated out of country or left
5 the platoon. So really, I'd gone through that transfer of men who've seen that where I was
6 the one who was thinking about, "Here I have a bunch of individuals that are coming in.
7 They're not as well trained that I have to work with in doing that." I think from an
8 enlisted standpoint I think it was an extreme negative. To see from a morale standpoint
9 seeing their officer's leave.

10 KC: You were the one constant there for, like you said, for around seven months

11 EF: For the time I was with the platoon, y'know, we had three company
12 commanders come and go.

13 KC: What do you do to help get your men, the new men in the platoon up and
14 ready? To make them effective? And they're coming in not one squad at a time, but one
15 here and one there. What sort of system do you have in place to help get these guys
16 ready?

17 EF: The first thing I do is just sit down and talk to them. Find out, y'know, as
18 much as I could about where they were from, their family and where they took their
19 training at. I told them that they would be with a certain squad. What you need to do in a
20 squad. You've got a great squad leader, whoever it was. You've got some men that are
21 very experienced. Y'know, the objective that you need to do is learn from them. Don't
22 take chances, listen to the experienced troops and what to do to take care of yourself and
23 reinforce the fact from a training standpoint, security, you're in a great unit. What the
24 company has done in the past. We talked a little bit about the history of Soui Tre and
25 some of the other contact we'd been in. I talked about the July incident where the lack of
26 security created problems and how we are the best company in the battalion and we're
27 going to lead the way and you could expect us to be in the thick of it. Trying to pump up
28 your *esprit de corp* within the unit.

29 KC: Right. What about the tangible day to day things? Whether it's what you're
30 going to carry with you, how you're going to deal with mosquitos, all those kinds of
31 mundane, small things?

1 EF: That I left up to the squad leaders.

2 KC: Okay.

3 EF: Y'know, I said that you need to take care of yourself. Y'know, each platoon
4 medic was responsible for going around and talking to each man daily when he passed
5 out the Malaria tablets on a daily basis. He would ask them how they were doing, their
6 feet do they have any, y'know any medical problems that they needed brought to our
7 attention. Again, being in a mechanized unit, a lot of the health issues that the troops in
8 the field and Regular infantry unit had, we did not have as much. We had the luxury of
9 having at least hot meal a day. We were able to, with Australian showers, to take showers
10 on a daily basis if we wanted too. So, there was a lot of things. Again, the luxury of
11 mechanized made life a lot easier. The platoon sergeant, they'd go down to their fire team
12 and get with who their buddy would be. He would sit there and talk to them about,
13 y'know, this is what you have to carry. You need to only put-up X number of rounds in
14 your magazine so it doesn't jam. You've got to clean it. Your weapon, the best way to
15 clean it is through this. So, y'know, once you got down to the squad level, the other
16 people in the squad would brief them and talk to them about it. One of the things I would
17 say is that you go in there and you don't tell them what you have to do. You're there to
18 listen and what they tell you to do is what you need to do. You don't go into that attitude
19 of, "I know it all." Cause that will turn the troop off quicker than anything. The same way
20 with the platoon leader taking over or the platoon sergeant coming in with an, "I know it
21 all" attitude.

22 KC: Right. What about this activity? You were talking about the heaviest activity
23 you saw that you were involved with in I believe you said it was November.

24 EF: Right.

25 KC: Take me through that.

26 EF: Okay, in November of '67 we were operating in an area known as The
27 Trapezoid, which was south of the Michelin Rubber Plantation. On the first day of action,
28 they moved into a day laager position and the company commander sent the 1st Platoon
29 with Lieutenant Springer out mounted in his tracks to, I would say, the north, northwest. I
30 went dismounted more to the northeast circling around. The 1st Platoon ran into an
31 enemy bunker system and started taking heavy fire. It had one of its APCs hit. I was, at

1 the time, about a thousand meters away from them and to their northeast, I think. The
2 action of the company commander, who was Mike Mitchell at this time, directed me to
3 move to support the 1st Platoon. I moved into a position of basically responding to the
4 gun fire and was moving in that direction and came up, actually on the flank of the
5 bunker system and started laying down a base of fire to cover the 1st Platoon. The 1st
6 Platoon was able to withdrawal from the enemy contact area, and I continued to cover
7 their actions. Pull back into the company laager position and then I maneuvered in a
8 position to fall back into it. So that was the first day and we were in contact. Then again,
9 the platoon responded. We had no casualties but was able to relieve the pressure on the
10 1st Platoon so that they were able to pull out and move their casualties. They had no
11 KIA's but had seven or eight wounded. Then on the 22nd—that was on the 21st of
12 November, then on the 22nd of November we were given the mission to move back into
13 the contact area the day before. My platoon was in the lead followed by the rest of the
14 company. We moved in through the jungle and then came out to an extensively large
15 bombed out area. Because of the fallen trees and limbs and the bomb craters, I made a
16 decision from having a formation where we were basically three platoons abreast moved
17 into a single column with the platoon. Moved out, the company commander held the rest
18 of the company out as I moved into this open area, bombed-out area. I kept moving until
19 I got about one hundred and fifty to two hundred meters from the company. The company
20 was still in the jungle area and then into this bombed out area I started receiving fire. I
21 walked into an ambush, a U-shaped ambush. When they opened fire with automatic
22 weapons and small arms, we hit the ground. One of the fortunate things for us was that
23 there were so many bomb craters that we were able to drop into the bomb craters to
24 provide us cover from direct fire weapons. Fortunately, they had no indirect fire weapons,
25 mortars, or anything. I can remember looking up out of the bomb crater that I was in, and
26 I could see trenches to my front and there was the pith helmets running along that you
27 could see. They were about fifty meters from us. We returned fire from the initial fire
28 received no casualties. The company commander made a decision to move forward to
29 bring the rest of the company up to support me. When he started moving out from the tree
30 line, he started receiving fire and he held in place. The battalion commander then, after a
31 while, had our C-Company that was there also move up to the right flank of our Bravo

1 Company, but he started receiving fire. So, I was in a position where I was still receiving
2 fire from direct fire weapons. No grenades were fired at me. A little bit later, we did start
3 receiving some .57 recoilless rounds and some RPGs fired. Again, because we were in
4 bomb craters; that was completely inflectional. Men basically stayed down. Right after
5 the initial contact, the company commander had the 81s start firing in support of the
6 position on that. Continued in that position, stayed there continually receiving fire from
7 my front my right and left flanks. The battalion commander at this time was flying above
8 us, brought in some artillery fire to fire on the position. Had called in for air strikes to
9 come in, helicopter gunships. We continued that. B-Company tried to maneuver again
10 and received fire. The battalion commander basically said, "Just hold in position." Based
11 on my reports that I was in a—what I felt, was a relatively secure position because I had
12 not received any indirect fire and had the cover of the bomb craters and anybody that
13 would try to approach me would have an extremely difficult time maneuvering through
14 the bomb craters and the tree limbs that were down and trees down. So, I just sat there.
15 The battalion commander had the 81s fire on one flank. I had switched the artillery to fire
16 across my front of the gun target line and had some other artillery that was in the general
17 support of the battalion fire into the jungle that was beyond the bombed-out area. When
18 the gunships came in, they came in and fired on the trench lines that they could see. From
19 the air you could see the definition of the trench lines that I had walked into. They could
20 see movement in the trench lines, so the gun ships were firing their machine guns into the
21 trench system. They didn't fire any of the rockets. The rockets they fired, they fired into
22 the tree line mainly to stop any additional reinforcements. This situation continued for an
23 extended period of time. After about an hour and a half of being in that position, I had the
24 battalion commander's helicopter, the brigade commander's helicopter, the assistant
25 division commander's helicopter, and the division commander's helicopter all stacked up
26 above me. As you could imagine, something would happen because at that point in time I
27 was the only unit in the division that was in contact. So, they all had to do something.

28 KC: Let me interrupt you here for just a second. What was the foliage, the cover
29 like? If you could see it from up above and helicopters, we're not talking triple canopy I
30 would assume.

1 EF: No, I say it was a bombed-out area. What it was, was it looked down and it
2 was just like artillery and bombs had destroyed every tree in the area and knocked them
3 down. What it was, was leafless, branches and tree trunks laying on the ground and just
4 bombed out craters. From above, you looked down and all you could see what a pocket
5 holes or the bombs that hit, the brown dead trees, and trench lines.

6 KC: Now, you mentioned that you saw pith helmets in the trench line. Fifty yards
7 or seventy-five yards away. You're talking about the different kinds of weapons that
8 they're bringing to bear on you. Were these North Vietnamese units as opposed to VC?

9 EF: We later found out through intelligence that it was the 101st NVA regiment.

10 KC: Okay.

11 EF: The base camp that we walked into.

12 KC: Okay, I'm through interrupting you. Continue with the story, please.

13 EF: So eventually what happened is they brought in other artillery to fire on my
14 flanks. They actually fired smoke rounds in. Y'know, they did all sorts of things. The
15 concern that I had at one point was that all of a sudden, I started taking fire from my rear.
16 Y'know, we were stretched out about seventy-five meters of my platoon, and I probably
17 had thirty men with me. So, they were spread out for about seventy-five meters in a
18 roughly shaped line or column, but positioned in the bomb craters. At the widest point we
19 maybe only had twenty meters for a width in our defensive position because of the bomb
20 craters. So, they brought it in, we started receiving fire from my rear which concerned.
21 They brought in some additional artillery support and at one point in time, I had artillery
22 basically all around me firing both flanks to my front and rear. The closest artillery was at
23 one point, one of my flanks started receiving a lot more higher volume of fire. The
24 battalion commander could see that the VC had moved up a little bit. So, he brought it in
25 within about fifty meters of my position. Again, it didn't really bother us because you just
26 said, "Okay, put your heads down. The rounds are on their way." They'd go slide back
27 down into the bomb craters and the artillery would hit. It would be smoke-filled. You
28 couldn't see anything and then the smoke would clear and then you could see what was
29 happening. One of the things about it is that on this particular day I had the public
30 information—SPC-4 from the battalion was with my platoon and he actually took some
31 pictures of us in the bomb crater.

1 KC: I think I've seen those pictures.

2 EF: Yeah.

3 KC: In your collection that you donated to us.

4 EF: Right. There's one picture where it's clear and then next one is a bunch of
5 smoke, where I'm talking to the battalion commander or the company commander letting
6 them know that there were no casualties and what the status was. So that lasted—we were
7 in that position for about four and a half hours. Finally, the fire stopped. The company
8 commander asked if he wanted the rest of the company to move up to support and for me
9 to move out. The decision was made, and have my platoon just move back to the
10 company and the company back to the night defensive position that was established for
11 the battalion. So, we moved back to that position and for the rest of the day they brought
12 artillery and airstrikes into the area.

13 KC: I'm actually looking at the pictures that you donated to us, and I see you in
14 these positions here next to the RTO talking on the telephone and the smoke and all of
15 that taking place. Just tremendous pictures you've got there.

16 EF: Yeah, you can see from the foliage of what the trees were like.

17 KC: Yes, yes, yes. It's like a moonscape almost. Now, tell me what it's like, Mr.
18 Fahel, to be in this position? You've got your thirty men, you're stretched out along a
19 seventy-five-meter perimeter there, and you've run into this absolute hornet's nest quite
20 unexpectedly. You've got to command these men and you've got to keep these guys
21 calm. You've got to keep these guys focused, you got to keep these guys doing what
22 they're supposed to be doing. How do you handle all that as an individual?

23 EF: Well, one is I think through leadership you have to remain calm and provide
24 that—when they look at you to see that you're calm and reacting. One of the difficult
25 aspects, again, I was with a group in one foxhole, and they were spread out in the other
26 foxhole. So, in one way, they couldn't see what I was doing. So, the other thing was, in
27 communications with just yelling down and saying, "Okay, how are you doing down
28 there?" y'know, calling the 3rd squad leader and talking to him and just the way I would
29 respond being calm and checking everything out. Keeping the men advised, y'know,
30 "Hey, we've got some 81's coming in on our right flank. We've got air support coming
31 in." Just calling that out and communicating with them on that. I think within the group,

1 may have been five or six men with me in my foxhole because I had myself, my two
2 RTOs, the RTO with our 81's and the company RTO, my company medic, my platoon
3 medic, and maybe one other or two other troops that were within close proximity of me.
4 So, when the opening rounds hit, that was the nearest bomb crater to drop into. So, from
5 that perspective it was just keeping the men advised. I think the other part was is that we
6 took no casualties and we continued all for the whole time not taking casualties. They
7 could see the enemy as close as they were. They would call out, "We got so many to our
8 front that we can see." They would engage or the artillery would be coming in. A lot of it
9 was that it was occupied the majority of the time talking to the battalion commander or
10 company commander on the radio giving him updates with the artillery firing coming in
11 too close or would I need it somewhere else. Keeping me informed of when the airstrikes
12 would be coming in and letting the men know that. So, y'know, it was one of those times
13 that during the action, looking back, a lot going on outside of what I was to do to keep
14 my higher command informed of what I was doing. Is there anything that I could do to
15 maneuver the platoon and the position to strengthen our position which I made the
16 decision no, I couldn't because of if we got out of the wrong craters then we would be
17 fully exposed while we moved someplace else. The terrain was such that you couldn't
18 easily make quick movements from one area to another. So, from my perspective, again,
19 it was that the platoon really functioned quite well as individual troops in individual
20 foxholes. When I talked to them after the contact and found out, y'know, found out again
21 when they dropped into the fox hole, they knew they had fire coming from both flanks so
22 there was some men that were facing one side and men facing the other side. Their main
23 concern was, again, that we'd get close enough to throw hand grenades into a bomb
24 crater which would be horrendous as far as inflicting casualties. Once the battle started
25 and we weren't getting that type of weapon thrown at us, I think their confidence in what
26 they were doing was stronger. The longer the battle went on, and the more fire support
27 was brought into support us, the more confident that they became. "Hey, we're going to
28 get out of this."

29 KC: Your guys, I would assume, have machine guns set up. Or do you even have
30 a machine gun or an M-16 like that with you?

1 EF: Yeah, we had our M-79—the only thing we did not have with us was our .50
2 calibers.

3 KC: Okay, you had a weapon's squad there with you.

4 EF: Yeah, we had our M-60s, but the M-60s were in a position where they
5 couldn't really do anything. Again, our thing was let's stay in the hole.

6 KC: Yeah, that's a good hole to be in at that time.

7 EF: Good hole to be in. You'd sneak up. If they could see something, y'know, if
8 they were receiving fire, they might put their weapon over and fire additional rounds just
9 to let them know that we were still there and not to get up. We had so much artillery and
10 the 81's were coming in. We had our company's battalions four deuces coming in and at
11 least two batteries of 105s were firing in direct support of us. Then a battery of 155s were
12 general support that were firing to the tree line. So y'know, we had a lot of noise going
13 on. Y'know, it was all ours. Their fire that we were getting from the initial burst which
14 was quite a bit. From the rest of the time, y'know, they had fired first a machine gun and
15 AK rounds would come in. Every once in a while, some RPGs. Like I said, the .57
16 recoilless was a shock to us. Again, being a direct fire weapon, it didn't bother us that
17 much.

18 KC: Couldn't really do you any damage where your position was. Now how long
19 did this engagement last before the enemy starts to pull back?

20 EF: I would say that they actually started to pull back after about three hours,
21 three and a half hours.

22 KC: So, you're there for an awful long time with all this going on.

23 EF: Again, it was hot as far as the sun baking down on us. It was tiring, but again,
24 because we traveled light, we had a lot of water with us. It wasn't something that would
25 cause too much of a hassle.

26 KC: When it's all over and you have time to sit down, think, and talk. A few
27 months before you would have gotten your platoon sergeant together along with some of
28 the squad leaders and ask them how well things worked for you. Are you concerned
29 about that now or do you have a pretty good feeling of where you are in a big scheme of
30 things?

1 EF: I'm pretty confident in where I am in the big scheme of things. I still would
2 talk to them to see. Again, from their perspective what happened, was there certain
3 elements that I did not know what was going on? What could we have done better on
4 that? Again, after the day before in this day when we got back from the contact, y'know,
5 we were pumped up because this two days that we've been in heavy contact and came
6 away unscathed and we took the best they could throw at us. Type thing. Again, there
7 was a certain cockiness that was with the platoon. Y'know, the same thing was I was sort
8 of cocky. "Now hey, we're walking on water. We can do no wrong. Throw them at us,
9 we're ready for them."

10 KC: So, once it's over, are you guys pulled back to be given a little more time to
11 recover from all this and to get all the things that you need? Are you going to stand out in
12 the field and move on?

13 EF: Actually, on the next day, which was Thanksgiving, we moved back into that
14 same area again with my platoon in the lead, take some sniper rounds, and the battalion
15 commander pulls the battalion back. Or company back. For the rest of the day, they bring
16 in our Thanksgiving meal and we have that, and airstrikes come in all day and artillery
17 into the area. So, they're just saturating that whole area with artillery and airstrikes. So,
18 the next day, which is the day after Thanksgiving, on the 24th, we are given the command
19 to move out into the area again. With this time, both Bravo and Charlie Company
20 departing the area. One of the things that happened, and I can't remember which night it
21 was, was that we got mortared in our night defensive position by the VC. Our Charlie
22 Company actually had an ambush patrol out in the general vicinity out where the mortar
23 rounds were fired. The VC, after they dropped their rounds down the tube, came running
24 down the trail where Charlie Company had their ambush patrol set up. They executed the
25 ambush and killed four VC that had just mortared us. The mortar fire didn't cause any
26 damage. That gave indication that the enemy was still in the area and was still very
27 active. So, on the 24th we moved back into the contact area that we had before with Bravo
28 and Charlie companies. What we found was a large bunker complex after moving
29 through the bombed-out area. It was no contact of the day, found a grenade factory,
30 extensive bunkers and trench systems that had been bombed out from the additional
31 bombings that happened. So that was that day. We spent all day in that area searching and

1 destroying bunkers. The next day, which was the 25th of November, we received a
2 mission on that the evening of the 24th that Bravo and Charlie Company was to go back
3 into the big contact area and start destroying the bunkers. So, we loaded up our APCs
4 with explosives that we'd be using to blow up the bunker systems that we did find. We
5 moved back in Charlie and Bravo Company with Charlie Company on the left flank,
6 Bravo on the right flank and moved into the area. My platoon was set up a little further
7 ahead of the company to hit a certain area that we found to start blowing the bunkers.
8 While we were doing that, Charlie Company was doing the same thing in their area.
9 Charlie Company, one of its platoon leaders found the trail and the platoon leader started
10 walking down that trail with his RTO. They were ambushed. Charlie Company then
11 committed one of his platoons and the company commander is Bill Allison, committed
12 one of his platoons to go in and exploit the contact. They moved up and started receiving
13 a heavy volume of fire and took some casualties. He then moved up an additional element
14 with its armored personnel carriers and it took some RPG rounds. So, what had happened
15 shortly was that they had two confirmed downed individuals. One was the RTO, and the
16 other was the platoon leader of the platoon. They had taken additional casualties with the
17 RPGs that hit the tracks. At this time, the forward artillery liaison officer, Charlie
18 Company, who was a close friend to this platoon leader, for whatever reason moved up to
19 try to see what was the status of his friend. He got to the small clearing where the two
20 were at and he was hit by gunfire. At this time Charlie Company had two of its platoons
21 heavily engaged with VC firing direct fire weapons, RPGs, machine guns, etcetera. The
22 battalion commander then told Bravo Company to move in support. I was the closest
23 platoon and so I moved without my tracks to the area where the other remaining platoon
24 of Charlie Company was located at. We moved there, they continued to try to determine
25 what was happening. By this time, they had I think three or four killed and maybe fifteen
26 wounded in Charlie Company. They were having a difficult time extracting their
27 wounded because of the heavy fire. I was then attached to Charlie Company and went
28 onto the Charlie Company's radio frequency. At that time, I was given the mission along
29 with Charlie Company's 3rd Platoon to move out in support. We moved up. He was
30 moving with his tracks; I was moving dismounted. His 3rd Platoon Charlie Company was
31 on the right flank, my platoon was on the left flank. We started moving up into the area.

1 We got into an area then close enough to the contact area that Charlie Company's 3rd
2 Platoon that I was abreast of started receiving fire. I'd still not take any fire from my
3 positions. We kept moving until the 3rd Platoon Charlie Company had actually linked up
4 with the 1st Platoon that had went in, in support of it. At that time, one of its Armored
5 Personnel Carriers took another hit by an RPG and had some more wounded. The fire
6 that my platoon was receiving was all coming from my right flank. It was where the
7 Charlie Company was engaged.

8 KC: So, it's on Charlie Company's right flank that's hitting them?

9 EF: Yeah, they're getting hit. I moved up to a position where I can actually see
10 the two platoon leaders—I mean, the platoon leader and the artillery FO (Forward
11 Observer) in the clearing about thirty meters from me on that. I had my platoon's two
12 squads online and a squad at my left flank. We continued to move forward low crawling
13 and not receiving any fire. Then all of a sudden, I start taking fire from my left flank. The
14 squad on the left returns the fire. It's sporadic and not that much fire. I would say ten,
15 fifteen rounds and we returned fire, and nothing happens. We keep moving up until we
16 are now—from my point man, the forward man on-line is about seven to eight meters
17 from the two casualties that are in front of us. At this time, we're in an area of the triple
18 canopy jungle. It's clear somewhat on the ground. We have a lot of ant mounds around us
19 that we can basically try to get behind. We're hunkered down in that. Charlie Company is
20 having a heavy volume of fire and it's just, y'know, deafening to hear the fire that's
21 coming from my right flank. My two lead platoons or squads continued to start returning
22 fire somewhat to the front and to our right flank which would be the left flank of Charlie
23 Company's platoon. The battalion commander and the company commander, Charlie
24 Company, wanted to know if I can extract the two individuals that are in front just on
25 that. I have one of my men, John Yoshikane, low crawls up to where he can grab the foot
26 of one of the individuals and it's the artillery FO. He is slowly able to pull that person
27 back, but we start taking fire then from the front. So, we start returning fire into that
28 position. At some point in time, the artillery liaison officer for our company, Lieutenant
29 Ken McKenzie, for whatever reason comes forward to my position and stays there with
30 me. Basically, I think it was to help direct the artillery rounds that were now starting, that
31 had been called in all along. When I started taking fire from my front, they wanted him

1 up there to help provide direct fire support. He sees that John is having a difficult time
2 dragging this individual back and Ken immediately jumps up, runs up to him, grabs him,
3 picks him up, turns around, and runs back to my position. As he's running back, he gets
4 hit in the back. It's a superficial wound, but he's able to get the artillery First Lieutenant
5 Van Patten back. He is KIA. So, we have one individual that's in front of us now which
6 is the platoon leader. He's FO—not his FO, his RTO that was with him in the initial
7 contact, when he dropped, he dropped several meters back and he was able to be
8 evacuated by the platoon from Charlie Company. We're still heavily engaged to our front
9 now. We're starting to get heavily engaged while Charlie Company is taking some
10 additional casualties and having a difficult time. I had John go up as close as he can, and
11 he grabs that platoon leader's foot and tries to extract him. What we'll find out is when he
12 had fallen, he had fallen in such a position that his arm was locked around a tree, a limb
13 or something and could not be budged. John was able to get close enough to see if he was
14 wounded or KIA. He signaled back that he was KIA. So, I had John stay there for an
15 extended period of time just because one, it offered him some cover and concealment
16 being in that position. We continued to return fire. The battalion commander got on the
17 company push and talked to me and asked me if I could get the—if I could extract the
18 platoon leader. I told them that the platoon leader from my man up there with him is KIA
19 and one of the most difficult decisions I ever made was I told the battalion commander I
20 did not think I could get him out without taking additional casualties. He said, "Roger
21 that, I'll get back with you." After I told that to the battalion commander, the company
22 commander got on and asked me if what I told the battalion commander was right. "Is
23 that you think I would take additional casualties?" I said, "Yes." Because in his position
24 we had to fully expose ourselves when Ken McKenzie was able to get the FO out, he had
25 gotten hit. I was confident that we would take additional casualties. The Charlie
26 Company commander said, "Roger that." And a few minutes later, which seemed like
27 hours later, came back on and asked if I could maneuver my platoon in such a way to
28 relieve and bring fire on the enemy that is having the rest of his 3rd Platoon and I think
29 that's his 1st Platoon pinned down. So, at that time I sort of shifted my two squads that
30 were online to the right and somewhat forward to where we were able to bring some fire
31 more to the left front of the pinned down Charlie Company. We kept that fire up. The 3rd

1 brigade commander, at that time, decided what he would do is bring a helicopter in to put
2 smoke on. I think to give us more concealment, but the helicopter dropped the smoke on
3 top of us so we couldn't see what we were doing. So that didn't work. There was concern
4 about the artillery because we were in triple canopy jungle that if they hit the trees above
5 us that it rained shrapnel down on us so when they were firing, every once in a while, you
6 could hear the shrapnel hit a tree and the shrapnel going over your head and all that. It
7 was a very scary scenario because we had one company with two platoons pinned down,
8 I was basically in a limited ability to maneuver because of Charlie Company on my right.
9 The enemy that was obviously in a good bunker position, trench position that was totally
10 concealed to my front and had taken fire from my left flank. The difference from this
11 contact and the one where I was walking through the ambush was the people flying above
12 you in an ambush, could see what was happening and could bring the artillery in. Here,
13 we would pop smoke and the smoke would drift up through the trees, so it was hard to
14 really pinpoint positions. We continued to slowly maneuver to the right flank and lay
15 down a base of fire. Eventually, in that maneuvering, we started taking a greater amount
16 of the fire than Charlie Company was able to do. The company was able to take the third
17 platoon that was now to my right rear, in some ways, start maneuvering it back. We were
18 able to also continue to lay down a base of fire where he was able to maneuver the rest of
19 his company out of the kill zone. So, they were able to move back. As they moved back,
20 sort of spread my platoon out into to cover their front in the right rear with our machine
21 guns and our fire. They were able to evacuate Charlie Company and get them back to a
22 secure area where they were able to evacuate. Their wounded, I was given the command
23 to then start pulling back. We pulled back under fire and maneuvered out in the contact
24 area. That lasted about four and a half hours.

25 KC: Wow.

26 EF: From the time Charlie Company had the initial contact until the fire was
27 done. It was about four and a half to five hours. With me in contact, maybe three hours of
28 it.

29 KC: That's an incredible amount of fire for that amount of time.

30 EF: Yeah, it's one of those things you're in that contact area and it's not all
31 continuous fire. There'd be lulls in the firing and it was like there'd be a lull and you'd

1 say, “Well maybe they pulled out.” And so, you’d stick your head up and then they
2 opened up again or then we would return fire. So, there’d be moments of complete
3 silence when nothing is happening. All of a sudden there’d be ten, fifteen seconds of
4 automatic weapons fire or small arms fire, very heavy. Or you get silence and all of a
5 sudden you get two or three more rounds in, and they’d let y’know that they hadn’t
6 vanished.

7 KC: Tell me about your men. What are they doing, how are they performing?

8 EF: The men were performing exceptionally. When I say that, when we moved in
9 I said we need to go online. They went online. They slowly maneuvered into a position to
10 provide the firepower to the front and to the flank. A lot of the times—and again, I was
11 behind a tree trunk or an anthill or just on the ground you’d look around and see them.
12 Sometimes they were just laying on their back waiting for something to happen because
13 there was nothing there or they were in a position to be able to fire if they could see
14 something. Because of the dense undergrowth, you couldn’t see that far in front of you.
15 The only thing you could see is where the two KIAs were. There was a gap in the
16 undergrowth, and it was like you could see there and maybe three or four meters beyond
17 where they were at was more undergrowth. The enemy would fire, you could see the
18 movement with the leaves and the branches where the rounds came flying through at you.
19 But the men, again, I think they performed with a little supervision on my part. Y’know,
20 screaming and hollering, “Okay, we just need to move up. Okay, move up a little bit
21 more. Extend to your right. Move your machine gun over to your right a little bit more
22 and bring fire to your right more.” So, they were able to do that with just giving the
23 simple commands moving forward. At times, they would give the arm and hand signals
24 pointing to a certain direction. They performed brilliantly in my prospective. We were
25 able to maneuver into an area and have contact where a sister company took serious
26 casualties and my platoon was able to go in, take no casualties, get into position by
27 maneuvering, to take some of the pressure off the sister company and have them able to
28 extract and get out of the area.

29 KC: About how long a line were you deployed along?

30 EF: Let’s see, my line was—I want to say close to thirty and forty meters with my
31 two squads. It’s very compact.

1 KC: I was going to say, that's relatively compact. Then again, because it's so
2 dense, sometimes it's a whole different scenario.

3 EF: Yeah, it's so dense that what I wanted and one of the things was when we
4 moved into areas like that, one of the standard procedures is maintain eye contact with
5 the men on your left and right. You don't have any gaps in it. If you get a gap where you
6 can't see somebody, all of a sudden you may start drifting off and get extended to an area
7 where nobody knows you're out there.

8 KC: Now, are you firing at this time, too?

9 EF: No, I never fired my weapon in contact.

10 KC: Not the entire time?

11 EF: Not the entire time, both tours.

12 KC: Both tours, not once?

13 EF: My thing was I was on the radio. Again, my thing was to be there in a
14 position to talk on the radio to keep the Charlie Company commander advised on the
15 progress of my movement. And my battalion commander on progress of my movement. I
16 was not from the point man, the furthest into the contact area. I was maybe three or four
17 meters behind him. It was the type of thing it's like, "What good would my firing" I
18 could see what to do.

19 KC: Right, and your job is to lead and to coordinate.

20 EF: My job was to, again, to lead the men, to keep my higher command advised
21 of my situation. As long as my platoon was functioning in such a way that I had not taken
22 any casualties, I was still a combat efficient unit that could do something. There was a
23 hesitation to bring additional, y'know, the rest of my company, Bravo Company with two
24 remaining platoons was in an area providing security for the medical evacuations. So,
25 they were in a position where they could not readily come forward. Also, there was some
26 question from higher headquarters if they wanted to commit additional troops into the
27 contact area. They were concerned as they had gone into the area the day before nothing
28 happened and then to get something like this happening. From the reports that came from
29 the platoons in Charlie Company as far as the number of positions that they were
30 receiving fire from indicated a substantially larger force than expected.

31 KC: Who were you in main contact with? Again, was this NVA or was this VC?

1 EF: It was the 101st NVA Regiment.

2 KC: And you found this out during Intel later on you said?

3 EF: Right.

4 KC: So, this was a large outfit that you guys ran into?

5 EF: Yeah, it was the 101st NVA Regiment. Now, whether it was the whole

6 regiment or a company of the regiment, from what I heard later it had to be larger than a

7 platoon-sized element that was there. So, I think it was maybe a reinforced platoon or a

8 company that was providing that secure area on that. One of the things that was is that

9 this is one of the units that was supposedly moving down into the area for the Tet

10 Offensive. I think what they were doing is they were maybe trying to avoid a large-scale

11 contact involving the whole regiment, but to inflict as much casualties as they could to

12 keep the regiment available for the Tet Offensive.

13 KC: Right, right. Of course, this is probably not anything y'know absolutely for a

14 fact, but just kind of piecing things together afterwards.

15 EF: Oh yeah, it was like a lot of this was done after, y'know, when the

16 intelligence came in and talking to the individuals that were there after my tour that was

17 like the battalion S3 and one of the battalion commanders talking about, y'know, the intel

18 after the fact, type thing that came out after I left country.

19 KC: What happens to B Company, what happens to your platoon when this

20 engagement is over? When you guys pull back?

21 EF: When we pulled back, we were even more cockier than we were before. We

22 had just, y'know, again this was the third or fourth day that we had gone in and to heavy

23 contact and come away unscratched were our sister platoons, our companies had taken

24 casualties so, yet it was like, "Gee, we're the charm platoon. Where do we go next?

25 We're the bad boys on the street." I was cocky that way because they performed, we can

26 do it, what's next for my platoon?

27 KC: Feeling pretty good about things.

28 EF: Oh, feeling excellent about it.

29 KC: Alright, do you pull back to a rear area again after these several days or these

30 two intense periods of contact where you just stay and push.

1 EF: We get to stay in the area. Then I think after that contact, what happens is that
2 we don't move into the area the next day. What they do is bring in air strikes and artillery
3 into the area the next day. We just sit in an area and observe it and we don't send out any
4 patrols. We just, y'know, sit there and cool it. Basically, the platoon is extremely hyped
5 up. They're biting at the bits to go do something. They're just gung-ho and I'm the same
6 way. So, the next day we're given the mission, my platoon, to go out and basically skirt
7 around into the jungle of the contact area. So, I move out with my platoon, initially. I go
8 out and all of a sudden, we take some machine gun fire to our front. I deploy our squads
9 that were somewhat in a column to online bring fire against the enemy and move
10 forward. That little incident, maybe the last three or four minutes, there's no return fire.
11 We do some recon by firing and nothing happens. We call and get directions from the
12 company commander, and he says, "Well, continue to move forward." So, we start
13 moving forward for about another twenty, thirty, forty minutes we move forward and
14 then we get hit again with small arms fire. We hit the ground, we start returning fire, and
15 I get word from my point squad that they have one man down. I say, "Okay, who is it?"
16 And they say, "It's Specialist Meeks" Who is my platoon medic. I look around because
17 my platoon medics supposed to be with me and he's not with me. So, I say, "How bad?"
18 and they say, "He's hit bad." I said, "Can you bring him back?" So, they bring him back
19 to my CP (Command Post) where I'm at with my RTOs and I'm only from where he was
20 hit to where my position. It's only about thirty meters, it's not that far. They bring him
21 back and put him down and he has a head wound. I just look at him and I don't know if
22 he was KIA from the initial round or if he died when he was in my lap, but he died.
23 Contact the company commander and tell him that I had just taken a KIA, who it is. He
24 says, "Hold one." And then he comes back a little bit later. He says, "I want you to move
25 back. Don't pursue the enemy." So, we start maneuvering back out of the contact area
26 and make our way back carrying the remains. There was probably, from all my time in
27 Vietnam it was one of my most difficult days. Because here, my platoon walked on
28 water, was the badass platoon that could do no wrong, and we take our first KIA. When
29 we made it back to the company area, carried the remains over to the CO's track, put him
30 down, he called in a medevac to evacuate the remains. I walked back to my platoon, and I
31 was in an extreme condition of depression all of a sudden—Because all of a sudden, my

1 balloon had bust. Something happened to my men. I looked around at my men and they
2 were in somewhat the same __ (??) attitude. They were just sitting there, with their heads
3 down, nobody was talking. I went over to my track and just sat down and just, y'know,
4 couldn't believe what had happened. Just all sorts of doubts coming in. I just looked and
5 the men didn't know what to say or what to do. It was, like I said, probably one of the
6 worst days of my life of having to go through that. One of the things that happened next
7 was that our battalion commander, whose name is AJ Norris, comes over and he sees me
8 sitting there. He comes up to me and he said, "Young man, you need to pull yourself
9 together. Your platoon has performed exceptionally during the last five days. Your
10 platoon needs you to provide leadership to them now. I want you to get up and provide
11 that leadership and get your men home." He put his hand on my shoulder and said, "Son,
12 I know you can do it." That, again, I respected Colonel Norris before, but the respect that
13 I've had for him ever sense that moment has been—it's like those words of guidance and
14 direction and there to provide that support to me. If he hadn't of done that, I don't know
15 what would happen to me. The rest of my tour in Vietnam I probably wouldn't have not
16 gone back for a second tour. Y'know, I don't know what my life would have been
17 because how that death of that one man impacted me. My two tours in Vietnam as a rifle
18 platoon leader and a company commander. Specialist Meeks was the only man that I lost
19 to hostile fire. Again, what Colonel Norris said and the way he said it in such a calming
20 voice had been like a mentor to me. Y'know, how he actioned as a battalion commander
21 and as a man and that his actions have really shaped my life ever sense that time. When
22 his action as my battalion commander that day and for the following period of time he
23 was in the command until February then I think he took over September, that short period
24 of time. I look back at it and he had a greater influence on my life than my father did.

25 KC: Now, it's one thing for the Colonel to come say that to you, it's another thing
26 for you to implement. How do you pick up what the Colonel says to you and how do you
27 approach your men and what do you say to them? What do you do?

28 EF: Well, it was difficult, but again, I was just challenged by the battalion
29 commander, so I was like, "Okay." Stood up, took a deep breath, and I just went around
30 and basically said the same thing to my men as he said to me. He said, "We performed,
31 we took this hit today, but we can't let us impact on what we're going to do next and how

1 we do the next day. We need to get home, and we need to focus on that. We need to think
2 about Meeks, remember him, but we need to do our job so we can get home.

3 KC: And your men responded to this?

4 EF: Slowly and surely, they responded.

5 KC: Here's a tough question for you. Meeks dies. Whether he dies in your arms
6 or died on the way or he was KIA immediately. There's this young man that is dead and
7 he's in your arms. What goes through your mind? What are you feeling? How does that
8 affect you at that particular time?

9 EF: It was such a shock to me. I think the first thing that went through my mind
10 is, "Why was he there? Why was he the point man?" That's basically what happened.
11 What did I do wrong to get him out there? Why wasn't he with me? Why didn't I miss
12 him to do that? And then I looked down at him at his head wounds and the sort of type of
13 thing is that—and now even today, anytime I see a head wound it makes me sick. I can't
14 stand to look at it. I think on one side, "I can't take this, why is he doing this?" Then
15 another part of me came up and I really had to control my emotions and not let something
16 like this get to me. I had to become—had to remove that emotion. That's part of some of
17 the problems that I have had is that after that incident, my emotions don't come out. I
18 have been able to withhold my emotions into myself and not express those to other
19 people. So, it gives an appearance at times that I don't care, but I do, I just can't let it out.
20 It's hard for me to explain holding him there and the impact that it had of losing him. Part
21 of it was, like I said, through all those months I was living my dream of leading troops in
22 contact and all of a sudden, this bubble, this dream burst because I had a man killed and
23 the realization of what war is and how deadly it is. It's not a game anymore. It's not a
24 dream anymore.

25 KC: How has Meeks affected you sense that time?

26 EF: Uh, I want to say there is not a week or something then all of a sudden, his
27 name doesn't pop up. I had another man that was killed, Thomas Priestoff, he was my
28 track driver. And I was able to get out of the field, finally in December, mid-December
29 around the 15th. I flew back to our basecamp and then got up in the morning and found
30 out that Sergeant Priestoff was KIA that morning. So, the day afterwards. He was killed
31 by friendly artillery fire. Those two individuals' deaths are individuals that in some ways

1 haunt me to a certain degree, but it's something I constantly think about. Every once in a
2 while, of Meeks and Priestoff.

3 KC: Does this particular instance, does this particular time and this event and
4 death of Meeks, in this particular case does it affect the way you operate? Does it affect
5 the way you go through day to day? The way you lead your men in combat the way you
6 lead your men on these missions or sweeps.

7 EF: I don't think it did from a tactical standpoint except that haunting thing is
8 why he was up there and not with me. Maybe making me, from a standpoint, being a little
9 bit more aware of my immediate surroundings around me. Who's here, what are they
10 doing. Like I said, it's always been the platoon medic always stayed with me in case there
11 was casualties, I could direct them where to go. After that initial contact that we had, he
12 was there with me. When we got up to move out, somehow, he got ahead of me and
13 ahead of our point man and walked into the ambush. So, like I said, it was a traumatic
14 experience for me and doing that. Like I said, it was like the end of the dream. All of a
15 sudden, y'know, I didn't walk on water, my platoon didn't perform. Y'know, there was a
16 lot of doubts that were raised in my mind. Was I so cocky that I moved out and didn't
17 apply the proper security to my front? Were my men in the same cockiness, just with an
18 attitude with whatever happens, y'know, we can face it and overcome it with no
19 difficulty?

20 KC: You think the men went through this as well? Second guessing where they
21 were?

22 EF: I think so. I think anytime you have contact, and you lose men, that there's
23 always the second guessing what you could have done better. It's just like back on the
24 day two or three days before when Charlie Company was hit real hard and I was up there
25 maneuvering. I constantly think, "Well, could I have done something different?" One of
26 the things that always makes me think about is I had my ninety-millimeter recoilless rifle
27 with me, and I had some beehive rounds. Could I have maneuvered in this position where
28 I could have fired at ninety towards where the bunker was and to remove the foliage and
29 really possibility of killing whoever in that bunker to relieve the pressure? Y'know, that
30 type of thing. So, every time I've been in contact, and you lose men, you wonder what
31 you could have don't differently on that. The day I was surrounded, y'know, what could I

1 have done differently? I said, “No, nothing. You did everything right.” That day with
2 Charlie Company with maybe the possibility of bringing the 90 up. This one was,
3 y’know, what did I really do wrong? Now, I must have done something wrong to cause
4 that to happen. That’s where I think when Colonel Norris came up to me and basically
5 said, y’know, “You’ve done well.” In a way saying, You had no control over what
6 happen to Meeks and that you—for the past four or five days your platoon has been
7 exceptional in getting in and getting out and you saved a lot of lives in these five days by
8 the actions of the platoon. You need to move forward and not let this one incident destroy
9 all the good work and put you in a position where you get into more trouble in reference
10 to that.

11 KC: I think maybe that’s a good place for us to stop today.

12

1 Kelly Crager: This is Kelly Crager continuing an Oral History Interview with Mr.
2 Elpidio Fahel. Today is July 14th, 2010. I am in Lubbock, Texas, on the campus of Texas
3 Tech University and Mr. Fahel is joining me again by telephone from his home in
4 Humble, Texas. Okay, Mr. Fahel, as we discussed off the recorder a little bit ago, we
5 finished up this particular action in November of 1967 in which you lost your medic,
6 Meeks. I'd like to pick up the story from that point there in November of 1967.

7 Elpidio Fahel: Okay, from that point on the company and battalion just continued
8 conducting missions in and around the Michelin plantation. On the 15th of December, I
9 got notified that I'd be going back to the rear to become the company XO (Executive
10 Officer). So, on the 15th, we had, had our weapons platoon leader. Greg Smith was
11 moved over to take over the 3rd Platoon. Since he had been in the field for a time, there
12 was no crossover time where I had to stay in the field with him. So, he just came over and
13 I hopped on the first chopper that came in that day and flew back. Soon my duties as the
14 company executive officer.

15 KC: How did you feel about becoming the XO leaving the field?

16 EF: I felt elated just to get out. It was one of those things, y'know, you kept
17 wondering what was happen—when it was going to happen because it was like you're
18 supposed to be six months and so from my perspective with Candy being born in
19 September, that was on my mind. I was looking forward to getting back in and spending
20 the last few months back in the rear area and taking it easy and just doing the XO
21 functions. One of the things I'd like to discuss before we get into my XO duties was the
22 mission—one of the missions that our mechanized unit had. That mission—and this was
23 the mission that from the time I took over the platoon until I left was the road security
24 missions. These were missions where the company would have responsible for the main
25 supply routes between Dau Tieng and Cu Chi at different points and times. It was sort of
26 rotated with the mechanized units within the division. The reason why I wanted to talk
27 about it was some of the best duties you could have and some of the worst. When I say
28 some of the best is that you would go into an area and just run the road, sit in a position
29 and secure it. Two types of road security missions that we had. One, is that we would run
30 the road prior to the convoy coming through basically leading the convoy then once we
31 got and handed it off to another unit that provided security from another point on then we

1 assume our mission. The other type of road security mission would be where we would
2 run the road and then we would set up positions along the road in security and what that
3 type of mission was that they'd be running convoys all day or vehicles would be going up
4 and down the road all day. Then we would stay there and provide security and then when
5 the last vehicle would go through, we got all clear then we would hook up. When we had
6 the security missions where we would provide security all day we would set up in squad-
7 sized locations where the company would have a responsibility for a certain sector along
8 the road and then drop off the different platoons. The platoons that would drop off—
9 would have our tracks or squads would set up in a certain distance apart and provide
10 security. When it was in the rubber plantations and a little bit of jungle, the distance
11 between the squad locations was not as great. When we were in the rice paddy open
12 farming areas it would be a great distance between it. We would pull into position; the
13 tracks would go into position. We'd set the fireteams out on each side of the track and
14 just basically we would be anywhere from ten to twenty-five meters off the road. So, we
15 were right on the road. We'd sit all day and basically do nothing. It was extremely boring
16 in one respect because we weren't doing anything, but it was a relief of not having to
17 move and really worry about what was happening. When we did these road security
18 missions, one of the things that we did like to see was the Vietnamese coming out and
19 talking to us and walking around and the kids out. If the Vietnamese were out there on
20 the road and they were around our tracks, then we felt pretty secure that nothing was
21 going to happen to us. If for any reason we were in an area where there was population,
22 but they didn't come out then we were more on guard of possibly something happening.
23 Fortunately, in these type of road security missions nothing ever happened as far as any
24 encounters. The men—the prostitute whores would come up and engage the men.
25 Sometimes they'd go off into the bushes and do it. We tried to tell them not to, but like I
26 said—I was away—squad locations so if I wasn't there, then there was a greater—well, I
27 knew they were doing it. While the cat's away the mice will play type scenario. And it
28 was something that for me, I couldn't fathom why they would do something like that, but
29 y'know, I'd say, "Boys will be boys" and "Men will be men" back at that period of time.
30 KC: And there's almost nothing you could do about it?

1 EF: You try to say, "Okay, just make sure you use a rubber, or you have a rubber.
2 Take precautions." The other thing was, "If you're going to go do it, just make sure
3 there's some security around." Cause you'd hear all the stories about the prostitutes
4 coming in and taking them out. All sorts of evil things would happen to the troops doing
5 that. Like I say, the same thing with the stories when we were doing road security. Of the
6 kids coming up and throwing a grenade in the track, you always were, in the back of your
7 mind, you never saw anything like that happen. As far as with the prostitutes, nothing
8 ever happened with the men except getting some VD (Venereal Disease). So, we did a lot
9 of the road security missions like that. At the end of the day, we would roll up into our
10 company position and what would happen is the whole battalion at times could be
11 providing road security where would have the companies all along the road or sometimes
12 it would just be one company within the battalion providing a security for a certain
13 portion and the rest of the battalion out on normal operations. Also, when we did some of
14 the road security missions, they would do the MEDCAPs and we would provide security
15 for the medics to come into the villages and provide medical care to the Vietnamese in
16 the area.

17 KC: Now, did you have any contact with the Vietnamese, the indigenous
18 personnel there? Any extended contact?

19 EF: No, not really. They'd come up to the track. I'd give them my food, some C-
20 rations and talk to them. For whatever reason, I'd never really had any extended contact
21 with them. Even when we went into the MEDCAPs (Medical Civic Action Program) and
22 provided security in the village. The platoon usually stayed out a little distance away. The
23 battalion surgeon and the medics or our S5 that would actually go into the villages. I
24 think there's a lot more of my men that would have a lot more contact with the
25 Vietnamese than I did. It was just something I didn't want to do.

26 KC: Let me ask you this while we're on the topic. What was your opinion of the
27 indigenous personnel of Vietnamese civilians when you got there? Did that view change
28 over time?

29 EF: Prior to my arrival, y'know, I'd say prior my arrival, I'd say the propaganda
30 where we were fighting the war to protect from communism and we had the people
31 behind us and even, y'know, some of the things when the adverse press in reference to

1 the attitudes of the Vietnamese. When I went over, I actually felt, y'know, they probably
2 wanted us there, but I think very quickly I got the sense that they really didn't want us
3 there. They just wanted us to leave them alone. They didn't want the Americans to get in
4 a position where it would cause the Viet Cong, NVA to come down on them and retaliate
5 because they were helping. They were—that's just the sense I had. That they really
6 wanted to be able to farm and do it in peace and quiet and they did want their life to
7 change. They didn't like the concept, I think some of them, where we would go into a
8 free-fire-zone area where there was heavy NVA, VC activity and relocate a whole village
9 from where they had grown up and their ancestors had farmed into another area. I think
10 there was always some type of resentment to that. I think there are some of them who
11 were very happy to have us there to protect them from the actions of the VC and NVA. In
12 general, I think the majority of the population just wanted to be left alone by both sides so
13 they could just go on with their life.

14 KC: Now, you mention resentment that the Vietnamese harbored toward the
15 Americans in some instances. Did you detect any resentment in your platoon or even in
16 the company of the Americans toward the Vietnamese?

17 EF: No, I think, y'know, the resentment towards the local indigenous population I
18 think was as bad as it was towards those Vietnamese that were in the ARVNs (Army of
19 Vietnam) or in the Popular Forces. There was that resentment because those who were in
20 the Popular Forces and the ARVN, I think we just had a very low opinion of their ability
21 to do their job as far as if something was required in combat that you could not count on
22 them. We had some Popular Forces attached to the company several times and it was like
23 sometimes y'know, you put one squad out front, and you put one squad behind them to
24 make sure if they did anything that you'd have some—that you could get them. You just
25 didn't count on them. I think for the indigenous farmers and all that, I don't think there
26 was any resentment, and the men enjoyed the kids. The kids were cute, and they were fun
27 to talk to and all that.

28 KC: I've got you chasing this rabbit here for me. I'll ask you another question,
29 you mentioned the ARVN and some of the people's attitudes toward it. What was your
30 attitude toward the ARVN? Did you work closely with any of them?

1 EF: Not the ARVN. We had seen them in some operations, but they were not in
2 conjunction with our unit. Where we had our dealings was with the Popular Forces. We
3 had several times that we had the Popular Forces squad or a platoon that was attached to
4 the company and would go on operations with them and it was just like, "You've got to
5 be kidding me." Y'know, I'd rather not have them with me than have that extra
6 manpower and firepower because I just had no confidence in their fire discipline or what
7 they would do. If things got really bad, would they turn on us? There was always that
8 question in your mind whose side—y'know, they were wearing non-descript uniforms so
9 they could easily go to either side.

10 KC: Now, were you involved in any firefights or in any missions in which the
11 RPF were involved?

12 EF: Not where they had to fire their weapons. So, y'know from a—it was just
13 watching their movement in their action. It's sort of like one time we were up in an area
14 south of the fire support base at Prek Klok which is way up north in Warzone-C. Almost
15 near the Cambodian border. We had a platoon with them, and it was an area that at night,
16 you expected something to happen. There they were, they had a bonfire going, they were
17 screaming, y'know, having a party. All of our men are, "God, what are they doing to us."
18 The company commander called and tried to get somebody on the radio to interpret it and
19 bring their leader over to tell them, "Put the fire out and calm down." The rumor was they
20 were celebrating Ho Chi Minh's birthday because it was in May. So, it was just, y'know,
21 I think anytime you go in like that and you have, y'know, some trained soldiers, they will
22 look down on the indigenous groups there. Cause their lack of training, their lack of
23 motivation. Why are they here? So, it was one of those things that I was very happy that
24 we did not get into any contact with them.

25 KC: Alright, I took you off your narrative, I'm sorry about that.

26 EF: That's fine.

27 KC: Now pick back up here. You're talking about these road security missions
28 and how nice they were to have a little bit of that boredom for a change, I guess.

29 EF: Yes. Again, it was just the type of security. Like I said, nothing ever
30 happened. The main concern that we had when we did those road security missions was
31 going through the rubber plantations because there are always some contact there, some

1 heavy contact in the rubber plantations. We felt, y'know, that because of the terrain and
2 you could see where the rubber trees came up to the road, it always was a very good
3 location for ambush. There was one area that there was a 90° turn that the convoying
4 tracks always had to slow down at. And that was always a concern that was a perfect
5 ambush sight. Several ambushes happened within five hundred meters of that turn off and
6 on through the years. So, it was a hostile area. We did not like to think when we had to
7 run the convoy route because sometimes if the order was just run and get on the road and
8 go. Other times we would move slow enough to try to observe if there was any mines or
9 wires across the road or the road had been disturbed or looked like it had been dugout.
10 We very rarely would go down the road with mine sweepers, engineers in front of it to
11 secure the road and make sure there was no mines. That was initially—then after the Tet
12 Offensive, then it was an issue where we started doing that at a more frequent basis
13 because there was a lot more incidences where mines were planted on the road. The VC
14 got smart and understood that from a mechanized unit we would go off the road. So,
15 during the dried seasons not only planting the mine on the road, but they would also plant
16 the mines out into the rice paddy. If we went off the road, there was a chance of hitting
17 mines. A lot of the mines were places in the coverts for drainage along the road, so it was
18 a natural hiding place for it. Most of the mines that we did encounter were just pressure
19 sensitive type. There were a few that we encountered that were command detonated. But
20 fortunately, while I had my platoon, none of my tracks hit a mine. I think from—I don't
21 really remember the company at all ever hitting a mine. Several of the other companies in
22 the battalion hit mines. I don't remember my time in the field that our company did.

23 KC: And you never had any sort of action, any sort of ambushes or anything like
24 that while you were providing security?

25 EF: No, and while we were providing security, we did not have any contact at all.
26 One of the concerns again in the contact was because if we were doing an all-day
27 mission, then we would have our squads out. Like I said, if we were in the jungle, maybe
28 250 to 300 to 500 meters between locations. If we were in a clear rice paddy area, we
29 could have anywhere up to 2000 thousand, 3000 thousand meters between locations.
30 Cause of some of the rice paddy areas you could actually—if we were 3000 meters away
31 with binoculars you could see the next track. So, it was good. But that was always a

1 concern because you'd have a track and a squad out there and y'know, maybe at the most
2 twelve men. They could easily be overrun, or something happened very quickly before
3 any support could get to them.

4 KC: Alright, take me through your time as company XO, B Company.

5 EF: Okay, B Company XO, that was the routine of the day was I get up, go to the
6 mess hall, have my coffee, my breakfast, go back to the company headquarters and the
7 headquarters had an orderly room, First Sergeant's office, my office. We also had—our
8 beds were in back of the building. The First Sergeant and mine. We also had the mail
9 room. Back in the rear area there was a company clerk, a mail clerk, a First Sergeant, and
10 myself. We had some, I want to say, five or six cooks that were back there. We had some
11 supply people. So, the amount that was actually assigned that would be in the rear area
12 was probably, at the most, fifteen to twenty men.

13 KC: Where was your rear area, by the way? Where was this located?

14 EF: It was in Fire—see what was it—Dau Tieng. Dau Tieng was right alongside
15 the Michelin Rubber Plantation. It was established and I think it was Camp Rainier was
16 the actual name of it, but everybody calls it Dau Tieng. The base camp had an airstrip,
17 three battalions of the third brigade, the 4th division/25th division. The artillery battalion
18 and support. Aviation company that was a troop lift supply flying the Huey's and also
19 had a platoon of gunships stationed there.

20 KC: So, this is a pretty big outfit that you have back there.

21 EF: Yeah, there was a good size, you say, large firebase camp. It wasn't really a
22 firebase; it was more like a basecamp. The perimeter, our battalion had responsibility for
23 eight bunkers along the perimeter. The responsibility, we had three executive officers
24 from the three companies in the rear. At night we had to pull a staff duty officer and we
25 rotated, so every third night we were staff duty. Our function was to go down to our
26 battalion headquarters—battalion rear TOC (Tactical Operations Center) and just stay in
27 there and monitor the radio and battalion operations. Back in the rear area we had a
28 battalion Sergeant Major and a battalion executive officer S1 (Administration), S4
29 (Logistics), and S5 (Civil Affairs) were functioned out of the rear area. The maintenance
30 section and commo section as far as repair. Each of the companies had their own mess
31 hall so it was Headquarters Company and the three-line companies each had their own

1 mess hall responsible for providing food and supplies to their respective companies. Get
2 up, like I said, go eat breakfast, go back to the area, do limited paperwork cause there
3 really wasn't that much paperwork, wait for lunch to come by or lunch time. Go to the
4 mess hall and eat. Have lunch, go back. And then we would have the requirements for
5 our resupply and then I'd work with our battalion supply officer—I mean, company
6 supply officer in the back of the rear and the First Sergeant and we would get our
7 companies resupply ready to go on that and find out when the choppers were to come in
8 and then just take the supplies and mail it down to the chopper pad, put them on the
9 chopper, and they were off. Go back to the rear area, hang around for dinner. If I had staff
10 duty officer, then I'd mosey on over and get in battalion TOC. Find out what was
11 happening, the locations, and just hanging around there. If I did not have that duty, I'd
12 just go back to the company area. Again, I had dinner and just hang around there. I
13 played cards with my First Sergeant and platoon and some of the supply people that were
14 back in the back. We'd play cards, I think the main game we played was Cribbage. We
15 listened to the radio, wrote letters. Every once in a while, we would have a movie that
16 would be back in the rear area, so we'd go watch a movie. Then we'd just probably by
17 9:30 it was time for lights out and just go to sleep. Back at that time, really, I did not
18 notice any serious drug problems or race problems back in our rear area at that time. Part
19 of that reason was, like I said, we had a rear area group, but very rarely did we have a lot
20 of the Regular troops that were back in the back for whatever reason. We had some, but
21 usually we had a minimum number of troops. We never really had a lot of troops in the
22 rear area like I did my second tour. One of the other responsibilities as executive officer
23 was to make sure that the men that if they were DEROSing (Date Estimated Return from
24 Overseas) back to the states, try to get them out of the field, get it processed out, and get
25 them headed home. Individuals that were going on R&R, make sure that their orders were
26 cut. We got them out of the field. Come back from an R&R and then getting back out in
27 the field. That was just, y'know, in a way it was extremely boring, but you had, at the
28 time, the more comforts of home. You had three hot meals; you had a nice bed to sleep
29 in. You had a—we had a shower there so we could take a shower daily. It wasn't without
30 comforts. We would go out—I'd go out sometimes with one of the other company XOs
31 to what we call the garbage pit which was an area that was outside of our perimeter

1 where we dumped a lot of garbage and just fire weapons for the fun of it. It was like I
2 remember firing a burp gun (PPSH-41), AK-47, M1-carbine. It was like firing a lot of the
3 older weapons that we would find. The captured VC weapons, y'know, test firing every
4 one of them and doing that. It was just one of the things to pass the time of day. We
5 would every once in a while, get called to go up to brigade for some type of briefing and
6 go back. It was that type of duty. The other aspect of Company XO which was the
7 unpleasant duty was if we took a casualty KIA, they would be evacuated back to the
8 grave registration area at brigade area. The responsibility of the XO was to go up there
9 and if he could, make positive identification of the KIA, come back to the rear area, and
10 start the processing for the KIA as far as going and getting all his personal affects and
11 getting that aspect of the operation going for KIAs. Any wounded that were in the field
12 that were evacuated out and they would come back and be on bed rest for a period of
13 time. It was the company's XO and the First Sergeant to monitor the status of the men
14 and make sure they got their medical treatment. When they were cleared for return to
15 duty making sure they got back out to the field.

16 KC: Now, did you miss being out in the field at all?

17 EF: No.

18 KC: You'd seen enough at this point?

19 EF: Didn't miss it at all. It was one of those things where I missed some of the
20 men and some of the certain aspects of it, but as far as y'know, if I had my choice, at that
21 period of time XO was a lot better than out in the field. Because the thing with the XO,
22 y'know, you didn't have to be on guard for something happening 24/7. In a way you
23 could let your guard down which made it nice in that respect. One of the other things as
24 far as the resupply of the company, if the company was providing road security,
25 depending on where their road security mission was, there were times that I would take
26 our company deuce-and-a-half, and our POL truck and I'd go in a jeep and take a three-
27 vehicle convoy out to the company and provide resupply. Usually, we'd leave the
28 perimeter of the base camp around 3:00 (PM) and get to the company within 30/40
29 minutes; drop off the resupply, fuel up the tracks, then head back to be back in by 1700
30 Hours. Definitely didn't want to be out overnight. We would make those types of runs if
31 the company was within a certain location that would make it easy to make that turn

1 around. I look back on that and I think, God, I can't believe I was driving on a road
2 with—let's see, there was my driver of my jeep, myself, the driver of the deuce-and-a-
3 half and his shotgun, the driver of the POL truck and his shotgun. So, there's like five or
4 six of us on the road. Y'know, now I look back and say, "God, that was stupid." Why
5 was I doing something like that? Why was I out there? (Laughter)

6 KC: Yeah, you could be out there hanging out literally, I guess.

7 EF: Right. There were other times as the company XO that I would catch a
8 chopper out and fly out and spend the day with the company or spend the night with the
9 company. Y'know, just to go visit them, just to get back out there. Which was nice to do
10 that because that sort of broke up the monotony back in the back. The company
11 commander would, between 1800 hours and 2000 hours, every night, would call in with a
12 task for the next day as far as what supplies or things that you wanted done as the
13 company commander to check on status of something. What supplies he would need. The
14 First Sergeant and I—and the supply sergeant would be our—we had a radio in our
15 company, orderly room that we could monitor the company freq. on and just keep that
16 going and doing that. One of the things as I went back to the rear as company XO on the
17 15th of December. I think I told you that my driver of my track, Tom Priestoff was killed
18 by friendly artillery fire on the 16th of December, and I had to go back and identify him. I
19 can't remember if it was on the 17th or 18th of December. Our platoon sergeant of our
20 second platoon, it was at night. The platoon thought they had movement outside of their
21 position and Sergeant Ashford started walking his platoon's perimeter and one of the men
22 woke up just for whatever reason, was asleep, woke up, saw this movement and shot and
23 killed the platoon sergeant. Platoon Sergeant Ashford was a good NCO. He was E7 with
24 fourteen- or fifteen-years' service, an excellent NCO very well respected by everybody
25 within the company. Like I said, he was our second platoon, and the second platoon was
26 the platoon that got hit real hard back in May. The platoon sergeant at the time in that
27 May contact that had already rotated to the states. Sergeant Ashford came in and we had
28 that one platoon leader that I told you was weak, and he came in and really solidified and
29 got that platoon together. When Lieutenant Donald joined the company and took over the
30 2nd Platoon, they really functioned as a good team on that. It was quite a shock and I
31 know the individual that shot, I think he's had nightmares for the rest of his life. He has

1 not come to any of our reunions, and nobody's been able to contact him. The ones that
2 were around with that individual for the rest of tour, y'know, they could tell that that
3 incident really impacted on his psych.

4 KC: Let me ask you about that. How do you feel about something or a set of
5 circumstances like that and the outcome of something like that? Are you angry, resentful,
6 do you feel bad for the guy? What are your feelings on that?

7 EF: Probably all of them. I think one of the things is that from my readings early
8 on about what happens in combat, you hear all sorts of—read about incidences like that
9 where our troops just, y'know, by accident like friendly fire, inflict casualties on our own.
10 It's horrible that it happened, but I also realized things like that happen in that situation.
11 That individual, y'know, like I said, he was asleep, and he heard this noise, and the
12 Sergeant may have been a little bit, y'know, towards the outside of the perimeter versus
13 on the inside of the perimeter. It could be just where he was at. The guy just woke up,
14 heard something happening, and fired. If he would have been on guard, then to me it
15 would have been a different story, but he was startled awake. I can't remember if they
16 said they had movement or had taken incoming rounds or not. I can't remember if they
17 did. If they would have taken some incoming rounds, that may have been what woke him
18 up and waking up and seeing movement there—because usually if you're in your night
19 position you do not expect to see any movement along the perimeter. It's all on the back
20 behind the perimeter.

21 KC: Were you responsible for providing or writing any of the letters to the
22 families back home?

23 EF: Yes, I did.

24 KC: Did you do it in this particular case?

25 EF: I did not do Sergeant Ashford's and Sergeant Preistoff. The main reason there
26 is I'd just gotten back to the rear and that happened on the 15th, 16th, 17th of December
27 and I was getting ready to go on R&R so the S1 shop took over that responsibility. I think
28 as time went on, at least in our battalion. Instead of the company commander, those
29 letters were compared by the S1 shop and then sent out for the company commander to
30 sign. But if there were some of the letters that would come from family or friends
31 addressed to the company asking for one of the ones asking for names of individuals that

1 were serving with an individual so that they could send care packages to them. I would
2 respond to them saying, “Just send it to this address and I’ll ensure that the goody
3 packages get to the individuals.”

4 KC: Now, a moment ago you were talking about some of the things that you
5 would do in the rear. One of the things you mentioned was listening to the radio. What
6 sort of songs do you remember? Or what sort of songs remind you of your time in
7 Vietnam?

8 EF: Y’know, there was a—Diane Ross, Diane Warwick; I remember her songs.
9 The Ames Brothers. We had a CD or a tape with their songs on them. So that’s what we
10 would play sometimes. I remember the Ames Brothers as far as “Little Glow Worm” one
11 of the earlier songs during the Vietnam era. Actually, a lot of the songs that we listened
12 to, it’s hard for me to remember them because I don’t want to get them confused with the
13 songs that were played in the movies that represented that period of time. Some of them, I
14 don’t even remember. *Apocalypse Now* when they had the, what is it? I can’t think of it,
15 Rolling Stones songs. I don’t even remember hearing that, “No Satisfaction” hearing that
16 over there. After I’d come back, it seems like that was one of the songs that was played a
17 lot. I think most of the ones that I seemed to remember were Diane Warwick, Glenn
18 Campbell. My First Sergeant was from the south and he liked country western.

19 KC: Okay, that’s, for example, a good point. Describe within the company, or
20 even with the platoon or whatever it might be. Describe the kind of makeup and I don’t
21 want to use the words cliques in a negative sense, but the people who have hung out
22 together and types of personalities and kinds of music, the types of recreation whether it
23 was alcohol, hard-liquor or beer. Describe for me the dynamics within the company like
24 that.

25 EF: Well, I’ll go with the platoon in the field. The platoon in the field, it seems
26 like when I took command of the platoon, there was two different cliques where the
27 individuals that were from the south and those that were from Chicago. They sort of hung
28 out together. I’m sure that some of the ones that were from Chicago had connections with
29 the mob, you just knew it. (Both Laughing), I think. So, they pretty much hung out
30 together. The men within a squad pretty much stayed together as a squad, and that was
31 the clique within the squad. You’re talking about eleven men in the squad. Maybe have

1 nine out in the field, two fireteams. It was pretty much the clique was who your foxhole
2 buddy was. They got together. If there was an individual for whatever reason, they didn't
3 get along well with that. They were moved around within the squad and go to the other
4 fireteam and doing that. Out in the field, y'know, they would sit around in the back when
5 they got the beer and eat and they would sit with the squad or the fireteam, sit, eat, joke,
6 share what goody boxes they got in. The music would go from rhythm-and-blues, rock-
7 and-roll, and country-western. It pretty much, y'know, I'll listen to this for a while and
8 then you got to listen to mine. There was no bickering on it type thing. When I was back
9 as a company XO, it was much harder to tell because we didn't have that many
10 individuals. I would say the group that I had very close contact with, which was my First
11 Sergeant, the mail clerk, the company clerk, and the supply sergeant. So, there was like
12 five of them. They were all from the south. Our mail clerk's name was Dittman, and he
13 was from somewhere in Texas, but his family had oil. I remember that. He was a quiet
14 individual that had just came in and did his job and was waiting to go home. The mess
15 hall group, I remember our chief—well one of the cooks was from Los Angeles and he
16 was in the porn industry. So, he was able to get a lot of porn movies for the troops.

17 KC: Popular guy, I'm sure.

18 EF: Popular guy. Y'know, it's hard to say for the clicks and all that. In my first
19 tour it didn't pop out like it did my second tour. Y'know, when I say that, in the field the
20 platoon had naturally the Blacks, we had Hispanics, we had an Indian, Italians, and they
21 pretty much intermingled together as a group. I think part of that was that the fact, again,
22 initially they came over on the boat and they took their initial training together. As we
23 started getting the replacements and that started happening in September, what I saw was
24 the cliques then started to develop where you had the boat people were with themselves
25 and then replacements were over on the other side. So, there was a distinct grouping then.
26 The long-term boat people were very reluctant to get another person, say a newbie, into
27 their group or into their squad or into their fireteam. Part of that was they just had—it was
28 concern that they knew how these other four or five people functioned and they really
29 didn't want somebody there that they weren't confident with. So that created some
30 leadership problems of having to break up that type of click and say, "Okay, I've got five
31 boat people in one fire team and none in the other. We've got to split you guys up and put

1 two, three, and put the other one in and let them know that the reason I'm doing that is
2 these newbies need somebody to train and they need somebody to watch over them. The
3 newbies need somebody to learn from.

4 KC: Now you mentioned reunions a moment ago, do you still see a separation
5 along those kinds of lines of the earlier guys, boat people, like you say, the replacements?
6 Does that still exist?

7 EF: Ohhhh yes, and it's very bad. It's created some—even within some not—our
8 reunion that I go to that one of the other groups had some distinct problems where the
9 boat people really didn't want the people replacements to come to their reunions. They
10 don't feel that they can share the experience with them. In the reunion I go to is the 22nd
11 Infantry that involves all of them and we've had to work hard to get the boat people to
12 come and participate in it along with the replacements because the replacements felt the
13 animosity there. "Hey, you guys came after us." You came in and we did all the hard
14 work. We built the base camp, we cleaned them up, we had our big battles and you guys
15 did nothing.

16 KC: Very, very interesting, very interesting. Well, you talked about some of the
17 music and went on front there. What movies did you get to see?

18 EF: Oh shoot, I'm trying to remember which movies. I don't remember. It was
19 nothing spectacular. I remember on my second tour of seeing the Green Berets.

20 KC: What did you think of that? This is out of chronology, but I want to hear
21 about it. What was your opinion of the movie?

22 EF: At that time, it was just a joke. People were just laughing. Oh, give me a
23 break making fun of it. Y'know, that couldn't be true. Y'know, why do they even do
24 that? Come on. It was more laughter going on when that movie came, and we saw that.
25 But I just remembered that. As far as the other movies that we saw, I really can't
26 remember. There's nothing that would stick out. Part of it was that the screen was a
27 plywood painted white. You had the projector sitting there. The sound system was lousy.
28 It was like, oh shoot, we'll be here for an hour, hour-and-a-half just something to, nothing
29 spectacular.

30 KC: You also mentioned R&R shortly after you went back to the rear to Dau
31 Tieng. Where did you go for R&R?

1 EF: I went to Hawaii and met Karen and my wife Mary in R&R and we spent
2 seven days in Hawaii.

3 KC: What sort of things did you do when you got there? Obviously, there's some
4 things I don't want you to discuss (laughter), but in the larger sense, what did you do?
5 What was it like to get back and decompress and be with your wife? What was that
6 experience like?

7 EF: It was very refreshing. I remember the first thing I wanted to do was go have
8 a nice big fresh salad and a big, good glass of milk. It was like getting to having regular
9 good food again was the main objective on that. I think the other thing was to be able to
10 just get out and walk around and see the sights. We went over to Pearl Harbor going
11 down to the beach and just sitting. Y'know, not doing much, but just being together. The
12 thing I remember was the food. The other thing that I did, we went and saw the movie,
13 "*Gone with the Wind*." The reason I wanted to go see that is on one of the road security
14 missions, one of the things you always wanted was to be a full-on thing was having a
15 good book to read and I just happened to have "*Gone with the Wind*" there, so I read that.
16 When I got back, I had not seen the movie before, and it was playing in one of the
17 theaters. To me it was just a great thing. You read the book within two or three months to
18 go see this epic movie in a nice theater with good sound and great popcorn. I thoroughly
19 enjoyed it.

20 KC: Even though it probably ate up almost one full day of your R&R.

21 EF: It did.

22 KC: That's really cool. Now, one of the things, I don't believe you and I have
23 discussed this, but one of the things that I've heard talking to veterans is that when they
24 went on an R&R that it was difficult to go back to the field, go back into country. And
25 more difficult than it was leaving the United States. When they left the US I often times
26 hear that they would tell me that they didn't really know what they were getting
27 themselves into when they went over there. When they went to R&R and it was time to
28 leave for R&R after a week from Australia or Hawaii or wherever it may have been, that
29 they knew damn good and well what they were going to go back into. It was very, very
30 difficult to do that. Especially for those who met their spouses in Hawaii. What was it
31 like for you to go back from Hawaii back to Dau Tieng?

1 EF: Well one of the, I think it wasn't the fact of leaving Mary that was difficult,
2 but the fact knowing that I was going back to really get in and start doing the company
3 XO function that I was not going back out to the field so there was a different expectation
4 there. I think those individuals that went on R&R and then came back were left knowing
5 that they were going back into an actual combat situation out in the field. They were
6 probably a lot more apprehensive and a lot more concerned on their part and reluctant to
7 do it. I think it probably did weigh on them more and it was a much more difficult time
8 getting on that plane and departing because of what they were going back to. Where mine
9 was I wasn't going back to that scenario, I was going back to a different scenario and,
10 y'know, I just had about five, six, seven days in the rear before as XO. So, I had not
11 really done that much as an XO getting my feet on the ground that I would be going back
12 to that scenario, and I would be getting back in January from the R&R, and I just had four
13 months, three months left in country, so my time was real short. It was short as the
14 executive officer, so it wasn't as difficult for me to return where I know other individuals
15 talking to them. Like I said, they made those comments on how much more difficult it
16 was. The ones that had the difficult were the ones that were going back to combat. I think
17 those that were going back to a rear area position were not as apprehensive or concerned
18 about it.

19 KC: Now, you said you'd get back sometime in early January of '68. Of course,
20 we know what happens at the very end of January 1968. Are you ready to go into the Tet
21 Offensive from your perspective?

22 EF: Not really. When I say that is if I got back in-country on the 1st—into Saigon
23 on the 2nd of January on the evening on the 1st or 2nd of January the brigade was at Fire
24 Support Base Burt at Soui Cut. The 271st and 272nd NVA regiment attacked that firebase
25 that night. I mentioned Soui Tre where the unit received the Presidential Unit Citation. At
26 that firebase at Soui Tre, it was just two companies providing security for the artillery
27 battery that was in that firebase. Soui Cut Burt is only about two to three miles from
28 where Soui Tre was. So, it was in the heart of the Warzone-C, and it was also somewhat
29 in the heart of the infiltration route down towards Saigon. So, they hit Fire Support Base,
30 Burt. The difference with Burt was that on the west side of the perimeter you had the
31 whole 2nd Battalion, 22nd Infantry. The whole Mech battalion was on one side of the

1 perimeter. On the other side of the perimeter with the whole 3rd of the 22nd Battalion,
2 there was a road that ran north/south so that was the dividing line between the two
3 battalions. They have the whole battery—the whole battalion of the 77th Artillery, 105s in
4 the perimeter and they had a battery of 155 SPs (Self-Propelled) inside the perimeter. It
5 was a good, strong, position. The NVA attacked up the—from the north was the
6 secondary attack and the primary attack came from the south of the position. They hit
7 around one thirty in the morning and the battle lasted until around eight o'clock in the
8 morning, so it was a very long, extensive battle. Our Charlie Company, 2nd, 22nd one of
9 the platoon leaders, whose last name is Kelley, won the DSC (Distinguished Service
10 Cross) at that battle. One of the rememberable things that he did, he maneuvered his
11 tracks into a position. His tracks were on the position south part where the main attack
12 came down the road. They were calling airstrikes in, and he was directing the airstrikes
13 in, and his comment was, “Do you see my burning track? Drop your ordinance 50 meters
14 south.”

15 KC: Oh wow.

16 EF: There were over four hundred NVA body count in the battle. So that
17 happened on the 2nd of January. I got in-country, and I flew into Dau Tieng during the
18 second and got in just in time to hear about what was happening and they were doing the
19 resupply of ammunition and evacuating everything in reference to it. I wanted to get on
20 the chopper and fly out, but the CO (Commanding Officer) told me, “Just stay there and
21 make sure we get all of our resupply.” So, it was like, for our battalion, the Battle at Soui
22 Tre and the Battle at Burt were major engagements. At Burt, one of the participants at
23 Burt was Oliver Stone and supposedly the final battle scene in “*Platoon*” represented that
24 contact. He was with the 3rd Battalion, 22nd Infantry.

25 KC: You say supposedly represented that. Do you care to elaborate on that?

26 EF: Well, it's supposedly in the book and there's some other that had written it. I
27 think he said, y'know, that was the battle before he left country and that was the battle
28 that he sort of represented his action as an ending factor of his tour in Vietnam was that
29 battle.

1 KC: Okay. What role do you play as company XO fresh into the position and
2 fresh back from R&R? So, what do you do from the time you land to the time you find
3 out what's going on?

4 EF: I land, and they send a jeep up to get me. When I got onto the jeep the driver
5 said, "Sir, there's a big battle blowing there." So, he took me down to the company area. I
6 got a quick briefing from the First Sergeant saying what happened, that the company took
7 one KIA and three or four wounded. Nothing really other than that. He said that this is
8 what they need on resupply, so I got in the jeep, I went up to our battalion S4, found out
9 what the plan was to get the resupply out. He said, "Here's the list," that they had already
10 flown several resupply missions out already. I went back to the company area, found out
11 from the First Sergeant. Then the company commander called, and I let him know I was
12 back in the area. He's asking me what did he need and he said, "This is why I need." It
13 was mainly some more ammunition, some food, to make sure I get the mail out, loved
14 their mail. Coordinated that, got the additional ammo that they wanted, the other supplies
15 that they wanted. They made sure the mail was there and put it on the next chopper that
16 went out to the area. Then just sat back and listened to what was happening and went up
17 to the battalion TOC and met with the—stayed in that area there. I got briefed and
18 listened to the radio and what action had happened there. I just listened to the area. Then
19 just settled back down and went and had something to eat.

20 KC: What happens in the aftermath of this battle? Is there a concerted effort on
21 the half of the battalion and the officers to try to figure out what happened, when it
22 happened, how it happened, that sort of thing?

23 EF: Yeah, there was the intelligence and again, after the fact there was a lot of
24 continued activity in the area after the battle and an aggressive patrolling by both our
25 battalion and our sister battalion. Immediately around the contact area to see what was
26 happening and to see if they could do the contact. The word that we had was that both of
27 these regiments were in Cambodia and were moving down to be in a position to support
28 the Tet Offensive. They had just come down and somebody said it was just like a target
29 of opportunity. They saw the helicopters going in there, they saw that was a firebase
30 being set up. These two regiments were the same regiments that attacked fire support
31 base at Soui Tre. It was where they quickly made a plan of attack to attack down the road.

1 Their intelligence that some people have said is that, that attack was a prelude to the Tet
2 Offensive and that it was very beneficial for the American's part that they attacked
3 because we did limit and inflict enough casualties to make those two regiments semi—
4 not semi, but less combat effective that they could have had those additional troops.
5 Could have been a position to attack the Cu Chi base camp or all the way down to
6 Saigon. I never heard if they ever knew what their final mission was.

7 KC: They found that in the Intel or anything like that.

8 EF: The Intel and some of the prisoners they captured. So, from that day until the
9 Tet Offensive, the brigade was operating up into that area and the things that we did find
10 was a lot of indications that the Viet Cong/NVA were moving south. There was some
11 indication that something was happening. Actually, prior to the Tet Offensive, the
12 battalion—well, the whole third brigade that was operating up in this area was moved
13 back into their base camp at Dau Tieng. We were moving back into a position around the
14 base camp. We didn't go into the base camp, but we were in a position that we could
15 easily support it. I think I've read later on where there was some intelligence where it
16 wasn't a complete surprise of the Tet Offensive that the IIIrd Corps commander, I think it
17 was Waylon, actually requested to bring the troops into a position. Yes, the Tet Offensive
18 took everybody by surprise, but at least for our brigade, we were not up fifteen, twenty
19 miles into the jungle north of our base camp. We were down in the area where we could
20 support.

21 KC: Right.

22 EF: During that period of time from that battle to the Tet Offensive, my main
23 function was, again, doing the daily routine items of making sure that the company got its
24 resupply and providing staff duty and patrolling the perimeter at night.

25 KC: It seems rather strange to me that these two regiments would have blown the
26 secrecy that was so much a part of what they're trying to do with the Tet Offensive to
27 attack a target of opportunity. It seems kind of odd that that would be the case.

28 EF: I know, initially it was one of the things that their route that they had to come
29 down that we were blocking it. Because they were coming down that in that area, in
30 reality with the artillery we had there and our patrolling, we, in a way, could have been an
31 extreme blocking force. Besides where the base camp was at, I mean our firebase, we had

1 patrols out, y'know, anywhere I'd say from three to five clicks in each direction off and
2 on during that period of time. You could have made it difficult for them to avoid us.
3 Again, y'know, did they have the intelligence to know that they were hitting such a
4 strong position? Or was it something they were thinking was a smaller position. Did they
5 know that it was basically two battalions in a defensive position, or did they think it was a
6 company defensive position or a battalion minus with just one battery of artillery? They
7 may not have had the intelligence to know what size force they were coming up against.
8 So, their target of opportunity may have been, "Hey, it's a smaller force." And then all of
9 a sudden once they got committed, they may have just pushed it.

10 KC: Did it give anyone any pause to think that two entire NVA regiments were
11 that far south and committed offensive actions?

12 EF: I don't know from an intelligence battalion level. In the area that we operated
13 in we were all, again, most of the time we had large contact. Back in November it was the
14 101st NVA regiment. So, we were always operating where there was three or four
15 regiments in our area of operation. But the 272nd and the 271st that were hit and
16 decimated at Burt and may, I guess, they went up into Cambodia, got refitted, and came
17 back down. I think, y'know, from our position at company and battalion level not
18 knowing the big picture of where, y'know, the big map that you had down in Saigon and
19 division or corps headquarters, y'know, the positioning of the enemy units and Intel
20 locations. We didn't have that so maybe at brigade or division level, definitely corps,
21 they had a better picture of what was happening. That attack may have been one of the
22 things that made them think that "Okay, this unit was here, some of the intelligence." A
23 prelude to the Tet Offensive, at least in IIIrd Corps. From readings I've read recently, it
24 seems like the IIIrd Corps was a little bit better prepared than other areas in Vietnam in
25 reference to Tet.

26 KC: Of course, it's incredibly easy for us, y'know forty some odd years later to
27 look back in hindsight and say, "Well, why wasn't this seen?" Because you had to be
28 there at the time.

29 EF: Right.

30 KC: And take in what you can know.

1 EF: I think intelligence is such a guess and again, if you capture a VC soldier,
2 what does he know? Capture one of our guys and say, "What's the big picture?" They
3 don't know what's going on. "Oh well, I had breakfast this morning and we were moving
4 here." "What unit are you with?" "Well, I think I'm with the 22nd infantry."

5 KC: I'm with a certain platoon, I think it's this company. Right.

6 EF: Yeah, even today you talk to at reunions, or you talk to somebody on the
7 phone that you locate. Y'know, they can't remember what platoon they were in or what
8 company they were in.

9 KC: Yeah, absolutely

10 EF: What really confuses them is those that were with the 4th Division and then
11 when we changed colors and became the 25th Division; that really confuses us. Y'know,
12 some of your enlisted have no concept of Army structure. They know what a platoon and
13 company is, but when you get up to brigade or division or corps, they have no, y'know,
14 what structure that is. "What corps are you in?" "I don't know, what division?" "Gosh, I
15 can't remember."

16 KC: Right, and of course that makes sense. When was the 4th—the transfer took
17 place, when was it, like in August of '67 or something like that?

18 EF: Yeah, August 1 we exchanged colors.

19 KC: Right, okay, okay. Are you ready to take me into the Tet Offensive of '68?

20 EF: Sure.

21 KC: Alright. Set up the entire thing for me. Tell me where you and your outfit
22 were. Tell me about the conditions, tell me about how it begins, how you find—or get
23 word of it. Take me through the entire process. And I'll feel free to interrupt you at any
24 time.

25 EF: Yeah, you can interrupt me anytime and ask questions, no problem. As I said
26 is that, for whatever reason, prior to the actual start of Tet, the battalion did move into an
27 area of operation that was actually South of Dau Tieng which would put it between Cu
28 Chi and Dau Tieng. It was in an area that was in close proximity to the main supply route
29 on the roads. I got—Tet Offensive, for me, started when our base camp got hit with
30 mortars. That was the first time that the base camp had been hit with mortars since I was
31 the XO. So, from the month of December through the end of January we had not yet

1 gotten hit with mortars. So, we were alerted to a mortar attack and took in quite a few
2 rounds within the base camp area, but none in our battalion area. I got reports of that and
3 as the day went on, really not got any word, we just got mortared. And then that was
4 early in the morning. In the afternoon, we got mortared again. It was like mortar rounds
5 into the base camp twice in a day. Something's happening. The company was alerted, or
6 the battalion was alerted, and they were in position. They were then moved into a road
7 security configuration that put them along the MSR. I think there was, at the time, three
8 separate company laager positions along the MSR. So, we did not get any information
9 that there was a wide scale attack going on in-country. We just knew that our base camp
10 had gotten hit. That went on until I would say the next day. Actually, we got mortared
11 again that night. We had three mortar attacks. The next day we woke up and got some
12 more mortar attacks. That's when I went up to the battalion TOC and they were talking
13 there that there's been wide-scale attacks that the US Embassy had been attacked. The
14 VC were attacking at Bien Hoa, Saigon, and several of the other large population areas
15 within Saigon. The Cu Chi base camp was under heavy attack and that Tay Ninh was also
16 under attack with mortars and rockets. At that time, we got the mission that the battalion
17 who would have the responsibility providing road security between Dau Tieng, Tay Ninh,
18 would be Bravo Company. Charlie Company, I think was going to have Tay Ninh down
19 to Trang Bang and then Alpha Company would have Trang Bang down to Cu Chi. So,
20 our battalion had road security missions and was to be prepared to be a reaction force to
21 the Cu Chi Base camp and to the Dau Tieng base camp and Tay Ninh base camp. The
22 mission was that they would patrol in the morning and then initially, the companies
23 would go—Charlie Company would go up to, I think, Tay Ninh and actually go up to the
24 base camp. Bravo Company would come into Dau Tieng, and they would stay in the base
25 camp at night. I can't remember where Alpha was stated. I think may have went to Cu
26 Chi. So, they did those missions and then for the month of February, that was the mission
27 was just the road security missions. It seemed like every day we were getting mortar
28 rounds. Several of the mortar rounds had hit in our battalion area and none in our
29 company area. As always, you'd lay awake at night, or you'd be hearing—and you could
30 hear the rounds drop down the tube and somebody would yell incoming, and you'd run
31 and dive under some cover or go into a bunker that was placed. We had right outside of

1 our orderly room, a Connex container that was sandbagged in, so that's where, if we were
2 close enough, would run into there and take cover. Otherwise, there was some other,
3 where they had half coverts were some sandbags over in a little trench that were in the
4 area that you could dive into. They were positioned within a short distance of where most
5 of the troops that were there on a full-time basis could quickly get to if something
6 happened. At night, we beefed up our perimeter security. Usually there was like three or
7 four men in a bunker. We'd put some more men up there. We had—I think initially they
8 had one of the executive officers, besides pulling staff duty, but then actually put one out
9 of the perimeter to take responsibility for the perimeter and then the staff duty officer,
10 one of the other XOs, would have the responsibility for any reaction force that was
11 organized. So that was the other thing. It was a reaction force that was assigned in case
12 something happened. It would be under the control of the staff duty officer to pick and
13 respond to. So that was what happened during February, and it was just running the roads
14 up and down. We had several of our tracks hit mines. Most of the mines that they hit
15 were off the road versus on the road. There was no engagement with VC directly by our
16 company. It was all mines, and they may have taken a few sniper rounds. The perimeter
17 was probed a few times by the VC/ NVA, but part of the perimeter was manned by the 3rd
18 of the 22nd or 2nd of the 12th. Not in my bunker area of responsibility. I think one of the
19 big surprises that we had during that month of February was one of the first uses of the
20 VC of the 107 rockets that hit inside our perimeter, a brigade perimeter. And that was a
21 whole new scenario of all of a sudden hearing of those rockets fire and hearing them
22 coming in. To me, it was worse than the 8-inch coming in. When they hit and exploded, it
23 was just a huge, loud explosion. Just a big crack.

24 KC: Not the mortars that you've probably grown somewhat accustomed to.

25 EF: Yeah, and most of the mortars, I think, they were 81s so I can't remember
26 what their big mortar was, but most of the rounds that they hit was 81s. I remember one
27 day, I was sitting at my desk and I heard the rounds drop so I started to run and ran out
28 the front door to get in the bunker and it was like as soon as I opened the door, about
29 thirty yards from me a round hits. I just remember seeing it hit, hearing it hit, and turning
30 my eyes to see the smoke coming up and hearing the shrapnel hit the building. When it
31 did that it was like, "Hit the ground." It was funny, well not funny, but after that hit going

1 back and looking at where my desk was and seeing the small shrapnel holes in the walls
2 behind me.

3 KC: That'd be eye opening, huh?

4 EF: It was eye opening. It was like, "Maybe I should put sandbags there or
5 something." So that was in, for Tet, that was our main mission was providing road
6 security for the supply routes and keeping the supply routes. The main contact that the
7 division had was one was at Trang Bang. There was a major engagement there where the
8 VC actually had blocked the MSR for a few days. So, we were able to—the MSR that ran
9 from Tay Ninh to Dau Tieng we were able to keep open. But there were days that the
10 Main Supply Route, the convoys could not make it from Cu Chi up to Tay Ninh.

11 KC: Of course, your outfit was not involved in opening it up or opening the MSR
12 back up.

13 EF: No.

14 KC: At what point did you realize this was a much larger thing than just a local
15 attack on where you were?

16 EF: Actually, probably when we started getting the "*Stars and Stripes*" and
17 getting the print from there. I don't remember listening to Armed Forces Radio or hearing
18 about it. I remember getting some of the "*Stars and Stripes*" talking about it. Again, from
19 our perspective it seemed like we were able to wipe out all the VC that tried to penetrate
20 the embassy. They didn't actually penetrate it. It penetrated the wall, but they didn't get
21 into the embassy. They weren't able to capture Long Bien or Bien Hoa. The 3rd and 4th
22 Cav of the 25th Division, I think the 2nd of the 42nd of the 9th Division, mechanized units,
23 were able to get to both Long Bien and Bien Hoa to prevent major enemy capture there.
24 From our perspective, yet again, the other thing is it looked like we were winning.
25 Y'know, they attacked and from what we were happening, at least in our areas, all the
26 major attacks were beaten back. In Saigon they did occupy the Cholon area, and that area
27 was wiped out by the fighting there. It appeared, y'know, within the first fifteen days,
28 that any gains they had made in IIIrd Corps were eliminated. It was after starting in
29 March, I think we went on a counter offensive and really started going out and attacking
30 them and trying to attack their withdrawal routes and going into, again, areas at Warzone-
31 C and D in the Iron Triangle to eliminate these sources and got into several firefights

1 during that period of time and did a good job on the outcome of that. Again, as far as how
2 bad the Tet Offensive was and what was happening, it's hard to say. The Marines were
3 doing a good job, and their PR (Public Relations) was Khe Sanh at the time and that sort
4 of overshadowed everything else in doing that. Y'know, the repeat of Dien Bien Phu,
5 were they able to make it? What the Marines were having up in Hue, so it was a lot of
6 how bad Tet was and the scope of Tet. I didn't find out until after I got back to the states.

7 KC: Even with you being privy to information at the battalion level?

8 EF: Yeah, they're attacking in Hue, there was an attack here. Y'know, there was
9 full scale attacks throughout the country, but it didn't say how serious it was. Again, they
10 did it and we beat them back.

11 KC: Obviously it's a huge tactical and strategically—at least for a while—defeat
12 for the communist forces, obviously.

13 EF: Yeah, tactically it was a defeat, but strategically because of how it changed
14 the attitude of the American public, it was a strategic victory.

15 KC: Right, right. Alright, how does the war for you change in the aftermath of the
16 Tet Offensive?

17 EF: It doesn't really change that much for me because I'm still doing the XO
18 functions. We had a few men that are KIA that I have to identify, but the month of
19 February, nothing really changes for me, y'know, on Tet. The major thing that changes in
20 early March for me is my company commander, Mike Mitchell track hits a mine and he's
21 thrown off the track and injured. I got a call from the battalion XO telling me to get my
22 gear together. That I have to go out and assume command of the company.

23 KC: Wow, what was that like for you?

24 EF: It's like, "Holy shit, I only have a month and a half, two months left in-
25 country. What am I doing?"

26 KC: Let me ask you this then, obviously, I think it would be an honor to be named
27 at least temporary commander of the company, but then again like you said, you only
28 have a month and a half left in-country. So, what was that like for you? Explain that for
29 me.

30 EF: One, it was, "Company commander, great." It's an honor that they would
31 think of moving me into as the XO and putting me in it because there have been other

1 times that the company commanders have been wounded. What they've done is taken one
2 of his staff officers and put that person in command. To me, it was like, "Oh boy, I feel
3 good. They picked me." But then I'm thinking, "Oh my God, I could do the job as a
4 platoon leader, but now I got the whole company to worry about?" And then the other
5 thing that bothered me is that I'd have to deal with our battalion commander. The
6 battalion commander that we had at that time, Colonel Norris, gave up command in
7 February and a King James Coffman took over battalion command. During his short term
8 that he had been in command, until I went out, he had already established a reputation
9 that he was not liked by the company commanders or the men in the field. So, it was like,
10 "Oh shoot, if I would have gone out and Colonel Norris would have been in command, I
11 would have felt a lot better about going into that position than with Colonel Coffman in
12 that position."

13 KC: What were you most worried about assuming command of the entire
14 company for the first time?

15 EF: Just the responsibility and that I would have to, now, take command of the
16 company and function. There was the two other company commanders, Captain Allison
17 of Charlie Company and Captain Wetzel of Alpha Company were excellent company
18 commanders. Then I was going in this time as a First Lieutenant taking over command.
19 Y'know, again, almost questioning what I would be doing. Like I said, the mission of the
20 company has been in. There's a lot more of steady contact on a repeated basis. My first
21 nine months in country as a platoon leader, y'know, I had contact in May and I had some
22 more contact in October and then in November. There wasn't a lot of contact day in and
23 day out. All of a sudden, we go into Tet where the potential is greater to do that. And so
24 again, y'know I'm a short-timer and gosh, am I going to be cautious? Do I really want to
25 be out here even though it's an honor? My short timer's calendar all of a sudden just
26 stopped. So, his track hit the mine around, I would say, after lunch. By four o'clock that
27 evening, I was on the chopper flying out to the company. The company, because Mitchell
28 had been wounded, was back at battalion. A lot of times, the way the battalion would
29 function is the battalion command would be with one of the companies in their night
30 position while the other companies were out. So, Bravo Company was with battalion, so I
31 flew out. I reported to the battalion commander. He told me I was taking over; he had

1 complete confidence in me and that the mission for tomorrow would again, me providing
2 security for battalion and sending out limited patrols. I went to the company area and
3 called the platoon leaders together. At that time, I had Lieutenant Springer in the 1st
4 Platoon, Lieutenant Donald 2nd Platoon, and Lieutenant Smith in the 3rd Platoon, my old
5 platoon. I got a briefing from them on what was happening. I rearranged the tracks
6 because the CO's track was destroyed by the mine. I had to take over the Commo track
7 and had to switch the radio configuration and make sure that I'd have the ability to
8 communicate with the battalion and the company. Then just got a briefing from the
9 platoon leaders as far as what has been happening in the past few days as far as their
10 missions. How Mitchell was organizing the platoons. I had my perception of which
11 platoon leaders, which one was the strongest and were with the weakest. Right at that
12 point in time, all three of the platoons were functioning at a high level. It did not have any
13 one platoon that stood out or one platoon that stood out because it was exceptional or
14 stood out because it was weak which was a good thing.

15 KC: Would you say that it was—it sounds like, despite the difficulties you may
16 have had with the battalion commander, it sounds like it's a pretty good position to be in
17 as long as you're going to be there.

18 EF: Yeah, the position of having a good, strong—again, a platoon, company that
19 was functioning with good platoon leaders and good platoon sergeants. Also, the fact that
20 the other two sister companies had good commanders and some good platoon leaders
21 there. As a battalion, I think it was good. I felt comfortable with what it was. The next
22 morning, we provided security for battalion and then that night, we were joined in the
23 perimeter by Charlie Company, and I went and talked to Captain Allison and talked with
24 him in length in reference to the battalion commander. He basically said that he has no
25 confidence in him. He's very hesitant to make a decision. So, got a good feeling on it. He
26 said, "You've been in the field, you've been a platoon leader, y'know what has to be
27 done. Use common sense and use your experience to do it. Just be careful on it." So, for
28 the rest of the time—and I think part of the thing was Coffman because I was the
29 lieutenant, usually had Alpha or Charlie Company in the lead. Very rarely did I have to
30 take the lead on something. The company would go out and operate separately in an area
31 and I'd send the platoons out in that the only—fortunately, the contact that the battalion

1 had during this period of time was our Alpha and Charlie Company would get into
2 contact and usually I had to go into a supporting role. Just maneuver in where I could
3 maneuver in. It was never the point company in the contact. So, that was, y'know, for the
4 month of March, it was providing road security missions and just operations and being
5 more of the palace guard for the battalion headquarters versus being one of the two active
6 platoon companies. In some ways, again, Wetzel and Allison sort of were upset with the
7 battalion commander that he wouldn't commit Bravo Company to do some of the
8 missions. They felt that Bravo Company was competent enough to do it.

9 KC: Having said that, and can I certainly understand your position and their
10 position there. Would it be possible that the battalion commander said, "Look, we got a
11 First Lieutenant in charge of this entire company that has no experience in an entire
12 company before, maybe we should—and he's only going to be here for a month and a
13 half. There are considerations here. Maybe we should go put him on this palace guard
14 duty and running security convoys and things."

15 EF: I think that was part of the thing, but again, he had questions about that. Why
16 not bring in one of the other captains that were at staff and put them in command? That
17 type of thing. Which is what happened after I left. I wasn't replaced by one of the—we
18 didn't have an executive officer in the rear. He could have put one of our platoon leaders
19 in, but he had brought a company—I think it was the S1 that took over command and the
20 S1 had been in country for about five months when Captain Mitchell got wounded. So
21 again, it's not one of the things—again, with Colonel Coffman, there were sometimes
22 you just didn't know what he was doing. I think one of the things that I remember about
23 him was that Captain Mitchell said that right after Coffman took command of the
24 battalion, they were in the field, he called the company commanders together and sat
25 them down. He said, "Now, let us pray." Y'know, I think that's good, but all of a sudden,
26 I think that hit the company commanders wrong. I think Mitchell said, "That set the tone
27 of everything." It was sort of like that story got around and then his name is King James.
28 All sorts of rumors went around. Even though the company commanders questioned his
29 tactical expertise, it was obvious to the men because there's several men that I've talked
30 to that hated him more than the company commanders did. Just because of things that
31 they knew that the companies were instructed to do. One of the key things was that this is

1 when I left country that both—actually, it happened right—yeah, I was not company
2 commander. I had gone back to leave. Our Alpha Company got into heavy contact and
3 Coffman would not let them maneuver to develop the situation. He did not commit
4 Charlie Company to a flank which was, I would say, an exposed flank that they could
5 have maneuvered in, but constantly pulled Alpha Company back and brought in artillery
6 and airstrikes and then would have them go back in. Y’know, Wetzel said, “If you would
7 have just let me stay there and develop the situation, we could have probably broken
8 them. But by pulling us back just gave them a chance to go down into their tunnels, avoid
9 the artillery and airstrikes. They knew we were going to come back, and they’d be
10 waiting for us.” And then Allison was fit to be tied because he would not let him go
11 maneuver because he didn’t want to commit another company. A lot of the tactical issues
12 was he was not willing to commit and let the company commanders develop the situation
13 and let them take more of a command of it. It was like his overseeing it and just being
14 very cautious. Which, in his way of doing it, caused the companies to actually have more
15 casualties in their prospective than if they had been able to develop the situation.

16 KC: Sure, I understand what you’re saying. Very interesting.

17 EF: The other thing is that one of the areas that I looked back on as a company
18 commander that was one of the other stupidest things I’ve done in my life. We were
19 operating along the Saigon River and the battalion commander was flying along the river
20 and said he spotted some VC along the river and told me to take the company over to
21 investigate. So, I went over and was with the company along the river investigating. We
22 were dismounted and for whatever reason, there was a sand pan sitting along the river. I
23 was saying, “Y’know, hey, we could do a much better job if we get into that sand pan and
24 get into the water and look at the edge versus trying to poke in from the other side
25 because we’d be able to see the entrance.” So, we got into the sand pan or a dugout. It
26 was myself, my two RTO’s, my artillery Forward Observer, his RTO, and one other man.
27 So, there was five of us in this sand pan.

28 KC: And you are arguably the five most important people in one small sand pan
29 out by yourselves? (Laughter)

30 EF: Right, stupid and in the water. I got a picture of us in there. Someone took a
31 picture and started laughing at us. Right after the picture was taken, one of the RTOs that

1 was the RTO was in front of the sand pan dugout. A VC pops out of the water, maybe
2 five feet from us. He sees them and just lets the whole magazine into the guy. It was like,
3 y'know, if all he had to do was stay submerged a little longer, reach up, and grab the side
4 and tilt it, Bravo Company's command structure would have been gone. It was like, "I
5 got to get back to the shore." We were only about ten feet off from the shore. But to me, I
6 look back at that picture and say, "Why did I ever do that? That was so stupid."

7 KC: What was that VC doing in the water?

8 EF: He—I think what happened was they were in the water, and they saw or heard
9 us. What happened was, maybe they saw the boat and thought it was some of his friends
10 and popped up or couldn't breathe to get in and didn't realize what it was. When we got
11 into shore, right there, we actually found a small cave tunnel and there were three
12 individuals in there and some rice. So, we actually had killed one VC and captured two,
13 we think.

14 KC: How did you find this little tunnel or this little cave?

15 EF: It was sort of just like a man stepped in a hole and saw something and pulled
16 the brush away. So, it was just one of those lucky things. So, we did that and we pulled
17 out. We moved them back to an area where a chopper could come in and the chopper
18 came in and we loaded them on the chopper, and they took off.

19 KC: Were you able to question?

20 EF: No, I wasn't able to question them. It really did not find out anything about
21 them. I think they flew them back to brigade, the headquarters, versus taking them to the
22 battalion. Usually if you had any prisoners that you captured, they were taken—airlifted
23 back to the brigade where they had the interpreters or people that could question them.

24 KC: Sure, how much rice did you find?

25 EF: I would say about a thousand pounds.

26 KC: Really? So that's quite a cash of rice they've got there.

27 EF: Yeah. I think along the Saigon River, there was a lot of areas. I know other
28 units that functioned along that were always finding rice along the river. It was
29 transported down at night and then during the daylight hours they would have sites where
30 they would store it.

1 KC: Hmm, wow. And how much time did you have left as a company commander
2 here?

3 EF: Let's see, at that time I want to say probably about less than a month before I
4 would leave country.

5 KC: Okay. Now, although you're incredibly busy with this new position as a
6 temporary company commander, are you still keeping an eye on the clock?

7 EF: Oh yes, every night. "One more day down. One more day." I'm thinking—
8 being back in the XO, I say, "Okay, if my DEROS is a certain day then I should be able
9 to get out ten days prior to get out." So that's what I was counting on. I was just watching
10 that. One side I was saying that I'm very thankful that I was pulling palace guard, so it
11 didn't really bother me. Then the other side saying, "Why won't you let me do
12 something?"

13 KC: Sure, it's just natural to have that internal conflict, I would think. Alright, so
14 you've got less than a month left after this incident. What do you want to do when you go
15 home? What are you thinking about? What is going to be your career, what are you going
16 to do?

17 EF: That is something I didn't know. I had no idea what I was going to do once I
18 got back. I knew that once I got back, I would have about six months of potential active
19 duty because that would be my commitment after OCS, how many years I had to serve. I
20 really didn't have any plan at that time, and I really hadn't even thought about what I
21 would be doing. Y'know, one side was maybe I want to make a career out of the military,
22 but I knew if I made a career of it, I would be back in-country shortly. At that time, I
23 really didn't think about what I would be doing. I did not have my orders, so I didn't
24 know where I'd be going once, I got back to the states. And so, it was sometime while I
25 was company commander that my orders came in for my duty assignment in the states
26 when I returned. So, I want to say sometime in March, and I was leaving in April. So
27 about thirty days prior to it was when I found out what my duty assignment would be.

28 KC: And what was that going to be?

29 EF: I would be a Senior Army advisor to the Nebraska/ South Dakota National
30 Army Reserve stationed out of Omaha, Nebraska. (Laughter)

1 KC: Forgive my laughing here that is one massive, massive change from what
2 you've been doing in Vietnam.

3 EF: Right.

4 KC: Wow, wow. Well, we'll save the conversation on that until next time, but for
5 the balance of our time today, tell me about leaving Vietnam.

6 EF: Okay, leaving Vietnam. We had, on the 11th of April, the battalion was
7 hooked up together and we were to move in the area north of the Michelin plantation on
8 the road. Basically, up to an area just south of where Fire Support Base Burt Suoi Cut
9 Battle was happening. The mission, the battalion commander called us in and said that
10 Charlie Company would be in the lead followed by Bravo and Alpha Company in the
11 rear. We were to go in along this road and then connect the left at the road junction and
12 go up and set up in a position to support the 3rd Battalion, 22nd Infantry that would be
13 airlifted into a clearing south of us. Now, what's sort of ironic about this is that the area
14 on the road that we make the left turn and go north is the road junction where on the 17th
15 of May that we lost our 2nd Platoon. The area that the 3rd of the 22nd was going to be
16 airlifted into, was where the battalion spent its night on the 17th of May. So, it was like oh
17 I'm going to begin my time in country at one location and I'm leaving at that location.
18 So, the battalion commander gave the order to move out. Charlie Company moved out,
19 got some distance on the road and started taking sniper fire. Charlie Company
20 Commander started maneuvering. His company got a call from Coffman saying, "Hold
21 up, pull back. Bring the artillery in." He followed the orders, pulled back, brought the
22 artillery in, started moving up again. Once the artillery came in, moved maybe another
23 thousand meters and took some more fire.

24 KC: Just sniper fire at this point?

25 EF: Yes, just sniper fire. Nothing serious. The battalion commander again, "Pull
26 back, brought it in." Allison said, "Y'know, I'm only getting one or two rounds. Let me
27 engage and let me do my own thing." He said, "No, just pull back." So, we did that. Gave
28 the order to move out, Charlie Company moves out, maybe moves another fifteen
29 hundred meters and his lead track hits up a small mine. Just blows up and doesn't even
30 knock the track off. Just stuns everybody. The battalion commander, again, says, "Pull
31 back." Y'know, brings in some airstrikes and does some other—what happens is the

1 whole movement takes so darn long that he's moving and all that, that we didn't get even
2 close to where we were supposed to be. So, we had to lager on the road that night.

3 KC: That's troubling.

4 EF: Yeah, that is troubling. I went and talked to Allison, and he was ready to
5 explode because he said, "If you would have just let me push on, and develop, or let me
6 engage. Because we engaged with our .50s and, y'know, once we opened with the .50s
7 the fire stopped. We could have kept moving. We could have been where we were
8 supposed to be" was his comment. So, nothing happened that night. The next morning,
9 we continued on. There's no contact, we come to the road junction. The old 2nd
10 Platoon's APCs that are burnt out are there. We take our turn, head north, go up about
11 three clicks, and then turn off and then go into a battalion laager position that night or that
12 day. The battalion commander calls the company commanders on. Each company is to
13 send out one ambush patrol and have our listening post set out. He said the 3rd Battalion
14 is being lifted in around 1400, 1600 hundred hours they'll be inserted into their landing
15 zone. Go back to our company, set our perimeters up, brief the platoon leaders on the
16 mission, and go from there. This is on the 12th of April. I got into country on the 15th of
17 April. So, I'm still in the field and I'm supposed to be—my ten days are gone. I'm down
18 into two, three four days of country. So, we set up that night. The 3rd Battalion goes into
19 position. It's now Good Friday. We are awoken by mortar fire that comes into our
20 position and extensive mortar fire that we can hear going into the 3rd Battalion's position.
21 We get a call from the battalion commander informing us that the 3rd Battalion is
22 receiving heavy indirect fire. That's the only message we get. Allison responds to them
23 and says, "Do you want us to be prepared to move out?" and Coffman says, "No, hold
24 your position. Don't take any action." He said, "Okay." A little while later we hear from
25 our battalion commander that the 3rd Battalion is now receiving small arms fire and looks
26 like their ground attack is imminent. Allison again calls the battalion commander and
27 says, "You want us to prepare to move out?" He says, "No." Allison called Wetzel and
28 me on our company pushes and says, "Turn one of your radios over to the brigade push
29 or to the 3rd or the 22nd." I can't remember which one, but we got one of our radios and
30 were listening to what was happening with the 3rd Battalions on their ground attack. The
31 VC, at one point, had started to penetrate the perimeter. The brigade commander then

1 calls Coffman alerting us of the possible to move out. Coffman calls the three company
2 commanders up and says, "You need to be prepared to move out on my command." And
3 Allison says, "Roger that, I'll start pulling in my ambush patrol and my LPs." He says,
4 "Don't do that yet. Wait till I give the command." So, Allison is fuming again. Wetzel is
5 doing the same thing. I'm sort of bright eyed, saying "what's going on here." We leave
6 the COs track, Wetzel goes to his, I think to the right, because that's where his
7 company's at. Allison and I go the other direction because our tracks are there. He says,
8 "Skip, I'm pulling in my ambush and my LP so I can move out. I recommend you do the
9 same." So, we go back, and we pull in and start our process of pulling in our ambush
10 patrol and LPs without notifying the battalion commander we're doing that. We get word
11 that the situation in the third battalion is critical. That the VC penetrated the perimeter.
12 That's when we received word from the battalion commander that we needed to pull in
13 our ambush patrols and LPs and get ready to move. Allison says, "Roger that." And five
14 minutes later he calls and says, "Skip, is your patrol in?" "Mine just came into the
15 perimeter; I should be ready to move shortly." We had already given the command to the
16 perimeter to start policing that up and getting it ready. A little while later the battalion
17 commander says, "Okay, I just got the order to move out. I told them that we'd probably
18 be able to start moving in about forty-five minutes." Allison says, "I'm ready to go, I'm
19 moving out." Allison pulls his tracks out and gets on the road that runs north/south. I pull
20 out and take him and follow him in. Alpha company had not pulled his ambush patrol in
21 so he could not get his company ready to go. Also, during that time one of the mortar
22 rounds that we took actually hit one of Alpha company's listening post and killed the
23 men that were in that listening post. So, they had to wait to evacuate them. Allison takes
24 the lead and goes down the road. Again, this is a night movement. He has some
25 dismounted troops out, some engineers that are in the lead walking as fast as they can to
26 make sure that there's no mines in the road or moving as quick as we can down this road.
27 We make the movement without incident at just about first light we hit the road junction
28 where the 2nd Platoon's APCs burnout are. We continue down the road and from that
29 road junction down to where the 3rd Battalion is still under attack is approximately 1300
30 meters. Allison, once he gets off past that road junction, just basically has his lead track
31 go full speed and they start moving down. In there, they get close to the perimeter. He is

1 on the 3rd Battalion commander's radio frequency, and he's been keeping them advised
2 how much longer it would be until he breaks into the perimeter. He approaches the
3 perimeter, the 3rd battalion commander, sends some ground guides up to lead them
4 through the perimeter from the north—cause that's where most of the ground attack was
5 coming from the south, southwest, and southeast. The Northern portion of the perimeter
6 is not heavily engaged. Allison, with his tracks comes in and is led to the south, southeast
7 of the perimeter. His tracks go through. I'm right behind him and I'm directed to go to
8 the southwest side of the perimeter, and we sweep into the perimeter we were one. Once
9 we get into the perimeter, we sort of break up into more of a line formation and spread
10 out. We go past the positions of the 3rd Battalion and at that time, we start engaging the
11 VC with our M-60s and .50 calibers. Again, we break through just in the nick of time to
12 save the battalion. I think if we would have waited for and following the battalion
13 commander that the 3rd Battalion would have received considerably more casualties than
14 they did take at that time. Within a short period of time after Charlie Company broke into
15 the perimeter, the VC, once they saw the lead APC break into the perimeter they started
16 falling back. By the time my company got in position and got online, there was very—we
17 couldn't see any VC but we're still receiving fire. Y'know, we just tore up the jungle
18 with our .50s. We secured the perimeter so they could bring in choppers to evacuate the
19 wounded, the KIAs, and bring in resupply for the 3rd Battalion as far as their ammunition
20 and everything. Once that was secure, both Charlie Company and Bravo Company, my
21 company, were given the order to—we were already dismounted, but to move out and
22 make sweeps to the front of our perspective areas of the perimeter. We were to go out—
23 they wanted us to go out for about three thousand meters in front of position and make a
24 good sweep of the area to see what we could find as far as blood trails or NVA. We made
25 the sweep, we found considerably a large number of blood trails, some abandoned
26 weapons, but no bodies.

27 KC: How many casualties did the 3rd Battalion take?

28 EF: Shoot, I'm trying to think. I can't remember how many KIAs. They took a
29 large number of casualties.

30 KC: That's not information I absolutely have to have, I was just curious.

1 EF: Okay, I have it all here. They lost 16 killed, 49 wounded. The actual body
2 count they found around the perimeter was 120.

3 KC: 120, but you suspect there was many, many more casualties.

4 EF: Definitely, a lot more casualties there. So it was, y'know, the final big battle
5 that I was in. We called from a perspective, the people that were there, it's the Battle of
6 Good Friday, is what they would call it. That was on the Good Friday which was on the
7 13th of April, the 12th or 13th of April. We stayed in position there for the rest of the day
8 with our patrols going out. Sometime during the day, the 3rd Battalion was airlifted. No,
9 they weren't—They left the perimeter and went somewhere else. We continued into
10 operation and making sweeps in that area. Both Charlie and Alpha Company had
11 extensive contact for the rest of the time with the trail elements with whoever the
12 attacking force was.

13 KC: But not B Company?

14 EF: Not B Company. I was always in a position to respond; I was always held
15 back. Which, at the time, didn't bother me that much. I think that it didn't bother me, and
16 the men of our company weren't extremely pleased at that. Y'know, hey, they weren't
17 doing it, but the amount of soldiers lost both by Charlie and Alpha Company was quite
18 high during the last few days of April. So, that was on the, like I said. Then on the 19th of
19 April, is when I gave up command and flew back to the base camp and spent another five
20 days in the base camp before I went to Long Bien and departed. So actually, my tour was
21 a little bit longer than one year. A few days past.

22 KC: Alright, why don't we stop there for today and we will get you home from
23 Vietnam and pick up again tomorrow.

24

1 Kelly Crager: This is Kelly Crager continuing an Oral History Interview with Mr.
2 Elpidio Fahel. Today is July 15, 2010. I am in Lubbock, Texas, on the campus of Texas
3 Tech University and Mr. Fahel is joining me again, via telephone, from his home in
4 Humble, Texas. Alright, Mr. Fahel, you mentioned a moment ago that you wanted to
5 kind of sum up some of the things that you remembered from that first tour before we
6 start to bring you home. What sort of things stand out in your mind as you look back on
7 that first tour?

8 Elpidio Fahel: I think one of the major things that stand out that has been with me
9 ever since is back when I talked to you about the day that medic got killed and Colonel
10 Norris came up and talked to me about that and basically made me realize what my
11 responsibilities were to the platoon. That action, his leadership, has been with me ever
12 since. And ever since then, he has been like a role model to me. How to respond to
13 stressful situations. To be able to keep focused on what I'm supposed to be doing, not get
14 depressed or get down with myself. So, I think from that perspective, that singular thirty,
15 forty seconds really has impacted on my life tremendously on that. The other thing that I
16 say, on the first tour that always stands out to me was the insects in Vietnam. I could not
17 believe the type of bugs that they had over there.

18 KC: Tell me about the bugs.

19 EF: You probably heard about the horrendous Red Ants. Everybody in Vietnam
20 talks the horror stories of Red Ants. Troops, if you're in contact, would rather stand up
21 and get rid of the Red Ants then worry about the bullets flying around. They were so
22 vicious. You'd be in areas, and you'd see them and would actually try to avoid going into
23 the area. There was an area that we were walking through one time with the leeches.
24 You'd just walk, and they'd sense the body heat, and you'd just see them crawling
25 towards you. I was on my track one day and I looked down and there's this spider. It was
26 the ugliest thing I've seen in my life. It was only about maybe an inch in size. It wasn't a
27 monster of a spider, but it was so ugly. It was just everything else, the mosquitoes. So, it
28 was all the insects over there that, y'know, I really remember. The Red Ants, the
29 mosquitos, and that one spider.

1 KC: What kind of affect do these insects and other climatic conditions, like the
2 flora and fauna, what kind of affect do they have on your morale while you're out there in
3 the bush?

4 EF: It can really distract you. Y'know, you're in the area of ambush patrol and
5 you're being, y'know, being attacked by mosquitos, you're concentrating or thinking
6 about, "Where's my bug spray that I can put on me? How do I cover myself up? Gosh,
7 they're attacking my ears. I need to put something on to cover my ears." You start doing
8 things like that. With covering your ears, you can't hear anything. Your sense of hearing
9 goes down and you may miss a sound of somebody, if you're in ambush patrol,
10 approaching the position. If you're on the perimeter, y'know, hearing somebody
11 approach. Just in an area of being on the ground, for whatever reason, seeing ants come
12 towards you. You want to get out moved so you start thinking about that circumstance
13 and how unpleasant they are, and they're going to bite you. It distracts you from thinking
14 about it while the enemy's out there and I may do something that may alert the enemy to
15 my position, or I may miss seeing my enemy's position.

16 KC: Now, when you're talking about these mosquitos, of course you're talking
17 about tropical heat, tropical humidity covered up in your fatigues or whatever it might be.
18 You're dealing with hundreds or likely thousands of these things. They're biting, they're
19 stinging, and they're distracting you like you said. What kind of effect does that have on
20 a person's morale do you think?

21 EF: Y'know, I don't know if it's morale. I think it's, "What am I doing here? I got
22 to get rid of these things." I don't know if it was something that would impact on,
23 y'know, the actual morale because you're thinking so much about how to get rid of them
24 and protect yourself. I don't think it ever noticed let's say, a morale issue. This is, "Why
25 am I over here in this environment. This is the pits, I got to get out of here." So, it's more
26 of just an attitude of making the situation even worse. Not only am I fighting somebody
27 that's trying to kill me and shoot at me, I'm fighting these stupid insects all the time.

28 KC: Well, while we're on the topic of these kinds of distractions, what about the
29 vegetation as well as the heat and humidity and things like that?

30 EF: The vegetation, depending on the terrain and just talking my first tour, we
31 were in the rubber plantations. The rubber plantations, to me, were beautiful. You had

1 y'know, thousands of acres of trees lined up in perfect rows. The grass was maintained
2 and cut, and it was because the height of the trees even during the hottest days you were
3 in the shade, so it was cooler in the rubber plantations. It was just a beautiful thing to be
4 in—in the tracks. The tracks would fit between the trees, and you could just get in the
5 row of trees and just keep going. The difficult part there, if you were in contact,
6 depending on where you were standing if you have a bunch of trees and you'd go to one
7 side, you can't see right or left because of how the rows will block your view. The
8 jungles that we were in, if there was the triple jungle with thick vegetation on the ground,
9 it made it very difficult to move. It made it difficult to see where the enemy may be.
10 From a point person it was exhausting being in the point and having your machete out
11 and having to cut through the vines and the tree limbs and everything else. You're
12 making all this noise so you're not really sneaking up anybody if you're cutting trail
13 through the jungle. The worst vegetation to go through was the bamboo. It could just grab
14 you and make movement difficult. You couldn't go through it standing up at times.
15 Crawling was even more difficult and if you were crawling, a piece of bamboo would
16 come up and grab your flak jacket or your radio or equipment. It was just miserable to
17 maneuver in. From the mechanized perspective during the dry season, if we were out on
18 the rice paddies, we'd have, y'know, five-ten thousand meters of clear area all around us
19 and you could just put the foot to the metal and just move as fast as you wanted through
20 an area. We would travel in that area and then basically just make a movement and go
21 into the tree line. If we were in a free fire area, as we approached the tree line we would
22 do some recon by firing, dismount the troops, and move into the tree line and then bring
23 our PCs in with us. During the rainy season, the rice paddies, it was like a speedboat. The
24 ground was firm enough to maintain the APCs. There was enough buoyancy in it that you
25 could go in, kick up a wake. It was fun. It was like playing PT boat in the area. We'd go
26 to this one area. This one time we were going—just with my platoon. We would just say,
27 “Okay, let's just go and assault this area where there's some high ground to just go up
28 into it.” The terrain did not limit the armored personnel carriers as much as individuals
29 thought we would hamper our abilities to move in the area. When we were in the jungle
30 area and we had to move through the jungle, it hampered the Armored Personnel
31 Carriers. We would be dismounted moving through the jungle. They would have to break

1 trail. You could just imagine any vehicle trying to go through and knock down trees and
2 get caught on vines. It was a very slow process moving through some of the extremely
3 heavy vegetation to get the tracks through. It would take forever to do that. The other
4 thing about it is the few times I would fly in a helicopter, just look down during the non-
5 rainy season right after it somewhat dried up and things were green. It was just how
6 beautiful and green the country was. But being down on the ground, it was horrible.

7 KC: How do you deal with your troops with your men because they're facing the
8 same things that you are? You obviously can't let them know that these things are
9 bothering you. What are they saying and how do you tell them to deal with it? Or does it
10 go to your platoon sergeant or something like that?

11 EF: It goes down through the chain of command. In dealing with it, one of the
12 major things was making sure from the mosquito perspective, that the men had—that the
13 medic went daily and gave them the one pill every day and then once a week they'd get
14 another pill. That was his function. If a man would not do it, he was to report to me or to
15 his squad leader that he didn't do it. They'd have him come up and sometimes you'd
16 almost force the pill down him.

17 KC: Why would they not want these anti-Malaria pills?

18 EF: To get out of the field, "I catch Malaria, and maybe get to go back safe."

19 KC: Sure.

20 EF: At the time they didn't realize that Malaria, they could catch the wrong type
21 and almost die from it. Also, that it stays with them after. It's just something you don't
22 just catch, like the flu, and goes away. It stays with you for the remainder of your life if
23 you're not careful. It can create other health problems by having it. The other thing was,
24 an advantage of having a mechanized unit and having resupplies, as far as the bug spray,
25 we were constantly able to have enough bug spray to, y'know, just wet yourself down to
26 put it all over you to prevent the mosquitos and also spray on the leeches. The other thing
27 was making sure that they understood the importance of keeping their feet dry, changing
28 their socks, y'know, just the general cleanliness aspects of being in the field to prevent
29 boils and any other type of skin fungus that could be developed. Again, by being in a
30 mechanized unit, we were able to carry, y'know, additional pairs of socks and change of
31 clothing. It really—if we were out in a rice paddy during the day and it was wet and we

1 were slogging around, when we came back to our tracks, we were able to get a towel, dry
2 off, change socks, shoes, sit up, and let our feet dry out.

3 KC: Did the bug spray work? I've had some people say that it didn't work at all.

4 EF: If you had enough of it, it would. Yeah, my experience was that the bug spray
5 worked very effectively. You had to put it on very heavy, but y'know, from my
6 perspective the part that bothered me the most was the mosquitos were just buzzing
7 around the ears. Y'know, you'd pull your jacket or fatigue shirt down and cover your
8 arms and button it down and put it on your hands. Your pants were bloused into your
9 boots so that wasn't exposed. You had your hands, your neck, you'd button up your neck,
10 face, and ears. If you put enough of the mosquito repellent on your face and your ears and
11 rub it in real good, it was effective. The problem developed if you're out and it was hot.
12 You'd be sweating and it would go off. Again, being mechanized we had the advantage
13 of carrying a lot of it. Then we always had one or two bottles stuck in our helmet.

14 KC: What about the indigenous personnel there? Did you see the insects and
15 things bothering me as much as it did you?

16 EF: Shoot, no! That was one of the irritants. It didn't seem to bother them at all. It
17 was just like their water buffaloes. We'd be on the road and there be these water
18 buffaloes. Y'know, those things would just look at you and they'd just follow you. It was
19 just amazing to everybody. Y'know, you have a five- or six-year-old Vietnamese up there
20 with this two-thousand-pound water buffalo hitting it on the side with a little stick and
21 moving it along and he's just following along. Boy, the American comes up and he just
22 turns and put his head down and look and you didn't want to mess with them. It just
23 didn't seem like the Vietnamese; it didn't seem to bother them. The mosquitoes or the
24 insects. They were accustomed to it, or they had such good mosquitos they could attack
25 the Americans and not worry about it.

26 KC: After this engagement that you had there in April of 1968, you're a short
27 timer here and you did a great job in describing that particular action yesterday. Once it's
28 over and y'know that you've got this date in which you're going to come home. Turned
29 out to be a couple extra days than you wanted, obviously, by which you come home.
30 You're going to go to the rear, you got paperwork to do. Pick it up at that point and tell
31 me about the process of you coming home.

1 EF: From what I can remember, the helicopter picked me up, I went back to the
2 rear area, started my out processing there as far as turning in the equipment and going in
3 and getting my old clothing that I came over with as far as like the class As and making
4 sure they were in the condition I could wear. Did some paperwork. One of the last things
5 that I did before I left was that we had a man killed out in the field and I had to go
6 identify them. Since I was the acting commander still, I signed the letter to the parents
7 notifying them that he was killed in action. Then again, that was prepared by the S1, and I
8 have a copy of that letter and it was like on the 21st of April and that was the last day that
9 I was at that base camp. I had my orders, the company clerk—said goodbye to the First
10 Sergeant and the people in the back of the rear area had the company clerk take me up to
11 the airfield and waited for the aircraft to come in that would fly me down to Long Bien—
12 Bien Hoa, I mean. I picked it up, flew down to Bien Hoa, went to the 90th replacement,
13 gave them my orders and they said, “Okay, we’ll notify you when it’s time for you to
14 depart.” I went back to the barracks. I think I spent part of the day there and actually,
15 sometime in the evening they came and got me and said it’s time to go out to the airfield
16 and wait for the arrival of your plane.” So, I went down there, sat in this big area waiting
17 for the flight to come in. They announced the flight was coming in and they boarded the
18 officers first and the enlisted men. The officers set up in the front of the plane. I think it
19 was three seats on each side, so it’d be six in a row. I got my seat, which was a window
20 seat and then just waited for the plane to take off.

21 KC: At any point did you ever reflect back on having to leave the men in your
22 company?

23 EF: Not my first tour. It was one of those things, I think, at the time I was just
24 happy to get out. I think if I would have not been in the field as long—I think also by
25 going back and being the executive officer, you learn that the attachment when I was with
26 the platoon slowly disappeared with that. Then when I went back to the company, I
27 wasn’t dealing with it down at the squad level as much. So, for me the part of leaving, the
28 remorse of leaving the men was the time when I gave up command of the platoon and left
29 the platoon. That’s the time I really missed those guys and went around and said goodbye
30 to the men who had been with me for those seven, eight months. I think when I got on the
31 plane, “I’m on the plane, hurry up and take off. Get me out of here.”

1 KC: What was the first thing you wanted them to do when you got home? What
2 are you thinking about doing the second you get home?

3 EF: The first thing I would do was get on the phone and call my wife, call my
4 parents and let them know that I was safe, and I was home. So that was the first thing I
5 was planning on doing. I had planned that I was flying into Travis Air Force Base and at
6 the time, my wife's brother was stationed at Travis. So, the plan was that I would go
7 there, be picked up when I got at Travis and stay maybe a day with them just to calm
8 down. Then I'd be flying down to Los Angeles and spending a few days with my parents,
9 then flying back to Kansas City.

10 KC: Now, before we get you there to Kansas City, what do you remember about
11 the flight home?

12 EF: I remember approaching San Francisco and looking down and seeing the
13 Golden Gate Bridge. At that time, y'know, like a sigh of relief. I wanted to applaud and
14 cheer that we've made it. I just remember looking out and seeing the Golden Gate Bridge
15 and saying, "Yep, now I'm home. No doubt that I'm home. Landing in either Okinawa or
16 Guam, I can't remember, or even Hawaii wasn't the same sense of being home as when I
17 saw the Golden Gate.

18 KC: What kind of reception did you get? What I'm talking about here is we often
19 times hear this about the returning soldiers from Vietnam and the protesters at the airports
20 in California, etcetera. What kind of reception did you receive when you came home?

21 EF: Actually, because we flew into Travis Air Force Base, there was really no
22 reception. When we landed, we went into the terminal. Basically, everybody had to go to
23 San Francisco to catch a flight out to go home or go to the out processing at Oakland.
24 They had buses lined up for everybody that was taking that route. Since my brother-in-
25 law was stationed at Travis I just stayed there. I really don't remember seeing any
26 civilians at the terminal where we got out at Travis. After everybody left, I was sitting
27 outside. I had called my brother-in-law, and his wife was going to pick me up and I sat
28 outside a terminal waiting. Y'know, I'm just sitting out there and there was nobody there.
29 So, I never had that initial negative reception that other people have had that I have heard
30 people talk about.

1 KC: What was it like to be reunited with, at least this part of your family when
2 you got there?

3 EF: It was a relief to see them again. It was just, y'know, reinforcing that I was
4 home and doing that and talking to them. Suzy, his wife, y'know, fixed a big dinner so it
5 was finally getting no mess hall food and just sitting and relaxing and talking about what
6 was happening; talking about what has happened with him, he was in the Air Force and
7 going from there. So, like I planned to spend some time there, but I got ancy so I didn't
8 spend as much time as we initially planned. It was like we spent—we landed in Travis in
9 the afternoon, and I was ready to leave the following evening. So, the next afternoon they
10 drove me to San Francisco where I got the flight to Los Angeles.

11 KC: And from there you flew back to Kansas City?

12 EF: Right.

13 KC: Alright, tell me about you being reunited with your wife and this daughter
14 you have never seen.

15 EF: That was, again, we landed in Kansas City that night just overwhelmed with
16 joy to be there to see my wife. She picked me up at the airport and then we drove up to
17 where she was staying with her parents, which was about ten to fifteen miles from the
18 airport. Not too bad. At the time, when we walked into the house, Candy was asleep in
19 bed, and I just went over there and looked at her and asked if I could pick her up and they
20 said yes. So, I just picked her up and woke her up and gave her a big hug. Y'know, it was
21 just a sense of joy and relief to be home and to finally see her. It was just very
22 heartwarming, the satisfaction of being home and being safe, and being together.

23 KC: How long were you going to be home?

24 EF: Uh, I had a thirty day leave before reporting to my next duty station which
25 was in Omaha, Nebraska. I remember you asked me what my plans were. At that time, as
26 far as future plans, y'know, I really didn't know what my future laid ahead. One is I had
27 probably another, I think, because of my obligation from OCS, another eight to ten
28 months of obligation in the military. So, I think that's one of the reasons I got Omaha,
29 Nebraska, because it was close to Kansas City. So, at the time, y'know, I did not have a
30 college degree. I really had no other skills except the military, so I really had no plan of
31 what I was going to do in life. At that time, it was okay, we'd just go up to Omaha. I

1 think we stayed with her parents for about a week and really didn't do anything. We
2 drove up to Omaha and let the grandparents watch Candy. Mary and I looked around and
3 went in and talked to where I was being assigned about housing and there was no military
4 housing, so we had to find an apartment, so we went and looked and found an apartment.
5 Signed the lease on the apartment then drove back to Kansas City and stayed there until it
6 was about three or four days prior to my actual reporting date. We had our limited
7 household goods that we did have that were picked up and shipped up to Omaha, signed
8 for the apartment. We didn't have that much furniture so one of the first things we did
9 was we went and bought a TV and a bed and dining room and living room furniture for
10 the apartment and settled in there. Then went to work. Like I said, I was an Army advisor
11 to the Nebraska/ South Dakota Army Reserve.

12 KC: How did your wife and new child adapt to move to Omaha?

13 EF: Candy had no problem because she was seven months old so it's not an issue.
14 I think with Mary, just the fact of being together was going to be a positive. From the
15 time that we were married, y'know, I'd been away for that period of time. I think we'd
16 been married—I think it was '68. I got married in '65 so that's three years. Of course,
17 y'know I had one year in Vietnam, six months in OCS, two months basic training, two
18 months of advanced individual training. So, the actual time we had been together was
19 actually very limited. She was looking forward to the fact that, y'know, finally settling
20 down and being together, the three of us. The fact that we were not that far from her
21 parents helped. If we would have been a greater distance from her parents, it may have
22 been more of a problem. We would be able to drive down to Kansas City on a frequent
23 basis or they could drive up, so it wasn't that much. But just the fact of being together
24 was a plus. I don't think it really impacted her that much. I think where she was more
25 concerned was, y'know, the same thing I did. What we're going to do now. We had eight
26 months of time left to be in the Army and was I going to stay in or was I going to get a
27 job? What would I be doing? Going back to school? Just a lot of concern on both of our
28 parts of where the future would take us.

29 KC: Well, tell me about your new position with the Nebraska National Guard?
30 You're an advisor for the Nebraska National Guard.

31 EF: Army reserve.

1 KC: I'm sorry, Army reserve, Army reserve. This is a drastic change from what
2 you've seen over the last year. Tell me your position here as an advisor.

3 EF: As the Army advisor to the Army reserve, I was responsible to advise the
4 Army reserve units in Nebraska, South Dakota. In the city of Omaha, we have the 3rd
5 brigade of the 89th Division, which was an infantry unit. It was my major unit that we
6 had. The assistant division commander was a brigadier general that was officed in our
7 building. The other units that I had that were actually in Omaha, was I had a hospital unit,
8 five JAG detachments, and two military intelligence detachments. The other units that
9 were in Nebraska and South Dakota that I had responsibility, were all service support.
10 Water purification units, laundry units, and maintenance units. All the units had— well,
11 in Omaha with the 89th Division and my hospital, JAG, and MI detachments. We had
12 three civilian employees that basically did all the paperwork for the units. Most of the
13 paperwork that we would have. At the other reserve locations, they all had a civilian
14 employee that handled all the paperwork and the administrative duties. The units would
15 meet once a month on a weekend and that was it. Within the support when I reported in,
16 there was a full Colonel who was an Adjutant General Corps Colonel who had requested
17 Omaha because that's where he wanted to retire at. So that was his last duty station. We
18 had two Sergeant Majors and we had one Spec-5 driver and a civilian secretary was my
19 support staff that I had. Really, the Colonel was there for about three months and then he
20 retired and then I was promoted to the senior Army advisor for the area. So, I got to move
21 into his nice big office. So, after he left it was myself, two Sergeant Majors, the driver,
22 and our civilian secretary. We spent most of our time watching television and playing
23 cards.

24 KC: Is that right? (Laughter)

25 EF: That's right. Y'know, I didn't have to be in until, y'know, eight-thirty, nine o'
26 clock and would pass the time of day, I don't know what we were doing. We would leave
27 around four thirty, five o' clock to go home. Extremely boring. On the weekends we'd go
28 in and just walk around where the units were doing their training. They had their training
29 schedule and, y'know, the MI detachments were all clear. The JAG detachments, I don't
30 know what they were doing. They had a requirement once a quarter to wear their class
31 A's in and I just remember going in and seeing that. It was like I could not believe the

1 JAG detachment. There must have been twenty of them. Twenty, because the JAG
2 detachments were like three or four man per detachments. So, there was like twenty
3 lawyers in the group. Not one of them had their uniform on properly. The brass was
4 upside down. Sort of like the typical stereotyped non-combat arms officer, y'know, how
5 he would wear his uniform. The hospital unit was a little bit better, but they still had
6 problems.

7 KC: Right. Tell me about your role as an advisor. You set up here, the way it was
8 set up. Tell me about the sort of things you would do when you weren't playing cards or
9 watching television. What was your job there?

10 EF: It was just to go down to make sure if there was reports that were due from
11 the higher headquarters that they were getting the reports out. They had their civilian
12 employees doing all the paperwork. They'd work all the hours. I really don't remember
13 doing anything with them. I mean, it was just that boring. They went to their two-week
14 summer camp. The 89th went down to Fort Riley, the one here, and I drove down there. I
15 had my driver drive me down there, a Spec-5 driver. I went down there and spent a day
16 and just walked around to see, "Well yep, they're doing their training." Y'know, I had to
17 sign, y'know, when they had their meetings, I had to initial off that their attendance roster
18 was correct. There was some other things from reports that I had to acknowledge that I
19 saw the report. If we did an inventory, sometimes I'd go in and help with the inventory
20 and verify inventory. The MI detachment, one of the interesting things that they did, was
21 that their active duty was actually during the Chicago Democratic Convention. They had
22 a hotel in their room that they set up gathering intelligence on everything. I didn't go to
23 that, but it was interesting when they came back talking to the commander, y'know,
24 about what their unit did in reference to gathering intelligence to identifying the radicals
25 and helping the police with their surveillance.

26 KC: It would have been fascinating I would think.

27 EF: Yeah, it was. The hospital units, when they did their training, they went down
28 to Fort Riley and were at a hospital there. I went down to see that. One of the moving
29 things there was there when they received some wounded from Vietnam were brought in.
30 So that was touching for me to see how they brought them in and all that. So, yet again,
31 the duty wasn't much, and I was there for sixteen months. As far as with advising the

1 units, I don't think I really did any advising, y'know, nothing spectacular. Some
2 incidences that happened was while we were there, President Eisenhower died and we
3 actually had, in the files, the standard policy and procedure for conducting his funeral that
4 happened. When it happened it was kind of nice to put it out and read all the detail that
5 went into that aspect of the preparation for his funeral and actions that would happen and
6 the units that would be supporting it when they took his remains to Kansas. The other
7 thing that happened, they had some riots up in that period of time and I remember getting
8 a call from 5th Army Headquarters wanting to know of the status of a brigade in Omaha
9 with a possibility of activating them for riot control. My recommendation was no. I went
10 out there one of the weekends they were doing their riot control training and you just
11 wanted to laugh.

12 KC: Really?

13 EF: Yeah.

14 KC: Describe it.

15 EF: It was pathetic.

16 KC: Describe that for me.

17 EF: Y'know, if you see pictures of riot control where the troops would be online
18 with their gas masks and doing that one step movement forward. They couldn't even do
19 that. Y'know, they were just there passing the time. They had no dedication; they didn't
20 want to do anything. Most of the time, y'know, the percentage of the ones that were in
21 that unit were there because they were avoiding the draft.

22 KC: How well were you adjusting to this new lifestyle and this new job given
23 what you've been through? Yes, it's boring and safe, but on the other hand it's not,
24 y'know, the adrenaline filled times of combat in Vietnam.

25 EF: I think it made me say, do as I want to stay, and do this. Y'know, "How can I
26 get out of here?" It was not a pleasant experience. I think one of the other things that
27 really made it extremely unpleasant and is one of the things that I really hold the Army at
28 fault was the lack of preparation and training that they gave to me because one of the
29 other major duties that I had while I was in Omaha was notification and survivor
30 assistance duties.

31 KC: Okay, tell me about that. Very interesting.

1 EF: At the time, the Army, as far as if there was a KIA in Vietnam, would not pull
2 from the ROTC programs. So, in Omaha and the surrounding area, I was the only active-
3 duty Army that they could actually do. I got a call from Fort Riley saying—well actually,
4 I got a call from 5th Army Headquarters telling me that this is my other duty. They sent
5 me a packet of, “Here’s your responsibilities.” I was told I would be contacted from Fort
6 Riley, their unit down there. I got a call, and they sent me some more information saying,
7 “This is your responsibilities for making notifications.” Then that was it. They said,
8 “Now you’re on the roster and you can expect a call at any time and within the policies
9 and procedures, we can make notifications any time after seven o’clock in the morning
10 and no later than seven o’clock in the evening.” They could get a call. The first call
11 would come in and it was at night, and they would identify themselves as Fort Riley.
12 They would give me the information; the name of the casualty, his next-of-kin, and their
13 address. Then the basic information was, y’know, “Private so-and-so was killed in action
14 on this certain date by small arms fire in a providence of Vietnam.” That was all the
15 information that we had. Then I was responsible for going to the family and making that
16 notification. They had a prepared speech that I was to deliver upon first verifying that the
17 name of the person, who it is, and “You have a son or a husband by the name of?” Then
18 going in on with the speech was. “On behalf of the President of the United States, I regret
19 to inform you.” And that’s as far as I got in any of the ones I did. As soon as you do that,
20 they see your uniform and they know what it was. One, it was a very unpleasant
21 responsibility to do that. Looking back on it, it sort of turned me to an attitude of my
22 emotions where I was really bringing my emotions inside of me and not showing them. I
23 think that really hurt. I think I made about ten notifications while I was in Nebraska.

24 KC: Now you say that you kept your emotions inside and as difficult as it would
25 be for you, I’m sure. I would assume that it’s something that you have to do when you’re
26 delivering these death notices. Is that correct?

27 EF: What was that?

28 KC: Holding these emotions back, holding these emotions inside. As much
29 damage it may have done to you later on, I would think that you’d have a sense of
30 professionalism. You would have to hold your emotions.

1 EF: That was it. The deal is that one of the things—I always say, I had to conduct
2 myself in a way that I would want if something happened to me that whoever made the
3 notification to my family would be. That would be doing it very professional show your
4 sympathy and communication with them without letting my emotions come through. The
5 worst one that I had to do was the second son that was killed in Vietnam. The first son
6 was a Marine and was killed. The other son graduated from high school, and he came. He
7 went over, as the father said, to seek revenge for his brother. He was KIA within a month
8 after arriving in country. So that was a very difficult one to actually go to. Fortunately, on
9 that one, all I had to do was make the notification. I was not responsible for the survivor's
10 assistance on that. There were several that, like I said, I made ten notifications, but there
11 were some that I made survivor. I was also the survivor assistant officer.

12 KC: Tell me about survivor assistance.

13 EF: That's the one after the initial notification that would come back. Well, as a
14 notification officer, if I was going to be the survivor's assistant, one of the responsibilities
15 was when the remains returned to the Omaha area, was to greet the remains at the airport.
16 There was usually somebody accompanying the remains on the flight that came in. They
17 would be picked up by the funeral home and then I would follow the hearse to the funeral
18 home. We'd have the paperwork and usually the paperwork would indicate whether the
19 remains were viewable or not recommended. If they were not recommended for viewing,
20 then one of the responsibilities working with conjunction, working with the director was
21 having somebody within the family come in and open the coffin and let them view the
22 remains to verify to the family, "Yes, those are your son or husband's remains."

23 KC: Let me ask you kind of a macabre question here. Coming back from Vietnam
24 and the jungle conditions in Vietnam and the way the bodies were dealt with in Vietnam,
25 sometimes they don't get to a cold storage place for a long time and body bags, which, of
26 course, are a rubberized kind of plastic. Then the time it takes to get them to the United
27 States to Omaha, to the family and then there at the funeral home. What kind of shape
28 were these remains in?

29 EF: All the remains that I viewed were in good shape. I mean, when I say that
30 even the two or three which were indicated not to be viewed, when we viewed them in
31 the casket, why did they say not to be viewed? Y'know, type things. So, none of the

1 remains when they got there were—they were in good condition that the family could
2 look at and see. Now again, they would do the head depending on where the wounds
3 would be. Maybe if they got a chest wound or if they lost limbs, that was not noticeable.
4 Even the few that had head wounds, the morticians did an excellent job in covering that
5 up.

6 KC: I'm sorry I interrupted you. I just think it was kind of an interesting question
7 to ask. Please, pick up the story there with survivor support.

8 EF: Well, the survivor's assistants after you'd be there to assist with the funeral
9 arrangements. Go over any of the benefits that the family was entitled to. Get them to
10 sign the necessary paperwork to start receiving the benefits and do follow up work in
11 assisting the family in any way we could. One of the things—y'know, they always
12 wanted to know the name of the commanding officer or what happened. One of the
13 difficult things, how did their son or husband die? And it was like, y'know, all we had
14 was killed by hostile fire. We did not know. They kept asking, "Can you tell me more?"
15 And it was the fact that you couldn't tell them more. You couldn't go into, "Well, from
16 my experience in Vietnam, this is how I think it happened." You just couldn't give them
17 any information like that, that could send them off on a tangent that could create more
18 hardship and grief for them later on.

19 KC: Let me ask you this, was it easier for you to do this as someone who had
20 been to Vietnam and that had seen combat, had seen death? Did it make it any easier for
21 you to be able to talk to these people to help relate?

22 EF: I think it did because being there and understanding the situation, I think it
23 did make it a little bit easier rather than just doing it blind and not knowing what had
24 happened on that. I think it did make it easier for me to do it. I think the other thing, in
25 reference to making it as easy as possible as it could be, is that I was in an area in the
26 heart of America and you might say, the Omaha area and some of the farmlands out,
27 there was still a sense of pride in serving in the military. I don't remember getting any
28 negative feedback given a difficult time during any of my notifications by either
29 individuals I made notification to or friends and family that would come during some
30 other visits or at the services. In one North Fork, we had several notifications I had to
31 make in that little town. After the first notification I remember driving up into the area

1 and stopping at the local gas station as we enter asking them where a certain address was
2 and going in. By the time I got to the house, right after I come up the pastor of their
3 church was right there. It's sort of like they knew something had happened because I was
4 in the military staff car. So anytime the military staff car came into the area, they knew
5 what was happening.

6 KC: How big a little town was this?

7 EF: I would say eight to ten thousand.

8 KC: Wow. So, you show up and they just know its bad news.

9 EF: Just know its bad news. Like I said, I think I made three notifications in that
10 town. The one notification that I had to make that I was concerned about was a black
11 soldier and again, in the bad part of town and having to go into that part of town to make
12 the notification.

13 KC: Why did that concern you?

14 EF: Y'know, they had race riots. It's their reaction. Then this part of the area,
15 again, they had race riots, it was more negative toward the military in a sense of doing
16 that. I remember going in and making the notification to the mother. She was a single
17 mother, and she took it, y'know, as well can be expected, but his brother was there. I just
18 remember that his brother was very professional. He understood what my mission was,
19 he understood. He basically said, "I know how difficult it was for you to do that." And
20 thanked me for, y'know, my time in the service. It really changed, y'know, say a
21 philosophy that I had in reference to stereotyping different individuals. It was one that as
22 going in and driving down in the staff car I was apprehensive about.

23 KC: Sure.

24 EF: Again, what irritates me even to this day was the lack of preparation that the
25 Army would give me to that. They didn't have an individual that had done this duty talk
26 to me and prepare me for it. They didn't have, y'know, that type of counseling or even
27 counseling after the fact about it. It was just, "Go do it and here's your written policy and
28 procedure." Once I made the notification I had to go back and make a phone call, notify
29 Fort Riley that the notification was made, who it was made to, the time of the
30 notification. At that time, they would give me information concerning the arrival of the
31 remains. If they didn't have the information, they'd later call me with the schedule for the

1 remains. I would then contact the family again and find out about the nursing home—not
2 nursing home, but funeral parlor that would be handling it and coordinate the activities
3 there. The remans support services if they wanted the military funeral would come out of
4 Fort Riley, Kansas, and usually that would come, and they would be there to greet the
5 plane and help carry the casket off the plane and put a hearse and provide proper military
6 honors during the transportation and during the service.

7 KC: What kind of affect do you think this particular duty had on you both short
8 term and long term?

9 EF: Short term it made me think, again, what was my future ahead of me?
10 Concerned about if I stayed in the Army, it was obvious that I would go back for a
11 second tour. I think long term, it's hard to say. I think it sort of made me cold in some
12 ways. It was during this time that my relationship with my wife started to change. I think
13 it may have alluded to it one time, I sort of denied that the service in Vietnam and the
14 experiences there changed me. Y'know, twenty-eight, thirty years, forty years later I can
15 say, "Yeah, it changed me, and this is another step that brought about even more change
16 in me." I think looking back, that's when I started to become more distant from my first
17 wife.

18 KC: And how can you explain that do you think?

19 EF: I think one was that we had been married, y'know, prior to our marriage I
20 think we had been dating for a year. We got married and it was one month, and it was
21 thrown into not being around. I went into the military when I was 21 or 22. The next
22 three years and then one year in Vietnam, I think there was a certain maturity and the
23 changing of life, a slowly changing of philosophy, what was important and how I viewed
24 myself and other things. I think it was just the change of not being together for an
25 extended period of time for the first three years. Looking back at it, I think I had difficult
26 times in the relationship in Omaha, but I think I denied it as a result of Vietnam.

27 KC: So, at this point in your life where your marriage is beginning to unravel a
28 bit. You've got this, not even just unfulfilling duty in Omaha, but one that could
29 potentially be damaging you in terms of the death notices and then the way that you are
30 dealing with it. You had your future to decide whether or not you're going to stay in the
31 Army, but if you stay, you're guaranteed to go back to Vietnam and could clearly cause

1 all other problems. Do you ever put these things together one time? It seemed to me,
2 without trying to put words in your mouth, for there to be a sense of being overwhelmed
3 with these kind of massive decisions and issues going on.

4 EF: I think that was part of the thing and I think one of the problems that I had
5 was that all this was going into my mind. I never really discussed it with her. Y'know, it
6 was like I kept all that within myself. So, I think you have those Vietnam Veterans not
7 discussing it and getting it out of your system. That was what is, I think, because I kept it
8 in my system and not discussing it or being afraid to discuss it with her is what led to our
9 separation.

10 KC: When did the separation occur?

11 EF: See, not until '78/'79.

12 KC: Okay, so this was long after you came back from your second tour.

13 EF: Yeah, just the initial thing, but looking back on it over time, y'know, as we
14 grew further apart, this was the start. We'd get back and do better, but it was just never
15 the same. It was sort of like life was never going to be the same. Being in Omaha, we
16 were not exposed to—I was not personally exposed to all the anger that was taken out
17 against the Vietnam veterans. What I experienced from it was all on the television and in
18 the newspaper. I did not have any personal conflict with anybody concerning my time in
19 Vietnam. The people that were in our apartment building were very supportive of the war
20 and never said anything negative about me or my experiences in Vietnam. In that way, I
21 was protected. I think if I would have been exposed to the negative comments and actions
22 that so many had, I don't know what my response would have been or how I would have
23 handled it.

24 KC: When do you make the decision that you're going to stay in the Army?

25 EF: I think the decision was somewhat, y'know, it'd come up and next thing I
26 know there's a letter saying, "What do you want to do?" I said, "I'll stay in." I didn't
27 know what I wanted to do. There was a certain comfort level of staying in the Army. At
28 least I'd be getting a paid check, the family would be taken care of. So that was not—it
29 was a decision that just came. It was like it went past the suspense date so here I was. It
30 was something I didn't really have to sit down and consciously make the decision. It just
31 happened.

1 KC: Did you include your wife in this decision at all?

2 EF: Yeah, when I did that, I said, “Okay, I just want to let y’know I’ve decided to
3 stay in because the other thing is by staying in, then I’d be promoted to Captain. So, I’d
4 get a promotion at the same time.”

5 KC: When you make this decision—and again, it’s not like it’s something that
6 you were deciding forever for the future, but did you think, maybe at this point, you
7 could make a career out of this if you’re going to be Captain and doing well? Do you
8 think that could possibly be a career?

9 EF: Not at a time because I think in the back of my mind, because I didn’t have a
10 degree that it would be difficult to make a career out of it. Although, y’know, you could
11 never tell what would happen. So, at the time, y’know, I just had four years in, so it
12 wasn’t really a vital commitment. Y’know, my commitment now by accepting that was
13 just another two-year commitment. It wasn’t the indefinite status yet.

14 KC: Right, okay. Now, you also know that this is probably going to mean that
15 you’re going to wind up back in Vietnam. How did that play between you and your wife?

16 EF: Yes, and again, it was like I didn’t know how long that would be before I got
17 the orders to go back. There was some apprehension on my part and various parts
18 knowing that I would be going back. There was always, “Maybe I’ll luck out and not
19 have to go back. Maybe they’ll just forget me and let me stay in Omaha for a few years.”

20 KC: Yeah, good luck with that.

21 EF: Yeah. So, the time in Omaha, it was sixteen months of a lot of inactivity as
22 far as being military except for the notifications and survivor’s assistants. That was the
23 part that impacted me most of being there is just brought some of the reality of how
24 horrible war is and that something can happen to you. Y’know, the soldiers that, y’know,
25 where you’d have the report of, “So many were killed this week.” It really put it into a
26 more personal thing for me realizing that it was just not a number, it was an individual.
27 Even when I was in Vietnam when we lost some men, it didn’t have the same impact to
28 me emotionally as it did making the notifications.

29 KC: How long is it from the time that you re-up, to the time that you get your
30 order for Vietnam?

1 EF: It was, let's see, re-upped in September. I went over in the following
2 September, so it had to be in July. Actually, it was right in June and July timeframe that I
3 got the notification to go over because I remember at the time, I had gotten a Lieutenant
4 in that was going to replace me as the advisor. We had them over to our apartment
5 watching the moon landing. So, I remember that y'know, so if he was there that meant I
6 had my replacement in and I had my orders. So, I had about a three-month prior notice
7 that I would be departing. One of the requirements there would be to, again, figure out,
8 where would I want Mary and Candy to be at and made the decision then that we would
9 relocate back down to Kansas City to find an apartment that was close to her parents.
10 Again, with the realization if something happened to me, that she needed to be with
11 family. Close proximity to family. I had a stay in Omaha until about thirty days prior to
12 my departure. I went on a thirty day leave in which that's when we moved down and got
13 the apartment in Kansas City.

14 KC: What was it like this time preparing to leave your wife and now your little
15 girl who's what, a year and a half old at this point?

16 EF: Yeah, a year and a half old. Well, in the first tour I was looking forward to it
17 and excited about it. This time, I started, again, really nervous about it. Not knowing,
18 again, what my duty assignment would be. Having somewhat and knowing from a
19 combat situation that I could handle it. The self-doubts about how I would function my
20 map reading and all the military skills, I didn't have that. It was just okay, y'know,
21 something could happen to me. This could be, y'know, could be the last time I'd see my
22 wife and my baby. That played on my mind considerably.

23 KC: I'd imagine.

24 EF: So, it was a much more difficult transition of moving down and staying and
25 getting down to Kansas City and making that move. Y'know, where the first tour I was
26 anxious to go away, the second tour it was like I really had second thoughts about it. Did
27 I make the right decision in staying in the military?

28 KC: So, you got your thirty days leave and you used that to move back down to
29 Kansas City, move your wife and child back down to Kansas City and to try to come to
30 grips to what could potentially happen in the future. Again, you don't know what your
31 assignment is going to be. By having been in combat I think there would be a very good

1 chance that you would wind up, but you never know. You've done some staff work as
2 well.

3 EF: Yeah, and then the other side is, "Shoot, I didn't want to be assigned as an
4 advisor to Vietnamese units." That was the other thing I really didn't want if I went over
5 there.

6 KC: Right, I think I mentioned your reasoning on that before. A lot of that had to
7 do with the food. (Laughter)

8 EF: Yeah, I don't know what I could do with the food. The other thing that I
9 remembered about it was I remember my first tour when I went over, how much weight I
10 lost in the first month. My thought process which was completely flawed, I have to eat
11 and put a lot of weight on. So, when I go over there, when I lose it, I'll go back down to
12 my normal weight which did not happen. I put on the weight, but I never lost it.

13 KC: Because you wound up in the staff position when you get back over there.
14 Yeah, that wasn't all that well thought out, I guess.

15 EF: No, good intentions. At least going over I felt good because I had a full
16 stomach, and I was eating good.

17 KC: Well, this time tell me about the separation from your family and you're
18 going to go back to the west coast and you're going to fly out. Tell me about the process.

19 EF: We set onto Kansas City so again, we wanted to fly out and spend some time
20 with my parents before I departed. The question was, do we fly out and do we take Candy
21 with us, or do we leave her with Mary's parents? We decided that it would be a good
22 thing to just take Candy out to see my parents and be with them during that period of
23 time.

24 KC: Had they seen your daughter at this point?

25 EF: They had because when she was born, they had flown back. But they hadn't
26 seen her since her birth. It'd been about a year or more that they hadn't seen her. They
27 were excited about having seeing Candy and having her come out and having me come
28 out. We flew out there and spent time with them. This time I was flying out of McCord
29 Air Force Base in Seattle. So, we spent time there visiting some friends there and just
30 being with my parents. Again, my parents showed a lot more concern about me leaving
31 now than they did the first time. Again, is that the first time they could sense my

1 eagerness to do it and they knew it was something I was looking forward to where this
2 time, I'm sure that they could sense a certain reluctance on my part of the enthusiasm or
3 the excitement that I showed my first tour was not there this time. They could see my
4 reluctance. They could also see, I think, within Mary, she was a lot more concerned about
5 me going over this time. It's sort of like you've been over once, and you made it through.
6 You're tempting fate again.

7 KC: Of course, you also have a daughter as well which would change your
8 parents' attitude I would think.

9 EF: Right.

10 KC: Tell me about the second trip back to Vietnam?

11 EF: The second trip, it seemed like it was a lot longer. I flew up to McCord,
12 checked in there. Again, got on the plane. They loaded up with the officers in the front.
13 We landed in Hawaii, got off, had something to eat, got back on the plane. It was just the
14 same trip over as the first time as far as they seemed like they were always feeding us. I
15 don't know how many meals we had, but it was good. Then when we landed, this time
16 we landed in Cam Ranh Bay. I was assigned to go to the replacement battalion that was
17 there. I don't even know what it was. When we got there, we were informed that part of
18 the orientation program, we had to go through a five-day course on lessons learned in
19 Vietnam. It was taught by senior NCOs. To me, it seemed like a waste of time. I think for
20 the first time, the troops coming over it may have been a benefit, but there was nothing
21 that showed me or tried to show me—maybe it was just I had a bad attitude about it. I
22 still didn't know where I was going as far as the units.

23 KC: What sort of things are they showing you in this lessons learned?

24 EF: Again, it was like how to avoid booby traps, care and maintenance of your
25 weapon, how to properly position and place a claymore mine, how to properly—they
26 even had us test fire or go out and fire an M-16 to fire the weapon. How to provide care
27 as far as first aid training. Communications with different types of radios that were out
28 there. It was similar to taking basic training and condensing it in with Vietnam flavor in
29 five days. There was about five or six officers that were in the group and the rest were
30 NCOs and a bunch of—I think there may have been sixty of us in the class at the time. I
31 remember of the officers that were with me, I was the only one that had a prior tour.

1 KC: What was their attitude like?

2 EF: I think they were just cocky and none of us really had a good attitude in
3 reference to it. It was like, y'know, we all know what it is we're doing. It was just very
4 boring. Y'know, some of the NCOs too, their attitude was not—it was sort of like, "What
5 are you doing back here in the rear area? Shouldn't you, with all your expertise be out in
6 the field?" That was one of the things I noticed my second tour that it seemed like all
7 your NCOs that had combat experience were in the rear areas. None of them were out
8 with the troops. They were somehow getting these plush jobs in the rear area. So that sort
9 of bothered me.

10 KC: At the end of this five days, do you have your assignment? Do y'know where
11 you're going?

12 EF: The initial assignment was to the Americal Division.

13 KC: What did y'know about the Americal at this point?

14 EF: All I knew about the Americal was that it was a disaster. It was where Calley
15 was at. It was a unit that was organized, initially, from Task Force Baker, I think it was,
16 was a brigade from the 25th division. Then they had the separate brigades were operating
17 in the I Corps area and they decided they needed a division command, so they brought
18 the Americal Division in. For some reason, I can't remember why, it's just that I think a
19 lot had to do with the negative press that the incident at My Lai had concerning the
20 Americal Division, the brigade commander, and the 11th brigade and the cover-ups that
21 went up through division.

22 KC: How much did y'know about the Massacre of My Lai and Calley, and all of
23 that?

24 EF: Basically, just what was read in the paper on it. Y'know, the reports on it. I
25 questioned when it first came out because more later on, again, I was at Fort Benning
26 when his trial was going on. About that situation, I remembered going through OCS even
27 before the Geneva Convention. The rules of war and how you would treat non-
28 combatants. It really, from I think, in some way souring my attitude towards the military
29 and certain other things we'll get to later, the fact that he got off like he did. To me, any
30 individual that would have lined the civilians up and shot him, that was murder. The fact
31 that he was part of the defense was he was following orders. Well, if the order is

1 unlawful, you don't follow it. You have the right to deny what it was. I just think that he
2 should have been shot by a firing squad. I think his company commander, brigade
3 commander, and division commander should have been really disciplined because of
4 their cover up activities, but Calley the fact that he just shot them, I can't understand how
5 he got off.

6 KC: Alright, and we can get into that later on as well. Like you say, you're at Fort
7 Benning when the trial is taking place. Alright, you're going to the Americal, and you've
8 got some, fair to say, trepidation going into the Americal?

9 EF: Yeah, and then I report into the G1 at the Americal, and I find out that I'm
10 assigned to the 11th Brigade, Calley's own. So, I'm going down to that unit and actually, I
11 end up with the 3rd Battalion, 1st Infantry part of the 11th Brigade. Their base camp is at
12 Duc Pho. Their forward firebase is at Hill 411. So, I go down to catch a plane and fly
13 down to Duc Pho, report—well actually, I'd report in to brigade and brigade signs me
14 into the 3rd Battalion, 1st Infantry. I go down to the 3rd Brigade, 1st Infantry and talk with
15 the S1, the executive officer giving me a briefing. They let me get settled in for the night
16 and then the next morning I catch the chopper and fly out to the battalion's forward
17 firebase that was a semi-permanent firebase and meet the battalion commander there. The
18 battalion commander, Les Stottle, talked to him and he informs me that I would be taking
19 command to Bravo Company in about two weeks.

20 KC: So initially you've got a company command then?

21 EF: Yes, my first. So, the first thing I did was I was told I was taking over
22 command in about two weeks. For the next five days I'd just sit around the battalion TOC
23 or the forward firebase and get acclimated to the operations of the battalion. Then I would
24 join Bravo Company in the field and accompany the company commander for about three
25 or four days then fly back to Duc Pho to sign all inventory equipment, sign for equipment
26 and actually take over command and fly back out being in the field as a company
27 commander.

28 KC: Tell me about the people. I don't necessarily mean that you need to name
29 names or anything like that unless you'd like to. Tell me about the people that you were
30 going to work with there with the 3rd of the 1st.

1 EF: The 3rd of the 1st, one of the things that I noticed is when you came in is that
2 all the Lieutenants and company grade officers, Lieutenants and Captains, this was their
3 first tour in Vietnam. So, I was the, when I arrived, I was the only officer in the battalion
4 at the time that I had. This was my second tour and when the other aspect of it was, even
5 when I took over command, the whole time I was in command, I was the only company
6 commander that had prior experience.

7 KC: Now, was this a straight leg infantry unit?

8 EF: This was a straight leg infantry unit.

9 KC: Did that give you any issues with that?

10 EF: Oh, a lot of issues. The area that we were operating in was the mountainous
11 terrain that was west of Quang Ngai City. So, most of the time we were humping in the
12 mountains. When I got my equipment and when I went in the back and got my packs and
13 just realized what I had to carry on my back. The first time I put all that gear on I could
14 hardly stand up. And then having to go out in the field and hump the mountains. When I
15 went out and joined the company and John Kelbs was the company commander. I was so
16 thankful that he realized that, you now, walk five steps to take a break, Skip. I was so
17 exhausted after the first day. My shoulders hurt; my legs hurt. I had to blow up the air
18 mattress and take two or three puffs of air mattress up I started getting dizzy. It was just
19 pure misery. It was like, "How am I going to make it as a company commander if I can't
20 even do it physically?"

21 KC: All that weight you put on really helped.

22 EF: Oh yeah, all that weight really helped. (Laughing) It was like—that was the
23 biggest shock to me was how difficult it was to initially move with all that additional
24 weight and carrying everything that I had to carry on my back. The other part of it was
25 that the standard procedure was that there were four-line companies in the battalion. They
26 would have three-line companies out on the hill, I mean, out in the field. One Line
27 Company on the forward firebase. That line company would be on every ten days. So, it
28 was like a thirty-day cycle you were in the field and ten days on the forward base. In the
29 ten to thirty days you were in the field, you could plan on getting resupplied every third
30 day.

31 KC: Hmm, that's quite a difference than what you're used to.

1 EF: Oh yeah, that's when I said, "Where's my APC? Where's my track?" We
2 were in an area in I-Corps, not as much enemy activity as we had down south, but there
3 was still enough realizing that we were not carrying as much ammunition as I carried
4 before. I was much more limited in my fire power because I didn't have, like before,
5 where we'd have a squad where we'd carry two M-60s we just had within each squad,
6 one M-60. We carried either one or two of our .81 tubes with us, but because we were
7 humping them, we had a limited supply of rounds that we had ammunition for it. We'd
8 maybe have thirty to forty rounds, twenty per tube that we'd have to be able to fire in
9 support where I was with the unlimited supply of ammunition. It was a real shock going
10 out there and then just having to be operating in mountainous terrain of climbing a
11 mountain or going down a mountain which was just a complete shock to my system.
12 Even though I had confidence as far as my experience before, it was, "Oh my gosh, can I
13 function in this type of environment? Why didn't they assign me to an armored Cav unit
14 or a mechanized unit?" I had that experience. It just seems like, y'know, that would have
15 been the perfect scenario. Put you with something that y'know, but that's not the
16 military's way.

17 KC: It must have seemed like it didn't make any sense to you.

18 EF: Oh no.

19 KC: Even going to you're looking at things like the amount of weapons that you
20 carry and the amount of ammunition you can carry, all those things. It must've seemed
21 pretty foreign I would think.

22 EF: It was a completely different scenario, y'know. It was really fighting the war,
23 completely different. The aspect of all the experience that I had with my first tour, it was
24 like a complete change or a certain lessons learned and things that I could do that I could
25 do that I could impart on my second tour, but it was still, I was fighting one, in
26 completely different terrain, vegetation, and in a way, a different enemy. My first tour
27 was a large-scale contact, second tour it was mainly booby traps and two or three VC at a
28 time type situation. It was a completely different environment. I think the other aspect of
29 the environment was is that my first tour, because of the boat people, there was a sense
30 that they were fighting a war, and we were taking it to the enemy because we were in a
31 free fire zone. The second time it gave me a sense that the troops were in a seek and

1 avoid attitude. There was already talk about, y'know, a downturn of the war and units
2 being deactivated. It was like, "I don't want to be the last one killed so we'll just take the
3 easy way out. We will avoid doing things." So, from a leadership deal it was a greater
4 challenge to me in the leadership because there was a greater reluctance to do things the
5 way they should be done.

6 KC: How do you, as a leader—now granted, you led a platoon and you led a
7 company, a different kind of company. Again, this is only a brief period, about a month
8 or so that you lead the B-Company of the triple-deuce. What is it like for you to come
9 into this situation with a group of individuals whose motivation wasn't the same, wasn't
10 as high? The morale, y'know, in general terms, national morale as well as morale of the
11 soldiers on the ground tends to decline at this time. The vision of the war is much more
12 murky than it was before. Now you're going to have to lead an entire company for your
13 whole tour and it's a different kind of company. What kind of challenges does this pose?
14 Especially in terms of leadership and keeping people motivated and getting them to do
15 what they want to do. How are you going to deploy your men? Tell me about being the
16 company commander with all these different issues that you've got to deal with?

17 EF: Well, one of the first things, again, that I was fortunate that I was able to
18 accompany the company for five days under Captain Kelbs and got to see how they
19 functioned. He did an excellent job of letting me know the strengths and weaknesses of
20 my platoon leaders that I would have. So that was a very positive thing. It also gave me
21 the opportunity when I wasn't completely collapsed on the ground to observe what was
22 happening. We also were unfortunate that we had such heavy contact the last day I was
23 out. So, I was able to observe the company in a fire fight and what was happening.
24 Somewhat, that got me, y'know, again, the adrenaline going to observe what was
25 happening. I could also—during this period of time I could see that one of the major
26 areas that, to me, was lacking, was a sense of security. Taking, I'd say, the easy way out
27 where in the first tour our ambush patrols would not go out until darkness. Here, they
28 wanted to go out during daylight hours and set their position up during daylight hours so
29 they would have no problem finding where they were at. The sense of not properly
30 setting up the perimeters and taking the easy way out as far as, a lot of times, not putting
31 the security out to the flanks as much as they should through difficult terrain. So, from

1 my perspective I saw that one of the major things I was going to have to do from a
2 leadership thing is give them a sense that one of the key elements to getting home and
3 surviving was making sure you do things from a security standpoint and not take the easy
4 way out. Do it the right way. If you're going to take an ambush patrol out, take a small
5 unit out, leave right at dusk or after dark so the enemy can't see you go into position. So
6 it was that type of thing. Also, instilling in the men that my philosophy was that I'm not
7 here to win any awards. I've already had one tour. I got my awards. My whole objective
8 is to get myself home and to get you home and to take care of you. So, it was a sense that
9 I wasn't going to be a gung-ho charge up the hill type leader. I was going to be more of a
10 compassionate person and lookout for the welfare of the men with the objective of getting
11 them home. It's sort of like being that aspect of, "We'll do it so we can get home
12 together."

13 KC: Alright, this wasn't necessarily the same attitude you had on your first tour.
14 Granted, your attitude is different towards your service here and toward your tour here
15 your first time around. Do you think that you took this approach as a company
16 commander based on the pragmatic acceptance of the attitude of the men and the
17 circumstances? Or was it something you really believed in?

18 EF: It was something I really believed in. They had to get home, but also realizing
19 that the whole, like you had mentioned, the whole attitude of why we were in Vietnam
20 and the attitude at home of losing the support of the people at home and the stories of the
21 individuals that were in Vietnam and when they went home how negative it was. I
22 honestly believe that the only way, again, from my experience on my first tour, that you
23 had any chance of being successful, you had to fight the war as a war. You just couldn't
24 lay back and let them bring it to you. You had to be an aggressive leader using the tools
25 as far as proper security, common sense in approaching the situation and not taking
26 chances. The fact that we were fighting a different type of enemy, and it wouldn't be as
27 large unit contact. Also, one of the major areas within our area of operation, again, was
28 the booby traps that, y'know, how do you avoid booby traps? Well, if you walk down a
29 trail you're going to get a booby trap. If you cut the trail through the jungle, you're not
30 going to have to worry about that. So, I think, again, it was talking to the platoon leaders
31 and the platoon sergeants and letting them know what my philosophy was and going from

1 there. Like I said, I had some experience that helped in doing that. One of the things that
2 happened while the contact that we had, one of our ambush patrols when I was still
3 accompanying the company had gone out the night before and then in the morning, when
4 they got ready to break their ambush position up, the VC during the night, had come up
5 and turned the Claymores on them. When they started to break down the ambush patrol
6 opened fire. We had three killed on that. Again, from a thing like I talked to them about,
7 that was because they went into position, and the VC knew where you were at. So there
8 was little things like that from lessons learned and doing it. Still, the men would look at
9 you. If anything, if you take command, they're going to watch while he speaks the story.
10 Is he going to walk the talk and what's going to happen? So, once I got command, one of
11 the missions was to—one of the hill masses was 241. Well, the mission was to cross 241
12 down into a valley. Well, we came up to the area right along this ridgeline on 241 there's
13 this nice, neat trail. Very wide that you could walk down. They started walking down the
14 trail and I stopped them and said, "No, we're not. Let's go off." We moved off the trail
15 by about fifty, sixty meters to down on the slope of the hill and started breaking trail
16 through the jungle. It took us probably three to four times longer to get to our objective
17 than if we just walked down the easy path. We made it with no problems. One of the
18 ironies of our area of operation—our area of operation my first tour was like all of IIIrd
19 Corps. We would be—y'know, I could be on three different map sheets in a day. My
20 second tour I operated off of one map sheet. That was our battalion area of operation, that
21 was it. It was like four ridgelines. Basically, like I said, we had three companies in the
22 field. Well, they would be walking the basic ridgelines and that was patrolling off that
23 area. So, Bravo Company goes across this thing and then a few days later our Delta
24 Company has the same mission walking across this area. They take the trail and they hit
25 several booby traps and have, I'm going to say, about five or six people wounded from
26 the booby traps. That was a lesson learned. At that time, the people sort of, "Hmm,
27 maybe he's right." So, it was like doing that. During my time as the company
28 commander, we didn't hit any booby traps, the contact that we were in, all except one
29 occasion, the company, or whether it was one of the platoons would initiate the contact.
30 So, during the time that I had command of the company, y'know, measuring body counts,
31 the company was the leading body count contact. We were in contact I would say just as

1 much as the other units were in, but our contact, except for that one occasion, was all
2 where we initiated it versus the enemy initiated it. So, the time that I was in command
3 didn't have anybody KIA in the company where the other companies had taken
4 casualties.

5 KC: Describe for me this first initial contact you had while you were brand new,
6 within the five days you were there. Describe what happened there.

7 EF: I told you one of the things was the platoon that was ambushed, and they had
8 that, but the contact that was the initial thing was the river, the area that the battalion
9 operated in was the Horseshoe. Song Tra Khuc River made a big bend and made it
10 looked like a horseshoe. You had about ten thousand meters from the northern point of
11 horseshoe south was rice paddy areas and then the mountains started. It was the main
12 infiltration route as far as VC/NVA into the Quang Nai Province Area. We had been
13 operating into the mountains and we came down into the rice paddy area along the river.
14 A helicopter had spotted some movement on the north side off the river. So, the battalion
15 flew some helicopters in, and they shuttled us across to the north side of the river. When I
16 say shuttle, it was like two helicopters rotating the company. It took some time.

17 KC: It would have taken quite a bit of time I would think. (Repeated for clarity)

18 EF: Oh yeah, it was like you only had to fly us maybe five hundred meters from
19 the pickup zone to the drop zone. So it wasn't that bad. We got the —Captain Kelbs got
20 the company across the river, and we started moving into this hedgerow type of
21 vegetation where you had farmland and a tree line. As we approached one of the tree
22 lines, we took up a position and then he started to move the company across through the
23 tree line. When they broke out into the farmland, took machine gun fire. So, the company
24 pulled back to the other side of the tree line and was heavily engaged with small arms
25 fire. Called in helicopter gunships and artillery and then a battalion commander gave
26 them the order to pull back to the river. As we pulled back to the river there was a
27 sandbar in the middle of the river and that's where helicopters would come in and pick us
28 up and start shuttling us back to the other side of the river. As we were doing that and
29 pulling back, there was a sense that the VC were actually moving with us cause the fire as
30 we moved back—There was about two hundred meters from the initial contact area to the
31 river. It seems like they kept coming and the accounts we were seeing sporadic fire on

1 that. So, we got most of the company across and then it was just the command group of
2 Captain Kelbs, his RTO, his forward observer, and myself, and another fire team that
3 were left on the Northside of the river. We had two helicopters come in and pick us up.
4 As they picked us up and they shuttled us across, we could see the VC were approaching
5 the river's edge and firing. At the time, the battalion commander was flying above, and
6 he called artillery rounds on the tree line. That was the initial contact that we had in doing
7 that. That was probably from all the contact that I had except for the time where the
8 enemy initiated contact on me when I had command was the largest element that engaged
9 us. I think that was probably a squad-sized element, seven to ten men that engaged us.
10 But it was a real eye opener to the fact that, y'know, how the men did function in a
11 situation if they got hit. Y'know, once they were in contact, I think they functioned very
12 well, but it was just the movement to contact was lax and the security, I think was lax in
13 doing that.

14 KC: What was your overall evaluation of the men in the company? The company
15 in general, but the men as well after this first contact?

16 EF: Again, as far as the platoon leaders—one of the things that Kelbs had me do,
17 was he got on the radio that was with the battalion commander and working with the
18 artillery and air support that was coming in. He had me handle and take over the
19 company, so I was in communication with the platoon leaders. So, it was a good
20 experience to listen and communicate with the platoon leaders which, like I said, I think
21 they did an excellent job. I felt confidence that they were able to develop their situation,
22 keep me informed from which I kept Kelbs informed about what was going on. They
23 didn't show panic in their voices. I think from the observation, I think this company
24 performed well under the circumstances in contact as far as returning their fire. Their fire
25 discipline seemed to be controlled, they weren't just emptying a magazine. They were
26 firing single-round bursts or two small round bursts and kept things under control. There
27 was no wounded in the engagement. So, it was a good first impression of what the
28 capabilities of the company would be is that even though I perceived there was an overall
29 attitude of seek and avoid, they could perform if needed to be. It's just getting them to get
30 into position of understanding that seeking and avoiding sometimes is not the proper
31 course to take.

1 KC: Now, you mentioned this. Do you think it was something that was more of a
2 corporate identity within the company? Do you think your predecessors allowed us to
3 develop or encourage this to develop among the lower ranks within the platoons?

4 EF: To me it was among the lower ranks. Again, if you were the point man in a
5 point squad, you could pretty much—you were given a certain direction to go. You could
6 pretty much dictate within that general area where you could go. If there was a sense that
7 there may be a problem over there, they could steer away from it. I don't think it was the
8 attitude of the platoon leaders or the company commanders. Again, I think it goes, they
9 may be aware of that attitude and doing that. Again, taking the easy way out and walking
10 down a trail or setting up a night position in an area that, to me, would be, "Why would
11 you want to do that? You're exposed too much."

12 KC: Okay, why don't we stop there for today, Mr. Fahel?

13 EF: Okay.

14

1 Kelly Crager: This is Kelly Crager continuing an Oral History Interview with Mr.
2 Elpidio Fahel. Today is July 16th, 2010. I am in Lubbock, Texas, on the campus of Texas
3 Tech University. Mr. Fahel is joining me again by telephone from his home in Humble,
4 Texas. Alright, Mr. Fahel, I'm sorry to have interrupted you there. Go ahead and pick up
5 the story where you left off.

6 Elpidio Fahel: Okay, what I want to talk about initially is the method of operation
7 for the company in the field. As I said, we had four-line companies in the battalion who
8 operated in the area west of Quang Ngai City, both rice paddies and mountainous terrain.
9 The battalion would have three companies that would be patrolling that area. One
10 company would be on our forward fire support base, Fire Support Base 411. That
11 company would be on the hill—we called it the hill—for ten days and then another
12 company, they would just rotate in. So, we were just rotating in that area and somewhat
13 covering the same terrain over and over again. Which made it very dangerous because we
14 established patterns, the travel or the routes you would take if you were going and
15 covering a ridge line, or a mountainous area in the valley. There was only so many ways
16 you could do it. It was an area that the enemy could easily booby trap or ambush you if
17 they wanted to. The method of operation for the company would be that if we were on the
18 firebase we would be airlifted out to the area which we would start our initial thirty days
19 in the field. We would get there and then it would be the mission of the battalion that had
20 given the company, which was basically, y'know, movement along the area, search and
21 destroy set up ambushes and just keep movement. We would move initially as a company
22 to establish a position and then I would send two platoons out to search and destroy a
23 specific area within our specific company area of operation. Usually the company
24 command group, which would be myself, my RTOs, my artillery forward liaison officer,
25 his RTOs and the company medic would stay with one of the platoons and our weapons
26 platoon that had our two- 81-millimeter mortars there. So, we'd establish a perimeter
27 there. The other two platoons would go out and function. Since we were on a three-day
28 resupply cycle, it wasn't necessary for the platoons to come back to the company location
29 except when it was time to accept resupply. So, what we would do would we would send
30 the platoons out. They would move in their specific areas, do their search and destroy
31 missions, set up a position at night that was more or less an ambush position platoon size

1 and then continue on movement in the morning. The company command group with the
2 one weapons platoon would spend the night in that position. Then in the next morning we
3 would also begin our movement along our path to cover our area of operation. There are
4 times that the platoon that was with the company command group would send squads out
5 to do some search and destroy in the immediate area of where the command group was. It
6 was more of a mission to ensure that from security to make sure there was nothing of
7 immediate danger in close proximity to the command group. I would stay up with the
8 command group, monitor the radio throughout the day, get situation reports from the
9 platoon leaders, relay the information, onto the battalion TOC at 411. That was our basic
10 mode of operation. When it came time to do our resupply, the platoons that were out
11 would come into the company area. We would usually get our resupply anytime between
12 fourteen hundred hours and seventeen hundred hours. So, it wasn't necessary for a
13 platoon to be there initially when the resupply came in, but they would filter in during
14 that time. If we were fortunate enough to get a hot meal, that would come in and then we
15 would get another helicopter, come back, and pick up marmite cans and anything else
16 that may have to go out or if a troop had to go out from R&R and was rotating back.
17 They could get on either one of the helicopters that came in. When we were operating in
18 our area of operation, the turnaround time for the choppers to go from our forward
19 firebase to where we were operating was anywhere from fifteen to twenty minutes. So, it
20 wasn't an extensive distance that they had to travel. Usually, it was shorter. If we were
21 real close it would be—in the first two ridgelines from the firebase. It was about a ten-
22 minute flight. We'd get a resupply which would include mail, changes of clothing,
23 ammunition, water, C-rations, LRPs (Long Range Patrol rations). The decision would be
24 made whether after we received resupply, if we would stay as a company in the perimeter
25 or would we have the platoons again move out to their specific areas of operation.
26 Because we were operating on the ridgelines, usually the standard was one platoon would
27 go to one side of the ridgeline and the other one to the other side. The ridgelines in our
28 area of operation basically ran north/south. So, one would go to the west, and one would
29 go to the east.

30 KC: How high are these ridgelines generally?

31 EF: What was that?

1 KC: How high would these ridgelines be, generally?

2 EF: I want to say there was a one hill mass was 241 so that's 241 meters. They
3 went up to as high as, I think 1300 meters, as far as some of the peaks in the area. In the
4 area, there was one that was 921 that was a very steep hill/mountain going up. At the very
5 top it was maybe a 30-meter circumference or diameter of the actual top of the mountain
6 or the hill before we'd start going down. There was foxholes dug all around that area. On
7 that particular time, I remember we were moving up towards that location and the point
8 platoon called in that they saw some VC at the very top of it and we were about two
9 hundred meters away and by the time we got up there, there was no sign of them. They
10 had just basically gone down the other side of the hill and sought cover and concealment
11 in the jungle that was around that area. So, from what I did during the day, like I said, I'd
12 just sit, monitor the radios, walk to the platoon areas, or just sit back and take it easy and
13 eat. So, from a company commander's perspective, during the day if the platoons were
14 out and the company command group wasn't movement, I just sat around and monitored
15 the radio. I worked with our artillery, and our 81's to constantly keep battalion and our
16 little fire control with the 81s updated on our location and so that if something did
17 happen, the indirect fire could rapidly be brought in to support the elements if they got
18 into contact. If we were moving as a company to a location, my command group usually
19 positioned itself behind the lead platoon and then I'd have the lead rifle platoon, my
20 command group. I would then have the 81 section and then two platoons behind me on
21 that. The platoons would provide—the lead platoon would have their point man and they
22 would also provide a flank security out. The same thing with the platoons that were
23 following the command group, and 81 section would be providing flank security. I had no
24 flank security for my little command group. That's the basic mode of operation. Once it
25 was the end of our thirty days—usually what happened generally, is when we flew off to
26 begin our thirty days, we would go to the ridgeline furthest to the west and we would
27 walk that ridgeline, go down, come up the other one. We would constantly keep moving
28 over until we hit the ridgeline that was closest to our forward fire support base. Once we
29 got there, we had, depending on where we were at, the battalion commander would either
30 have us just march and march back to the fire support base to begin our ten days or there

1 are times that they would feel sorry for us and send some helicopters for us to shuttle us
2 in.

3 KC: Now, you talked about the dangers of falling into a routine, falling into a
4 pattern while you're working this relatively small area there, like you say, one map was
5 plenty for this tour. What sort of patterns would you fall into and how do you think the
6 enemy picked up on it?

7 EF: Well, the main pattern we fell into is when we flew off the hill, we would go
8 to the—the unit would go to the furthest west hill mast and ridgeline. We would be
9 patrolling that general area of going from, y'know, one time we would move from the
10 southernmost portion of that hill ridgeline mass, mountain mass going north. Then the
11 next time we'd come out, we'd start at the north and move south. All the companies
12 would basically start in that general area and move either north or south and patrol down
13 into the valleys on each side. So, it was easy for them to determine that, "Okay, the
14 Americans have this. They're going to go there; they're going to move down either north
15 or south." So, it was easy for them to start implanting booby traps, punji pits in the area
16 where we were walking. The contact that we normally had when we were on the higher
17 elevations of the hill masses were from booby traps. We got into where we had the
18 contact—when I say contact, that would be with exchange of small arms fire. That was
19 when we were getting down lower into the valley area where they would have some of
20 their little staging areas where they would do their movements. They did not move on the
21 top of the hills; they moved down to the valleys where it was easier to walk. You could
22 see there were many trails on the valleys. Some of the valleys had streams that were
23 running down the center of it. There were foot trails on each side of the stream. There
24 were foot trails that were right at the point where the hill mass kind of came into the
25 valley. Y'know, there was trails all over the area where they would do their movement. It
26 was the type of thing that if you got on a trail and walked any distance, there's a potential
27 that you could get a booby trap. The platoons that would go down into the valley, that's
28 where they had to be very cautious with the security of walking into not only some booby
29 traps, but basically into an ambush or some type of enemy encampment where they were
30 doing it. In our particular area it was more of a staging area for supplies and moving
31 supplies through that particular portion of the AO into the area that was along the

1 coastline and closer into the populated areas. I think I mentioned earlier about the area of
2 the horseshoe, which was a large rice paddy area. That area, all the indigenous people
3 were removed from that area and put into a settlement village that was about three
4 thousand meters to the east of our forward fire support base and it was called Tin Village
5 because they built barrack-type facilities for the people to live in that had tin roofs and
6 they had some Popular Forces that would go in and provide actual security for it. The
7 individuals who lived in that Tin Village did a lot of farming in the areas right around our
8 forward firebase which was our rice paddy and farmland. There were times that our
9 battalion had to provide security for a certain group of them that would go into the
10 horseshoe area and do some farming or do something there, too. The River Song Tra
11 Khoc was another area for as far as movement supplies it was quite active at night with
12 sand pans going up and down the river. Several times, or many times the battalion would
13 set up ambush patrols right along the river to engage the movement of supplies down the
14 river.

15 KC: Now, you mentioned booby traps. What kind of booby traps would you
16 encounter?

17 EF: The majority of the booby traps were hand grenade-type small explosives,
18 very simple type. Some claymores. There were ones that were set as booby-traps that
19 involved unexploded American ordinance that would have mainly 105 rounds. The
20 majority of them were the Chicom grenades, some punji pits. If there was an area off to
21 the side where if you walked off the trail or if they set up an ambush that you would dive
22 into an area and there would be some punji pits. The majority of them were Chicom
23 grenades.

24 KC: Now, you say punji pits. Do you mean smaller ones to just get in someone's
25 foot or larger ones that can get an entire body?

26 EF: Mainly it was ones that were just designed to get a foot. Again, the concept
27 was they weren't out there to try to kill you. If they could wound you, the number of
28 individuals that would have to be consumed in taking care of the wounded person and
29 getting them out of the field also, when you got them out of the field, that meant a
30 helicopter would come in so there's always a potential that if a helicopter came into an
31 area, y'know, of just shooting down the helicopter. A lot of it wasn't designed, like I say,

1 full body. It was mainly just small two or three sticks, sticking up in a small hole that you
2 could fall into.

3 KC: Describe the different kinds of contact that you had. You talked about small
4 arms fire running into an ambush. Give me some examples of this taking place whether
5 it's platoon or company-sized actions that you're involved with.

6 EF: The majority of the contact or all the contact that we had except for one
7 occasion where the company instigated the contact and mainly it was the platoons that
8 were out on patrol. Many times, if we were movement, the point platoon would see VC
9 and engage the VC. Or they would be set up in an ambush position to engage. One of the
10 major ambushes that we set up was that we were moving as a company along this one hill
11 mass. We had stopped to receive our supplies. When we stopped like that, I had one of
12 the platoons sent out to observation posts to a position where they could really observe
13 the valley to the west because there was always movement in that valley. At about four
14 o'clock in the afternoon, the southernmost observation post reported that there was six or
15 seven VC walking on the trail that was closest to our hill mass and moved on it. I was
16 able to move to a position where you could observe them just walking down the trail.
17 There was six of them with dispersed—We could tell that we were carrying backpacks
18 and that the lead man had a weapon and couldn't distinguish the weapon. We just
19 observed the movement on that day, as they went up the trail. I did not engage. I then
20 came up with a plan and I had a second platoon leader, his platoon would move out at
21 dusk and moved to the north of maybe a thousand meters to the north of the hill mass and
22 start moving down into the valley and spent the night. Approximately 750 to 800 meters
23 from an area that we'd discussed as being a good ambush location because you could see
24 how the trail would go in and get closer to the side of the hill which was some good cover
25 and concealment with vegetation. After about two hours, three hours of they moved out,
26 they got in position, I kept the other two platoons with me at the company area. At first
27 light in the morning, I had that platoon leader, Greg White, moved his platoon down into
28 position and set up his ambush position and was in that position by about nine or ten
29 o'clock in the morning. The concept we want to do in position, settle down, and quiet for
30 the majority of the day. Then I used my one other platoon and moved them to the west.
31 The ambush position was to the east. To the west hill mass, had them make a lot of noise,

1 fire their weapons every once in a while. I also had our 81s firing their rounds to the east.
2 Then around one o'clock in the afternoon, I had our 81s pre-fire some positions that
3 would support what we perceived as avenues of withdrawal if we engaged the VC that
4 were further west, more like blocking fire. They fired two or three rounds to get those
5 locked in and then we just sat and waited. Then again around four o'clock we had our
6 observation post that was down on the hill mast observed and reported that there were
7 seven VC now coming up the trail. So, we moved into position, we alerted the 2nd
8 Platoon, and he gave him authorization to engage whenever he wanted to. I had our 81s
9 in position and ready to fire. They would not fire their rounds until the 2nd Platoon
10 opened up and the signal for them to fire was when the 2nd Platoon opened up and they
11 could hear them. The distance from the top of the hill to where I was at down to where
12 the 2nd Platoon was at was only about a thousand meters total distance if it was that
13 much really a short distance. It was one of the things that being on the hill mass where we
14 were at, you cannot see us from that trail. The VC came up the trail, the platoon leader
15 instigated the ambush by firing claymores and his M-60 machine gun. The M-60 machine
16 gun was on the northern most position and it was set up as far as the killing zone and it
17 could just fire down the killing zone. When the VC walked into the position, the
18 vegetation actually blocked our view of the actual trail and kill zone. So, what we saw
19 was we saw, when he opened fire, there was just one of the VC, it was the last one in the
20 group is the only one we could see. They opened fire and that particular individual started
21 running—turned around and started running. We saw one other individual that ran and
22 jumped into a bomb crater that was near the trail. The fire from the 2nd Platoon must
23 have lasted, I would say, at least ten seconds and it stopped in a great fire discipline. He
24 had positioned his claymores to cover most of the kill zone and the five that were killed
25 immediately in the kill zone were all killed by the claymore mines. The one VC, the last
26 one in line ran and they couldn't have had it better. They ran right into where our 81s
27 were going. We actually got him with one of the 81 rounds. The one that went into the
28 bomb crater, they moved up to the crater and threw some grenades in which was overkill.
29 They must have threw at least five in. He was KIA so the ambush from the time that we
30 instigated the ambush, and the fire of the 2nd Platoon must have been, like I said, ten to

1 fifteen seconds. Then the rounds of the 81s. So, within a minute the action was over with,
2 with a body count of seven. Medical supplies and one AK-47 was captured.

3 KC: When you say medical supplies, what kind of?

4 EF: Gauze, wrappings, bandages; that type of medical supplies. No medication, it
5 was just all wraps.

6 KC: What kind of quantities are we talking about?

7 EF: It would be the type that each individual was carrying. Like a backpack size.

8 KC: Okay, now you've got an entire company involved in this. You've got seven
9 Viet Cong who were killed. Obviously, it sounds like you're setting this thing up
10 brilliantly. Everything came together like it was supposed to in complete effectiveness.
11 To step back from this a little bit, you've got an entire company involved in going after
12 seven individuals. You had mentioned the word overkill with throwing the grenades in
13 the bomb crater to get this one individual. Did you ever get the feeling while you were
14 out there, while you're out there patrolling and going after three or four, or five or six or
15 seven or eight? Did you ever feel like it was overkill that the US—or you in particular
16 and possibly the US in general was applying so much force and pressure and the results
17 were not massive numbers, but small numbers here and there? Did you ever get that
18 feeling?

19 EF: Oh, it wasn't I got a feeling, it was like that's what I wanted. I wanted to have
20 superior force both in numbers and in fire power. It was one of those things—to me,
21 that's the way I wanted—if I was going to be in contact, that's what I wanted. I've been
22 in contact before where the numbers were more equal.

23 KC: And that would be no fun. (Laughter)

24 EF: That was no fun. Like I said, all the contact that we had except for one
25 occasion is where we initiated it. Whether it was—that particular contact was the—
26 during my time in command was the largest single-body count any company had as far as
27 numbers. Most of the body count in contact was two to three or maybe one. So, it was
28 always engaging small elements or just a straggler around. We'd be up on the hill mass
29 and see one lone individual walking down the trail and we'd call fire missions in with the
30 artillery trying to hit them or I'd use my 81s to try to hit them. So, it was like, there was
31 not the numbers enemy that I faced in my first tour. Completely different scenario.

1 KC: Which goes to reinforce this truism about the war depending on where you
2 were and what particular time and what particular unit. Your war was vastly different
3 from someone else's war.

4 EF: Y'know, the further up—y'know you get within the Americal Division and
5 the 196th Brigade and the 198th. They had a lot larger contact because they were getting
6 closer to the North Vietnamese border and the major infiltration routes up in that area in I
7 Corps. Now, the other contact that I keep talking about, the one time that we did not
8 initiate contact, we were operating in the area of the horseshoe just searching and
9 destroying. What would happen is the VC would constantly move into that area and put
10 stores of supplies, mainly rice, food, medical supplies to be picked up later. It was like
11 where they'd bring them down to the river. They would offload them and put them in this
12 huge area for further use. We were patrolling in that area and it's a vast rice paddy area
13 so how we were patrolling. The platoons were just out. We were trying to cover as much
14 area as possible during that particular day. It was time to get resupplied, so we moved
15 into an area for resupply. I called the company also joined the location and we got our
16 resupply and then the mission was given that one platoon would go north of company
17 position, another platoon would go east of the company position. About fifteen hundred
18 meters, both of them would be away from the company. I kept with the company
19 command group, my 2nd Platoon, and my weapons platoon, and the mortars. We had the
20 mortars at the southern portion of the perimeter with the weapons platoon occupying
21 some positions there with the 2nd Platoon occupying the major portions of the perimeter
22 from the east, center east. I would say from the three o'clock position to the nine o'clock
23 position would be the 2nd Platoon's operation area. We received our resupply. The
24 platoons departed the perimeter. Had our artillery FO would call in his prearranged
25 defensive fire locations that were mainly aimed at the hill masses that you could see.
26 Facing us where usually we'd get mortar rounds from on that and some into the valleys.
27 It was all quiet and then about one thirty in the morning I was asleep, and my position
28 was in the center, my RTOs were maybe five, six meters from another area. About ten
29 meters from me is where my artillery liaison and his RTOs were positioned. I was woken
30 up by the sound of a trip flare going off and some men yelling right afterwards. As I set
31 up, I looked to the east. I could see the trip flare that was on the ground. I could see two

1 VC moving parallel to the position. At that time, we started receiving incoming machine
2 gun fire and small arms fire. The platoon or the company, what was there, the platoon
3 plus started returning fire. All the fire that we were receiving initially was coming from
4 the south and southeast. Heavy volume of fire and then after that, I set up—before I went
5 to bed at night I'd set up and have some handheld flares that were right next to me that I
6 could reach over and fire in case something happens and get immediate illumination in. I
7 fired a white parachute flare and then right after I fired that, the initial trip flare went out,
8 but they sent off another one that was a little bit further south of that. I could not see
9 anybody moving. At that time, we started receiving Chicom grenades into the perimeter
10 and around the perimeter of the southern portion of the perimeter where my 81 group had
11 their positions. We continued the firing, getting some small arms fire in. During that
12 thing, I had yelled to the RTOs to notify battalion that we were under attack by an
13 unknown size enemy force and that we were returning fire. Dean Devault, which was my
14 artillery liaison officer was already talking to the fire direction center that the artillery
15 battery requested. He initially requested flares and asked to fire on some prearranged
16 targets. The targets he initially fired on were in the hill masses to our south so that he
17 could at least—if we started receiving mortar fire, he would quickly be able to adjust and
18 get some rounds in there. He requested that there be continuous illumination by artillery
19 flares until we stopped it.

20 KC: Let me ask you this real quick, all this artillery support's coming from Hill
21 411, right?

22 EF: Yes.

23 KC: What size guns did you have on 411?

24 EF: 105.

25 KC: Okay, 105s, okay.

26 EF: Right.

27 KC: I'm sorry, pick it up.

28 EF: So, after a few seconds it seemed like time just went. I got up and moved
29 towards the perimeter where in the direction of where I saw the initial movement and the
30 flare go off, checking on that. We were still receiving fire from the south. When I started
31 to move out, I had my platoon RTO come with me and I kept my company—the battalion

1 RTO back at the area just to keep him safe. I got up there and realized they were still
2 receiving fire. I contacted the platoon leader of the 2nd Platoon and told him to take and
3 have his men that had the M-79s fire to the south over our center of our perimeter, but
4 fire further enough south to start laying down a base of fire there. I then got word from
5 the weapons platoon leader that we had taken casualties to the south of the perimeter. At
6 the time, he said that they would need medevac. "Get medevac, we have some seriously
7 wounded." By then, started making my way around to the south of the perimeter toward
8 the 3rd Platoon was. When I started making that move, we had stopped getting the
9 Chicoms in. We were now just getting some rifle fire and machine gun fire that was
10 coming from some of the trees and the tree lines that were away from the perimeter. The
11 closest tree line to the perimeter was maybe fifty, sixty meters away. So, they were firing
12 from those positions. I got down to the 3rd Platoon leader and made assessment of the
13 situation and then called our 2nd Platoon leader and told them to bring a fire team with
14 M-60 machine gun down to the southern portion of the perimeter. Since there was no
15 contact, really, to the north of where the 2nd Platoon was in the north. Moved down
16 there, platoon leader pointed out that there was one VC KIA that was right in front of the
17 position, maybe two to three feet. He had crawled up and was able to get that close before
18 he was seen. Then he was killed that close. He still had about five or six Chicom
19 grenades on his pistol belt. So, it looks like he had really crawled up as close as he could
20 but had not thrown anything yet. We were able to do that. I found out that both of my 81
21 tubes had been damaged with shrapnel from the grenades and were inoperable. We had
22 six wounded and all six would require a medevac. I moved back to where my company or
23 battalion RTO was, gave an update—myself to the battalion commander of that we were
24 still receiving sporadic small arms fire. I had six WIAs (Wounded in Action) that would
25 require immediate medevac. I requested gunship support, and the artillery was
26 continually coming in. Dean Devault, my FO, had moved down to the southern portion of
27 the location with his RTOs was directing the fire support. He identified certain tree lines
28 we were receiving fire from and was directing and correcting fires into those tree lines.
29 We were still receiving sporadic fire, but it was not very effective. It seemed like it was
30 they had started to withdrawal. Within about twenty minutes, the first gunships came in
31 and I directed them to fly and fire their rounds to the southern portion of the perimeter

1 along the tree lines in one particular hill mass and into the valley. The area that was likely
2 routes of withdrawal for the VC/NVA.

3 KC: Now this is one o'clock in the morning, or so, you say?

4 EF: It started about one-thirty in the morning.

5 KC: Okay, so it's still dark when all this is going on?

6 EF: Yes.

7 KC: And you've got the Huey gunships or Cobra gunships that are coming in?

8 EF: Yes.

9 KC: And it's dark.

10 EF: Yes, it's dark. And how they did that is that we had strobe lights. We had the
11 strobe lights, so they were able to identify our position. There was still the aerial flares
12 from artillery out so they could see, and we could identify the tree line. We also used
13 tracer rounds from the M-60 to mark, y'know, "Can you see our position, our strobe
14 light?" We're going to fire tracer rounds into an area." And they said, "Yes, we can
15 identify it." In the area that we were trying to have them fire into was five to seven
16 hundred meters from the perimeter. It was one of those things I wasn't going to try to get
17 them close to it at night. What I was really trying to do was prevent potential
18 reinforcements coming up to the position or blocking them as they were trying to
19 withdrawal to the hill masses which would be the area which they would seek cover from
20 and go back in for protection.

21 KC: I see.

22 EF: So, the gunships came in and made their rounds. Once they made their
23 rounds, we got word that the medevac was on its way. We got word that he was in the air
24 and coming in and would be on station within two or three minutes. We spotted him and
25 we had our strobe light on and holding it up on the LZ talking him down, "Can you see
26 our strobe light?" And he said, "Yes." He said, "I'm coming in." We watched him
27 coming in and just horrified that he's coming in and he actually landed outside of our
28 perimeter. What he had spotted was a burning flare on the ground. An aerial flare that had
29 hit the ground. He had mistaken that as far as strobe light. It was like as he was going
30 down, "Where are you going? You're outside of the perimeter." Just as he touched down,
31 I guess he realized where he was at and it was just, y'know, watching him just all of a

1 sudden just take off and sort of bank over to the left and come into our perimeter low and
2 land. It was like, “Oh my gosh, that’s just what I needed to have him shot down outside
3 there creating more havoc. God, what trouble will I get into now?” So, we loaded the
4 casualties on and actually there was just four of the seven that were wounded that needed
5 evacuation, immediate evacuation. The rest could wait until the medics could take care of
6 them. They could be evacuated in the morning or another time. So, they did the
7 evacuation. We still were receiving sporadic fire and within, I’d say, about ten, fifteen
8 minutes after the medevac came in it was all quiet again. That was around, I’d say, from
9 the time the initial firing started until that medevac left maybe forty-five minutes to an
10 hour. It seemed like it was all night.

11 KC: Now that it’s over, the enemy is withdrawn, you got your guy’s medevac’d,
12 what do you do at this point?

13 EF: We continued with the flares for a while. I repositioned the 2nd Platoon to
14 provide more support. The two platoons that were away were informed of the situation. I
15 could have—I made the decision to leave them in position for the fact that if we were hit
16 and the VC knew where the platoons were, that if they tried to make a night movement to
17 our position, they may be put into a position where they would get ambushed. I told them
18 to just stay in position. My feeling was that they had hit us, and they had withdrawn. We
19 were not going to get hit again, but we stayed on alert for the rest of the night. We fired—
20 artillery kept firing harassment fires throughout the night with their artillery on the hill
21 masses and in the valleys. Anywhere from 700 to 1500 meters from our position to the
22 south.

23 KC: Just to kind of keep their heads down.

24 EF: Just to keep their head down and let them know that we were still there.
25 Every once in a while, one of my men would think he saw something and there’d be
26 some small arms fire going out of the perimeter, but nothing came into the perimeter.

27 KC: Was it difficult to maintain discipline? Fire discipline in a fire situation like
28 that after being hit like that?

29 EF: It was in a way, but the fire discipline they did, they would just fire one to
30 two rounds. It was more like a recon by fire. In that circumstance of sense, I knew that

1 the enemy knew where we were. I wasn't really concerned that by them doing some
2 recon by firing it was really disclosing where our position was.

3 KC: They just hit you, they knew where you were.

4 EF: Right. I'd rather let the men be a little bit edgy and fire at it. As long as they
5 didn't empty the magazine on it.

6 KC: Plus, it makes them feel better, I think.

7 EF: Oh yeah, it's one of those things. If I see something I want to make sure. I'm
8 sure that the other thing I know is the overkill from that one VC who was right next to
9 our perimeter. It seemed like every hour somebody would put a round into him just to
10 make sure he was dead.

11 KC: Just to make themselves feel a little better, I guess.

12 EF: Well, maybe he's not, maybe he's playing opossum. (Laughter)

13 KC: Okay, that brings up a good point. What do you have the men doing? Like
14 you say, you have repositioned the platoon. What do you have these guys doing?

15 EF: I said, "Okay, stay alert." They were in three-man positions and what I
16 wanted was for the rest of the night, y'know, two men awake, one asleep. What it was,
17 was all three were awake the rest of the night. Nobody went to sleep for the rest of the
18 night. We just sat there. I sat there in the back in the center of the perimeter with the
19 artillery FO and listened to him. I'd call in my situation reports to battalion. I called and
20 asked if they could give me an update on the status of our wounded. Now, one of the
21 wounded individuals was our battalion chaplain. He had come out to conduct services to
22 the company and decided if he could spend the night with us. It was his first night in the
23 field and it was his only night in the field. He never went out and spent the night again.

24 KC: I wouldn't blame him.

25 EF: He got some shrapnel in the rear end.

26 KC: I was going to ask you what caused the casualties. Was it all shrapnel from
27 the grenades?

28 EF: It was all shrapnel from grenades.

29 KC: Okay, when you talk about this Chicom grenades, are you talking about the
30 potato masher type?

1 EF: Ah shoot I can't even remember; I know there's a potato masher and there's
2 another one that would look more like our old pineapple grenades.

3 KC: Yeah, I forget the number of that one.

4 EF: Some of them could have been our own type of grenades that they may have
5 had. We just basically stayed in that position. At first light, the battalion commander flew
6 out with his command-and-control helicopter with a resupply of ammunition. He landed
7 and walked the perimeter. We counted ten to fifteen spots where the Chicom grenades
8 had hit. We did not sweep the outside of our perimeter until the other two platoons
9 returned. What I had at first light I had the other two platoons return and once they return
10 I had them sweep through my perimeter and then go down maybe to the immediate tree
11 lines that were around our area and checked that area out. They found numerous blood
12 trails. Y'know, many different locations, but no other VC. The only body count we had
13 was the one that was right next to our perimeter. There were several blood trails that were
14 within twenty meters of our perimeter. We know we inflicted casualties, but we don't
15 know how many.

16 KC: What kind of effect does this have on men being snuck up on at night and
17 being hit like that?

18 EF: The next night they made sure they dug deeper holes, and they were much
19 more alert. Again, this was in January, so I've had Command of the Company since late
20 September, and this was the first time that we had somebody hit us. And so, it really, I
21 think, got them back into not being so overconfident and being concerned and not taking
22 chances. Like I said, I'd say, "Okay, dig in." Well, they'd dig in, but they didn't dig in
23 that deep. The next night all the holes were at least four or five feet deep. It was great.
24 The other thing was that they said, "Can we have some more claymore mines?" So, they
25 wanted to carry more ammunition because of that.

26 KC: Amazing what that'd do to you, I guess.

27 EF: It's just sharpened the, "Hey we could get hurt out here." From my thing
28 when I look back on that particular action, the area that we accepted resupply and the
29 area that I spent the night was an area that had been used before, many times before by
30 US troops. So, I look back and I said, "The mistake I made was that I should have once
31 we accepted resupply and the platoons had moved out. I should have taken my command

1 group and my two in the weapons section and the 2nd Platoon. We should have moved to
2 another position.” We were in a position far enough in advance that they could see where
3 we were at. They saw the helicopters come in, so it was a lack of taking the thought of
4 security and not setting the pattern. I got complacent and that opened us up to that
5 potential risk. That’s a thought that I went through that I really goofed on that. So, it was
6 like every time after that when we accepted resupply, we never stayed in the spot where
7 we accepted resupply.

8 KC: Alright, what other sort of actions or missions that you’re on, any sweeps that
9 you’re on stand out in your memory?

10 EF: There was one where one of the squads and Sergeant Edwards was the squad
11 leader, set up an ambush along the Song Tra Khoc River and called in that he had some
12 dugouts coming down the river. He engaged them with machine guns with LAWs and
13 actually sunk one of them. So, that engagement there. That’s basically all the other
14 contact that we had was not too long after the contact that I had where they hit me. Our
15 Alpha Company, up on one of the ridgelines, got hit. My company was in a position that
16 it could move to reinforce, and it took me about a day to get to them because of the
17 terrain. They were going up and the commander was Bill Jackowski and he was sitting
18 there and I asked him how he was doing and he says, “I’m not doing too good.” I asked
19 him, “Why?” and he said, “I sat down on a punji stake.” So, that was basically, y’know,
20 all of the excitement that I had. Again, sitting up—except for the thing when my CP got
21 hit. All the other contact we had was with an element that was away from where I was at.
22 One of my platoons were out and they would have the contact and they would report
23 what was happening to me. I would have reported to the battalion.

24 KC: Okay, you’re out for thirty days at a time and you’re receiving re-supply
25 every three days, you say?

26 EF: Every three days if we were lucky. We went one day when we were up during
27 the monsoon season up in the mountains and went nine days without resupply just
28 because the weather prevented the helicopters from locating us.

29 KC: Tell me about that. What’s it like, one, being in the monsoon season and two,
30 not getting resupplied? Not getting LRRPs, not getting C-rats?

1 EF: It was not fun. It was like you count on every third day of getting resupplied.
2 You basically don't ration yourself. So, it was like days after that and once we realized
3 that—I think the men did, that the weather was such where we were at. Cause when we
4 went in it was overcast and it was raining. They airlifted us into a valley and then we
5 started across the valley and started going up into the ridgeline. As we were flying in,
6 initially, it was a low ceiling, so the helicopters were flying at low level. When we
7 landed, we could see where we were supposed to go, but we couldn't see the mountains
8 because of the cloud cover. Once we got into the cloud cover, we couldn't see anything.
9 So, we knew that in the back of our mind that we may not get resupplied. Some of the
10 men still didn't ration their food or their water. Their water wasn't too much of a problem
11 because if we had to get water, we could move down into an area that would have a
12 stream that we could get some water. It was mainly the food. It was difficult from a
13 standpoint of we got extremely hungry. The wetness in that area, the problems with the
14 feet being wet, you're being wet all day. It was just not a fun time. It was just miserable.
15 When we operated on that particular time it was all reality, very little operation. What we
16 did was we tried to find a position that was somewhat leveled that provided ample
17 drainage so that we weren't sleeping in water. And pretty much tried to stay in one
18 location in a general area and not move too much. It was just too difficult to move in,
19 uncomfortable, and my thought was, "God, we were so miserable. The VC are probably
20 seeing what we're doing. They're sitting there in a warm hooch with a fire and laughing
21 at us." They're not that dumb to be out in this stuff. Only we're dumb enough to be out in
22 this stuff.

23 KC: Now, anticipating that maybe you would not be able to get resupplied, do
24 you, as the commanding officer of the company tell your platoon leaders, "Look, you've
25 got to have your guy's ration."

26 EF: Yeah, called them together and said, "Y'know, we got to watch ourselves. I
27 don't know when we're going to get resupplied. We don't know when the weather's
28 going to break." If we got really desperate what we would have to do is walk down into a
29 valley where we could get a low ceiling that the choppers could come in. I didn't
30 necessarily want to walk down into that area because that would open us up to more
31 potential problems as far as being engaged by the enemy. Also, if a helicopter would

1 come in at low level instead of coming out and the VC were there, they would be a much
2 easier target for the VC to shoot down than not be shot down. One of the other things
3 was, because of what movement we did do, we had to put a block on artillery being fired
4 within certain grid squares because of not being able to, one, did we really know exactly
5 where we were at because we could not see any other landmarks. Everything was based
6 on how we felt the terrain was going and how far we had moved. So, we knew if we got
7 into contact that we would not be able to get any air support or artillery support. It would
8 be on our own. So, from that perspective I was a bit alarmed. Again, in the back of my
9 mind nobody would be out here expect us.

10 KC: Alright, when all this is happening, you're in the monsoon rains, you're out
11 there isolated, no artillery support to speak of. You're soaking wet the entire time,
12 movement is limited. What do you do? I mean, what are you doing from hour to hour?
13 What is it like to be out there?

14 EF: Extremely boring. Time doesn't seem to move at all. Y'know, it seems like
15 you'd look at your watch and say, "Geez, it's been five minutes since the last time I
16 looked." Time just did not move. I'd walk the perimeter; the men had their ponchos up
17 trying to stay as dry as possible. Just looking ragged. They'd look at you, they'd look at
18 me and say, "What did I get myself into? What am I doing here? Why are we fighting
19 this war like this? Why is our mission—what did higher command put us out in this
20 miserable location knowing that the weather was going to be miserable and that if
21 something would happen, they couldn't support us? Wouldn't it have been smart to just
22 bring us back and put us in an area of operation where they could support us or at least
23 could see us from the air? Y'know, put us down in the rice paddy area. It's better than
24 being down in the mountains."

25 KC: Alright, now these are thoughts that the company commander is having. Of
26 course, when you're bored and you're soaking wet and you're hungry and there's not
27 much going on all you're going to do is probably, these thoughts are going to intensify
28 and continue to build. What do you think your guys are thinking?

29 EF: They're thinking—I'm thinking they're thinking the same thing that I'm
30 thinking. Sometimes I look at them, "Sir, can't you do something?" I try to say—I didn't
31 say there's nothing I can do. It was like "How are you doing? Are you okay? It'd stop

1 raining sometime.” Just small talk with the men. Again, even from my perspective, the
2 movement around because we’re up in the mountains and in jungle, the platoons were in
3 a position—sometimes it was very difficult just to get to where they were at through the
4 jungle and the walking and slipping and falling. The men—sort of like some of the
5 pictures. They haven’t shaved, they’re dirty, they’ve got raggedy fatigues on, they have a
6 blank look on their face. In some ways you think they just want something to happen to
7 get them out of this boredom. I don’t think they’re thinking about the enemy attacking
8 them. They’re just thinking about how miserable the conditions that they’re in and how
9 much longer it’s going to last. Y’know, about the eighth or ninth day when daybreak
10 came and we could see the sun, it was such a great feeling. We got up and we were
11 actually on a finger, not on the ridgeline and we moved up to the higher ground to really
12 position ourselves where we were at. We figured out where we were at and then we
13 figured out where the closest LZ would be. We immediately moved to that LZ so we
14 could get resupplied. The battalion commander was ready to resupply so once we told
15 them that—and he knew that the weather was clearing, they came out and resupplied us.
16 Then the downside was that we knew we had about another fifteen days in the field.

17 KC: Right, I was going to ask you about that. Okay, with all of this rain, all of this
18 mud obviously that was going to accompany it. What kind of effect does it have on the
19 equipment that you had with it and how do you deal with it?

20 EF: It was a constant cleaning of the weapons trying to keep them dry. There was
21 certain things from clothing, it’s useless to try to keep anything dry. If you had a change
22 of socks, as soon as you’d change them, they’d be wet within five minutes. It was just,
23 “to heck with it.” The main thing was trying to keep the weapons clean, keeping the mud
24 out of the weapons, and whatever other equipment we had. The ones that really had a
25 difficult time were the guys that were carrying the 81 tubes and the base plate and the
26 bipod for the 81s because of the extra weight. During when it was the monsoon season,
27 we actually, instead of carrying two tubes, I made a decision based on recommendations
28 from some of the other guys, just carrying one tube in the rounds and reduce the number
29 of rounds that we were going to carry. So, it was just the fact that you were constantly
30 dirty, constantly wet. We had air mattresses that if you blow up your air mattress, you
31 had your poncho on, you could rig a shelter that would keep the direct rain off of you and

1 you can clear off enough of the vegetation off the ground that you could blow up your air
2 mattress and you could at least sleep and be dry, not in water, and not having water fall
3 on you. The danger with that was, again, if you have that type of hooch build or cover on
4 you and it was raining, you couldn't hear anything from, y'know, the VC were in
5 movement and were coming up on you. You could not hear anything. If you were the one
6 that was on guard duty, y'know, you'd have your poncho liner on over you, you'd have
7 the head portion put over you covering your ears so your ability to hear was gone. Again,
8 fortunately nothing ever happened where they would sneak up on us when it was raining.
9 That was always a concern that I had is that you couldn't tell the men not to put their
10 hood on. Y'know, you knew they were going to do it. You just hope that they would stay
11 alert enough and maybe see something and that by putting out their trip flares and early
12 warning devices where they would take some cans or something and string them in
13 between the trees so if somebody would hit it, it would make a noise that they had
14 positioned those things.

15 KC: What about wildlife? You talked about bugs; you talked about ants and
16 mosquitos. What about other kinds of wildlife? If you cleared off a little spot out there
17 and you've got this, y'know, poncho liner over the top of you keeping the direct rain off,
18 it seems to me that some of the other animals in the area might find this a convenient
19 place to be out of the rain as well.

20 EF: The only other animals that we encountered were snakes. I personally did not
21 encounter any snakes, thank God, but some of the other men had seen them or crawled
22 into their position and once in a while I remember hearing somebody screaming in the
23 middle of the night, "There's a snake here!" And you'd hear a bunch of chopping noise
24 where they pulled out their machete or somebody was whacking at it. So that was it.
25 There was no other animals that we engaged. One of our sister companies did kill a tiger.
26 The only other time we had anything to do with animals was the dreaded water buffalo.
27 We were down in a semi-secure—when I say semi-secure area, this was farmland that
28 was actively being farmed by the Vietnamese in the area. It was an area that was not a
29 Free Fire Zone. When we were in the mountains where it was free fire. The horseshoe
30 was free fire, but there was a little area that you once lined that you crossed from the
31 horseshoe along the river that turned into a no fire zone, and we could not fire weapons

1 unless we were engaged. We were operating in that area one night and we heard a lot of
2 noise coming towards the perimeter. The next thing we know, we were attacked by about
3 three water buffalo that just moseyed on through our perimeter. It was one of those things
4 that you didn't want to mess with them. The thing was, because we were in the free
5 fire—no fire zone, we couldn't shoot at them. Y'know, if we would have shot them, we
6 would have been court marshalled for killing the animals. Some six- or seven-year-old
7 Vietnamese kid crying because his beloved water buffalo was killed by a bad GI (General
8 Infantry). Shoot.

9 KC: I think I know how you feel about that.

10 EF: Yeah. (Laughter)

11 KC: Well, things like that as well as the conditions and the questioning of the
12 mission. Maybe not just open questioning, but to themselves thinking, "Why in the hell
13 am I here? This war's whatever." And that sort of thing. Individuals tend to feed off of
14 each other. This is the Americal Division. Like you said, it wasn't put together in the
15 most coherent manner. This is the aftermath of Calley and getting on in the war and
16 discipline may be an issue. What are the guys saying? Are they questioning you? Is
17 morale bad? Is discipline—are there any problems with that? How do all of these
18 circumstances affect the status of your men?

19 EF: I think that they're all starting to question, "Why are we here? What are we
20 doing here? Why are we fighting in this war?" The one thing I say that I had going for us,
21 I think any commander that had troops out in the field was we could always say, "We're
22 here for your brother, your foxhole buddy. Our objective is to keep you safe." Y'know,
23 we have to fight the war as a war because that's the only way we can really hope to get
24 back. If we don't do our job and we don't look out for our buddy, then something's going
25 to happen to us. So, it was easier to keep the morale a little bit higher than it was back in
26 the rear areas because of that. Also, if you could keep the troops moving, you did a better
27 job. It was when they would sit and do nothing that created the problem. It was like we
28 were stuck those days without resupply. That was a bad time because we weren't moving
29 that much. Once we were up and moving, then men would have that movement going, the
30 time would pass faster. It was just easier to control. Again, I was very fortunate that I had
31 three good platoon leaders. So again, I've been fortunate when I had command, I had

1 some good subordinates that were able to inspire their men. From a company commander
2 in my second tour, I had extremely limited contact with the men. Except those that were
3 right within my command group. Most of my talking with them was done through the
4 platoon leaders. Y'know, when I had the company in, I'd walk the perimeter and talk to
5 the men. I never got to know any of them. They just knew me as the company
6 commander, the old man. So, I think, y'know, the aspect of the morale of the troops, I
7 think just looking back just like any in history, they're griping about something all the
8 time. The fact that really made it more difficult for the GI in Vietnam was knowing that
9 back home they did not support the war. Then it was like, "Why are we fighting this
10 war?" Then in a sense, looking at the Vietnamese people and not getting the same
11 adulation of when we go into a village like during World War II when they walked into a
12 French Village and liberated them or something like that. They weren't getting that even
13 from the local population. They were just getting stares, looks at. The fact that if the male
14 in a village or the male you would see was over twelve years old, you didn't know if he
15 was a VC or NVA. You never knew.

16 KC: Alright, another one of the issues concerning morale and even discipline,
17 sometimes a lack of discipline in a number of ways was the issue of race. There's a
18 common theme, often times, that there are racial issues between black and white and to a
19 lesser degree, Hispanic soldiers. Did you encounter any racial issues while you were
20 there?

21 EF: Extreme problems when I got out of the field, back in the rear area. It seemed
22 like even the drug problem and the race problem was all rear area. If you were out in the
23 field, you really didn't care about the color of their skin. What you cared about is, "Did
24 that person take care of his weapon and if you got into contact, would he be there to
25 support you?" As long as he did that, you could care less what color skin they had, where
26 they came from, anything. But once you got back, back into the back area, it was an
27 extreme problem, it was horrible.

28 KC: Now, when you say rear area, you're not talking about the ten days back at
29 FSB (Fire Support Base) Hill 411?

30 EF: No, when I went back, after I gave up command of my company I went back
31 and became the battalion S4 at Duc Pho. It was back at that rear area that the problems—

1 there were some of those problems in the ten days that you were on the fire support base.
2 You could see it, but it wasn't blatant as much as it was back in the rear area.

3 KC: Let's put the discussion of race and drug issues off until you go back for the
4 rest of your tour in the rear areas. It's a good time to Segway back into those beloved
5 long awaited for ten days on Hill 411. Okay, your thirty days are up. What's it like to be
6 back on the hill?

7 EF: It's just relaxation. Like for me, when I would go back in and the company
8 would be on the hill, then the company would have responsibility for about ninety
9 percent of the perimeter bunkers. They would be assigned to the platoons. The platoons,
10 we got in there—when we first got on the hill, the first thing the men did was get a
11 change of clothes, shower, and go to the mess hall and get a good meal to eat. Then they
12 would go back. They would have their mail and then the ten days would be on the bunker
13 line, improving the bunkers, police called, doing other odd jobs as far as maintenance of
14 the hill. Like cutting down weeds, painting rocks, doing anything else you might have in
15 a semi-secure area. During the day, like I said, they'd do a lot of maintenance on the
16 bunkers, improving them and filling sandbags. Go and have another good meal at
17 lunchtime and a good meal at dinnertime. They had movies there that they could go and
18 watch in the mess hall. What else was there? From my perspective, we were up on the
19 highest point of Hill 411 we were at was a company CP that had my radios there. I'd
20 spend about two days initially on the hill and then I would fly back to Duc Pho to the
21 company area and spend a day, day and a half there doing paperwork just talking with the
22 First Sergeant and the company executive officer and some other people back there.
23 They'd fly back out onto the hill. During the day, if the battalion surgeon was going to do
24 a MEDCAP then the company on the hill would provide the MEDCAP. Most of the
25 MEDCAPs that we provided were going down to the tin village in that area that was
26 close proximity.

27 KC: Now, would you send an entire company out on a MEDCAP?

28 EF: No, it would be a squad.

29 KC: A squad, okay.

30 EF: We could hit the tin village with our .50 caliber that they had on the hill. It
31 was, again, there was the ARVN training facility was right next to it, so it was what was

1 perceived as a secure area. Nothing was going to happen. We knew that there were
2 probably a lot of VC within the village, but they were never actively combative. We
3 knew that they were probably the ones from Quang Ngai City to Hill 411. There was a
4 road that you could get resupply on every once in a while. There were times that we
5 would find that the road was mined. When I was back at S4 I actually drove to the hill a
6 few times in a Jeep, but it was actually the engineers who had swept the road. We'd sit
7 there and one of the things that we would do on the hill was we'd have a mad minute
8 where at night, we'd just test fire all the weapons on the perimeter, coordinate our 81 fire
9 and four-deuce and some artillery and just have a mad minute where we'd just have
10 everything open up for a minute and then see how well our fire discipline is if we could
11 stop the fire at the end of the minute. The troops enjoyed being on the hill again because
12 they were just able to relax, take it easy. There was no stress there. They could walk
13 around in their immediate area—because the bunker they occupied was also their
14 sleeping quarters, so they had good protection from the elements as far as if it was
15 raining. They could walk around that immediate area without their shirts on. They didn't
16 have to carry their weapons with them all the time if they were in the immediate vicinity
17 of their bunkers. If they did go to the mess hall or any place else, they had to carry their
18 weapons. There was a basketball court that they could play basketball on. That was about
19 it. If anybody needed any type of medical care, the battalion surgeon was there in his aid
20 station so they could go up there and get that. There was a good time where the platoon
21 medics could really check out everyone. Check their feet if they had any boils or just in
22 general upgrade maintenance. Like I say, they got a change of clothes, they were able to
23 replenish all their equipment if it was ragged, get new ponchos, poncho liners, fatigues to
24 wear, socks. It was ten days of just laid-back time.

25 KC: You said the medics would go through and check feet and check for boils
26 and things like that. What other sort of other inflections or illness will you likely see?

27 EF: It was very easy for—if you got a scratch to get it infected. Different type of
28 funguses may develop. I think the main thing I seem to remember again, was the
29 funguses on the feet or if you stayed in the water too long. Sort of like a jungle rot
30 beginning on the foot and the boils and infections from scratches. So, it was a good time.
31 Again, there you could take your boots off, your socks off and really let your feet air out

1 for ten days. It was comfortable in that respect. The other nice thing was that the mess
2 hall was air conditioned so you could go up there and sit in the air-conditioned area and
3 have your meal.

4 KC: That must have seemed like heaven.

5 EF: Yeah.

6 KC: Y'know, a moment ago you mentioned you went back to the mess hall and
7 had a good meal. What would you call a good meal? What made up a good meal for you?

8 EF: It was hot. You could identify that it was a piece of meat. The potatoes had
9 some consistency with them. It was just that it was cooked there, and it was warm type
10 thing. It was the typical mess hall food, nothing spectacular. It was so much better than
11 C-rations and LRRP's. The other fact is you're eating out of a tray with real forks and
12 spoons, a glass of milk or juice or water. You could sit down and eat and take your time
13 about it. There was no rush to get in and get out and do anything there. I think the other
14 thing that I just thought about again was at least when you got back to 411, you had the
15 crappers there where you could go sit and take a nice crap in luxury rather than just
16 bending down and having the grass tickle your ass. (Laughter)

17 KC: The little creature comforts.

18 EF: The little creature comforts and have all the toilet paper you wanted.

19 KC: Yeah, things that you would never think about until you actually have to go
20 through with it. It would be a big deal. Especially like you say, if you're stuck in the rain
21 and you have to deal with this, that's another inconvenience.

22 EF: Yeah, and those malaria tablets made you go all the time, so it was the misery
23 of having to take a dump and have it raining and then you try to wipe yourself off with
24 wet toilet paper was just not the way you want to live. So, like I said, the crappers were
25 something, y'know, even though they smelled and all that. It was just that luxury of
26 having that dry toilet paper and being able to sit like you were accustomed to sit.

27 KC: Well, to take this back in another direction which I probably shouldn't do,
28 what about these barbeques that we often times hear about when it comes to Vietnam or
29 when somebody gets back to a more rear area and somebody's flying in steaks and
30 you've cut some fifty-five-gallon drums in half and you got a grill on it, you got that
31 going. Did you ever get involved in any of that?

1 EF: Oh yeah, that was one of those things, again, is that they would grill food.
2 That was one of those things the first day or second day that you were on the hill, that
3 was one of the things that they would have was steak, grilled steak. The other part you'd
4 have salad. It was, y'know, a good thing to do. The areas that had all the steak grilled like
5 that were all in the rear areas on a regular basis. When I was back at S4, that was
6 something the mess hall was able to do on a regular basis. The supply chain, y'know,
7 would come into the rear area at Cam Ranh Bay and people at Cam Ranh Bay would
8 siphon it off and go up to division headquarters. They'd siphon it off and go to brigade
9 headquarters, they'd siphon it off and then it'd come down to battalion and they'd siphon
10 it off and there was nothing to go to the companies.

11 KC: I've often heard people say that they would have killed for a grilled burger
12 over there, but it's always steaks. The hamburgers were difficult to come by in a situation
13 like that, but steaks were available, the darndest things.

14 EF: A part of thing was just being able to maintain and keep the meat frozen so it
15 would be good. I think hamburger was hard to do. You got the frozen patties and
16 depending on where you're at, the ability to keep them frozen once you got up to an area.
17 A lot of the food that came prepared in 411, was airlifted out the day before or during the
18 day from the rear area. So, they didn't have the massive refrigeration units that could
19 maintain a lot of supplies in that forward base.

20 KC: What about alcohol consumption?

21 EF: None in the field. Mainly because you didn't want to carry it. Now on my
22 first tour, that's all they had. The tracks were full of beer, type thing. The second tour,
23 and when you'd gone on 411, you would have the beer and there would be a limit to the
24 number of beers that individuals could have. It was abused and every once in a while, a
25 report would filter up to me that a certain trooper was drunk and had caused some trouble
26 with some individuals and had gotten into a fight within their squad. Usually when
27 something like that happened, I just left it to the squad leader and the platoon sergeant to
28 handle that situation. If an individual had that problem, the threat of, y'know, we're
29 limiting your supply from now on would bring them back once they sobered up. Also,
30 you had the problem on 411, again, not to the same degree that you had back in the rear
31 area of drugs, mainly marijuana. There are times when I was walking the perimeter you

1 could smell it coming out of the bunkers. Usually what they would have is if they were
2 smoking inside the bunker, they'd always seem to have somebody sitting on top of the
3 bunker outside. As an officer or platoon sergeant come walking by, y'know, you'd see
4 them yell something down. By the time you got there, nobody was smoking anything, but
5 you could sure tell they had.

6 KC: Well that brings up sort of a stereotypical kind of scene. Maybe it's
7 stereotypical because of the success of the movie, but the movie, "Platoon." I'm sure you
8 probably remember the famous bunker scene where the so-called heads are in the
9 underground bunker and they're using marijuana. What do you think of that
10 characterization?

11 EF: I think it's a good characterization in the rear area base camps. That, y'know,
12 Oliver Stone was in the 3rd brigade or in 3rd battalion 22nd, part of the 3rd brigade, 25th
13 division. Back in those rear areas, that was a major problem there. When I became S4,
14 that was a major problem. You could just go in—there were certain areas you might see
15 in the company that you didn't go into which was sad, but you just didn't want to go into
16 that.

17 KC: I got us a little bit ahead after I said I wouldn't do it, but I did. So, I'll back
18 away from that.

19 EF: There was—and again, I think how it was depicted in "Platoon" I don't deny
20 that that may have been a scene in one of the bunkers on the perimeter or several of the
21 bunkers on the perimeter. When I did walk the perimeter—one of the things is I walked
22 the perimeter during the day. I hardly ever walked it at night. The main reason for that is
23 even though there was a small road behind the bunker line, it was still dark, and it was
24 still dangerous. You just didn't want to be out by yourself, and you didn't want to be
25 carrying a flashlight that led people to see where you were at.

26 KC: Sure.

27 EF: So, I'd walk the perimeter during the day and then the platoon leaders would
28 have their responsibility and they pretty much, y'know, would stay in one bunker at night
29 and control that. That scene is something from my perspective, even though I never saw
30 it, I would never deny it.

1 KC: Right, what sort of things do you do back at Hill 411 in terms of your own
2 personal life? You talked about what you'd do for duty. You'd go back to the rear for a
3 day and catch up on paperwork and talk to people and things like that. What about your
4 personal life? What do you do personally when you go back?

5 EF: Personally, I'd just get up and I'd go down into the mess hall for breakfast,
6 drink my coffee. Then I'd walk up to where the battalion commanders and the command
7 operating center was and spent a lot of time in the TOC with the staff officers there that
8 would be the battalion S3, the battalion Command Sergeant Major, the artillery people
9 that were there listening to the radio and talking about what the operations, in some ways,
10 we did last month. What are the companies doing now? Just spending time there. Again,
11 it was air conditioned. The area where I was at was not air conditioned. It was one of
12 those things, y'know, finding air conditioning and staying in it. I would write letters, read
13 mail, sleep, read a book, go back and eat and drink coffee and go up to the battalion TOC.
14 From my prospective, I was, again, not doing much. Just relaxing and taking it easy.
15 Getting my thoughts together and trying to figure out how much longer am I going to be
16 out in the field? How many more times am I going to have to make that rotation? If I
17 have to do it again, is there something else we can do different, so we don't have the
18 same boredom as far as the movement? After January, that contact I was in where they
19 hit us, the battalion started having a lot more contact. It seemed to step up. I don't know
20 what it was. I think it was in January, February of 1970 that things started, within the
21 battalion area of operations, started getting a little bit more intense.

22 KC: You mentioned getting letters from home. What sort of information are you
23 getting about back home?

24 EF: Back home mainly, y'know, was telling me what Candy was doing, what she
25 had done the day before, how she's grown. It seems like there was always one picture
26 with the letter and that Mary would be telling me what she was doing. It was just how
27 much she missed me and how much Candy missed me. Again, reporting on when I left,
28 she was a year and a half old so what has she been doing now? She's starting to talk,
29 she's playing with this, and she's walking much better. Just keeping me updated on the
30 daily things of what was happening. There was never any indication of what may be

1 reported on the news as far as the situation in Vietnam or the situation at home or
2 happenings at home. All the news that I received was through the Stars and Stripes.

3 KC: Do you listen to the radio? Do you listen to any music? We were talking
4 about this yesterday.

5 EF: Y'know, I don't remember listening to the radio. There may have been a
6 radio on and some music playing, but as far as sitting and just listening to the radio, I
7 don't remember doing that. I could have, but it's not something that sticks out in my
8 mind.

9 KC: Alright, here you are on the evening of the ninth day and you're heading out
10 in the morning. How do you prepare yourself and your company to go out the next day?

11 EF: Okay, prior to moving out I'd got and have a briefing by the battalion S3 and
12 the battalion commander on how I would be leaving the hill. Would I be walking off the
13 hill or would I'd be going off a helicopter. We'd get the mission as far as the method of
14 leaving, where I would be going to. Once I hit the ground, my general area of movement
15 in some way's they'd say, we want you to patrol a certain ridgeline and we want you to
16 do it for X number of days. There's certain indications from the previous company
17 through this is where they covered. We want to make sure that you don't go into this
18 area. You go over here. It was just getting the briefing on that. I'd meet with the platoon
19 leaders and give their briefing. I would make sure that from a logistical standpoint that
20 the required ammunition would be redistributed and that was one of the other things.
21 Y'know, all the ammunition that we had when we came off the hill we dumped and got a
22 new basic load of good, clean ammunition. We'd get our meals and rations. I'd make sure
23 that the platoon leaders, as far as their tasking of making sure they had all the supplies
24 and equipment that they needed for the platoon. If there was any last-minute things that
25 they needed, we needed to get it in so it could be gotten out to the hill before we left. If
26 they couldn't before we left, to be on the first supply chopper that would come out in
27 three days. Again, since we had worked on only one map sheet, there was never a
28 problem with getting new map sheets. Except if they were all wet or something or
29 destroyed, we would get new map sheets to carry. We had our radio standing SOIs
30 (Signal Operation Instructions) that we were issued and made sure that the platoon
31 leaders had the current one. I'd have the current one and we'd ask any questions about it.

1 One of the things on my first tour, my call sign the whole time was the same call sign. It
2 never changed. In the Americal Division they changed call signs and frequencies on a
3 regular basis. It just drove me batty trying to remember that “Oh, this is Tuesday, we
4 changed my call sign.” The people that developed these call signs were just crazy. They
5 just didn’t make any sense to me. In the frequency, there was a few times that we’d try to
6 change to the radio to see that I was instructed to do so and could not make contact. I had
7 to go back through the artillery liaison and have him find out through artillery what was
8 happening with the change of frequency and find out they changed their start time for
9 their frequency to a different day or something. So, it was just—and then I’d just go
10 through everything that I was carrying and made sure I had everything that I wanted to
11 carry as far as the number of rations, the right type of LRRP’s and made sure I got the
12 LRRP’s that I liked. So, it was just going through and just checking my weapons and
13 getting verification from the platoon leaders that they were ready to move out. Then once
14 the next day when we’d get ready to move out, usually we would move out after
15 breakfast so once the company had breakfast. Depending on how we were moving out, if
16 we were just walking off the hill, we’d just, y’know, go out the gate and go on our way.
17 The majority of the time, though, we would be airlifted out. So, what we would do is go
18 down and then get outside the perimeter where the helicopters would come in and then
19 we would fly out on the helicopters.

20 KC: Did any of your men express any trepidation? Was anyone upset? Refused to
21 go back in the field again after being there for ten days? What was it like, do you think,
22 for the guys to, after these ten days, at Hill 411 to go back out?

23 EF: I think in some ways we’re happy to get back out because again, it was like
24 the garrison duty. If they had to go through the mess hall, they had to make sure they had
25 their steel pot on, their uniform was clean. It was just, y’know, there was enough of, say,
26 Garrison Duty, that irritated them. Y’know, it was too formal—they couldn’t relax like
27 they could in a way out in the field. It’s like—the other aspect of it too, being on 411,
28 after the first few days it was nice, but then it got awful boring. Y’know, when you get
29 bored you start telling stories, you start thinking about things. It just gets to the point
30 where the aspect of, “What am I doing here? Why do I have to go out? Maybe I can get
31 some marijuana.” They start getting into more of the Garrison-type problems in dealing

1 with it. In some ways, by going out in the field, it gives them a new direction. I don't
2 know of anybody that gave a reluctance or didn't want to go out that may have been a
3 platoon or squad level. Somebody may have voiced that, but it was handled at that level
4 and never reached me. So, from my perspective I really don't know if I had those
5 problems. It's one of those things I could have had those problems, but it never
6 manifested because the platoon leaders and platoon sergeants basically took care of it for
7 me.

8 KC: Right, which is what they're supposed to do.

9 EF: Right.

10 KC: And what you're supposed to do is let them take care of that. That's the way
11 it's supposed to work. Alright, you're back in the field again and of course, everyone is
12 counting those thirty days as best they can. Are there any other times in the field or any
13 other issues or instances that you want to bring up that you haven't talked about already
14 while you're out here with the Americal and going out in this area and then working your
15 way back?

16 EF: I think one of the things that struck me was when I was with the 25th
17 Division, when they went and they moved a company by air, they moved the whole
18 company at one time. You'd have that mass formation of helicopters come in, pick up the
19 whole company, and you'd go. Basically, they would insert the whole company into the
20 LZ. The first combat assault that I went on was with the Americal, so I never really gone
21 on a combat assault before. This was a whole new experience. I was talking to the
22 platoon leaders how they do this and prior to this particular combat assault, the battalion
23 commander went up with him and his helicopter and he showed me where we were going
24 in at. The combat assault was conducted by two helicopters. So being a company
25 commander I had to be on the lead chopper going into the LZ followed by another
26 chopper. Now, the turnaround time from where the company was at to where they were
27 dropping us off at was about thirty to forty minutes turnaround time. So, once I was on
28 the ground, I could not have another six to ten men or maybe sixteen men of the company
29 in for about another thirty-five, forty minutes. Which wasn't that exciting to me because
30 what would happen if we got hit? In one chopper was my command group and the other
31 chopper was about six or seven men. So, there wasn't that many of us on the ground. I

1 wasn't looking forward to it. That was discouraging on my part. We started going into the
2 LZ and I'm sitting behind the pilot with my back against the pilot looking to the rear of
3 the helicopter and all of a sudden, the door gunners open up. I thought, "Are we taking
4 fire?" Y'know, I think the men could see the panic on my face that were there. One of
5 them reached over and said, "Oh, that's the standard procedure in this area to fire the
6 door gunners to fire as we go into the LZ." I said, "Okay." So, they come into the LZ, and
7 I look to my left and everybody's getting off on their left. I said, "Well shoot, I'm on the
8 right side of the plane. There's no looking back, I'll just go off the right side." I go off the
9 right side. He had landed on a side hill.

10 KC: Oh no.

11 EF: When I went off, I went down. I rolled maybe another thirty, forty feet down
12 the hill. So that was the first combat assault that I made as I get down to the bottom of the
13 hill. I'm also carrying all this extra weight that I'm not really used to yet. I remember
14 laying down and looking up and there's my command group sitting up there sort of just
15 looking down at me. "What did we get ourselves into?"

16 KC: Oh wow.

17 EF: Because I had not been, I'd say, in command of the company that long. So,
18 that was my first combat assault. The second one we went into was into a rice paddy area
19 and this time I made sure that the ground was on my side of the airplane. I jumped off.
20 When I jumped off, I landed in, I don't know, how many feet of water, but I sort of bent
21 forward and when I bent forward my pack on my back shifted which caused me to move
22 forward. I was trying to gain my balance as I was running somewhat forward until my
23 head hit the dike and then I fell back into the water. So that was my second combat
24 assault. I have not been doing good on my combat assaults.

25 KC: Yeah, "Captain Skip Fahel, we're not sure about this guy."

26 EF: And I think there was two other times that we went on combat assaults. That
27 one, we had to jump out at a higher altitude than I wanted to and that wasn't fun.

28 KC: How high?

29 EF: I want to say about ten feet. We only went into—I only had one combat
30 assault that I went into that was a hot LZ.

31 KC: Tell me about that.

1 EF: Well, this was like the sixth or seventh one that we went into. One of the
2 other things that I wanted to do is as we were patrolling, they'd have us go in and they'd
3 air lift us from one hill mass to another hill mass. So even though we were in the field for
4 thirty days, they would use the helicopters to quickly move us around sometimes. We
5 were going from one ridge line over to another ridgeline and started coming into the LZ
6 and as we were coming in, the door gunners opened up and all of a sudden, I heard one of
7 them say, "Incoming." When I heard him say, "Incoming" I heard something crack. One
8 of the door gunners says, "We got hit." The pilot turned around and said, "Everybody
9 out." It was like you just jumped out. So, I jumped out and it was about seven or eight
10 feet and remember hitting the ground and the chopper just quickly getting out of the area.

11 KC: So, after you jump out? What do you do? Are you trying to land on the base
12 of fire to secure the area?

13 EF: Try to figure out, one, where is everybody else that was with me on the
14 helicopter at? Am I just by myself? It was like again, because I think the most helicopters
15 that ever moved my company were four, so I never had enough, I'd say, have enough
16 troops on the ground to protect me. It was like one of the other philosophies I had,
17 y'know, I would joke with the men, "Your objective is to keep me alive because if you
18 keep me alive, you're going to be alive." So, it was like once I got on the ground was
19 trying to determine where the other men that hit the ground with me were at, were we still
20 receiving fire? And if we were, where was the fire coming from? When I came in from
21 the helicopter and the way it came in and changed directions and it flared, it was really
22 hard for me, initially, to determine where I was at in my orientation with the other
23 helicopter. Cause I lost sight of where the other helicopters actually went in at when I
24 came in. So, it was just getting on the ground and getting my RTOs together so I could
25 talk to the other element that was on the ground setting up the perimeter security and
26 determining to see if we were receiving any additional fire. Once the helicopters left,
27 there was no more additional fire. It was just the initial helicopters coming into the LZ
28 that took what I'd say, sporadic fire.

29 KC: Now these are Huey lifts I assume?

30 EF: Yes.

1 KC: Alright, so you've made it back out to wherever it is you're going. You're
2 thirty days out and your ten days back. You did a great job of discussing all of that and
3 describing everything that's going on there. Is there anything else you want to discuss
4 before we move you back to battalion as the S4?

5 EF: I think the only thing that I thought about in prior discussions and somewhat
6 is a key thing, the same thing here is what do I remember about both tours? One of the
7 things I failed to mention about the last tour but its relevant even on this tour was when
8 we were in contact, just how there'd be these brief moments of loud gunfire and
9 explosions followed by periods of utter silence. It wasn't like you hear in some movies
10 where it was just constant firing going on where you were receiving constant fire in the
11 rounds going off and explosions on a regular basis. It was just like everything went in a
12 spurt. They would fire at you, and you'd have this immediate fire coming in. We'd return
13 fire and then it would be silence. So, it was between that element. The same thing
14 happened when I got hit in the night position with the Americal. That initial fire was
15 extremely loud, the men were yelling. Once it stopped, there was a lull where everything
16 was quiet, and you started to look around and tried to figure out what's going to come
17 next. Then it would happen again. That's one of the things, in reference to when I was in
18 combat and actually in contact, that I remember was that element of extreme chaotic
19 condition. You were firing and receiving fire followed by the quiet and say, "What
20 happens next?"

21 EF: I will say that between the two tours, the first tour was much more pleasant
22 for me because of my Armored Personnel Carriers and the fire power. I was carrying
23 anywhere from with the first tour, we would go dismount, I had probably at the most ten
24 to fifteen pounds that I was carrying. And that's stretching it. When I was in the Americal
25 out in the field, there was sixty to eighty pounds on my back that made it completely
26 different as far as the physical aspects of how tired or fatigued I would be. One of the
27 things I do remember is as time went on, my physical ability to carry that weight
28 improved. By the time I got out of the field, it didn't bother me that much. I think I told
29 you the first night when I tried to blow up my air mattress, I almost died, I was dizzy. I
30 couldn't do it after two puffs. By the time I left the field, y'know, no problem of blowing
31 that air mattress up. I could sit there blow it up, and ready to go.

1 KC: Good thing you put on all that extra weight.

2 EF: Which I did not lose.

3 KC: I was looking through my notes as you were talking about that. One of the
4 things that I had written down that I had asked you about was foxhole strength versus
5 authorized strength of your company in the 2nd tour. You remarked that it was much
6 lower. Explain that whole situation for me. What do you think it was?

7 EF: The authorized strength of the rifle company when I was with the Americal. I
8 believe it was 154 officers and men. I never went over 100 men at the most except for
9 one night that I had more than 100 men. That's another good story.

10 KC: Please, go ahead.

11 EF: Foxhole strength normally was between eighty and ninety men in the field.
12 So, it's almost half of my company is in the rear area somewhere.

13 KC: Why?

14 EF: They're either in R&R, they've been wounded, or they have some type of
15 injury. They're back on 411 when there's a group because we operated, the logistic
16 system required that each company have three or four men on hill 411 that was
17 responsible for a company's resupply. We were required to have X number of men back
18 in the rear area for supply efforts. Plus, we had just a whole mess of people back in the
19 back. The other thing was is there was so many men that were, even at battalion, if
20 battalion strength was—say, I was authorized 154, my assigned to the company at any
21 point in time, maybe max, was 125/130. So, we never even had the 154 assigned. So
22 many of these men were the tail that were at the base camp, brigade, at division level that
23 were in support units in the rear or, y'know, sort of like the number of—Chu Lai was our
24 base camp, they had a beach. Well, they needed lifeguards. Well, the lifeguards had to
25 come from somewhere. So, they pull them from the troops. You need club managers, so
26 they pull them from the troops. The PX needed people to help with supplies. They'd pull
27 y'know—they'd task them in. We, never even got to our authorized strength. If you had
28 130 actually assigned to the company, then you'd take out five or six on R&R, some that
29 are walking wounded in the rear area and other things. That's where I never got down to
30 a lower level. It's frustrating is that we never had the full complement of men.

1 KC: Do you think this could have possibly been part of an overall attitude within
2 the division as well? That this sort of thing could happen?

3 EF: I think it's the sort of thing that throughout, if you look through war, I don't
4 even know what the tail was in World War II, but you hear about all those that were
5 assigned to the rear area. To provide the logistical support that is required to support the
6 front-line troops is tremendous. I think as technology advanced more and more; troops
7 had to be pulled out to do that. Your maintenance sections, they required—the more
8 sophisticated our weapons became, the more individuals you had to have to be able to
9 pull maintenance on them. The more sophisticated our radios, you had more radio
10 mechanics that were involved in it. It just grew and grew and grew that logistical tail.
11 Then, like I said, the lifeguards here. You needed back in Duc Pho you needed so many
12 men to provide bunker security. So, you had to keep a contingent back there to ensure
13 that we could man the defensive bunkers at the basecamp. It was just all that I think
14 subtracted from the foxhole strength.

15 KC: Now you mentioned at one time you had over 100 men in your company.
16 You remember that distinctly. You said that it was a good story. I want to hear it.

17 EF: Okay, what it was, was I was out in the field, and I got a call from the
18 battalion commander saying that he was sending a chopper out for me to pick me up.
19 That there was a mission. So, a chopper came out, flew me back to the battalion on 411,
20 went to the battalion TOC and the battalion commander and S3 were there. They
21 informed me that the intelligence had identified a POW compound at a specific location
22 and that a mission for the company was tomorrow to be airlifted in to attempt a prisoner
23 rescue.

24 KC: Now, exactly where was this located?

25 EF: Oh, it must have been way east of Quang Ngai because I was out of artillery
26 support range from 105 and 155s. The only artillery support I would have was from some
27 Special Forces camp that had 175s, which was not the type of weapon you'd want to have
28 in support of you.

29 KC: And why do you say that?

30 EF: The 175 was lucky to hit within the grid square that you were aiming at.

1 KC: Alright, now Intel says there's a compound holding a single POW or multiple
2 POWs?

3 EF: They said multiple POWs. They did not know if they were American or
4 Vietnamese. It was just POWs.

5 KC: Now, were these VC I would assume up at this camp?

6 EF: Do not know. They just said—they always say, y'know, it was always
7 VC/NVA.

8 KC: Okay.

9 EF: So, they were there. So, my company was given the mission that it would be
10 airlifted in the morning. We would receive helicopter support from the Americal Division
11 and that I would get ten helicopters to air assault into. Which is more than I ever had
12 before. So, I knew it had to be serious if they're going to give me ten helicopters. But
13 still, it would take two lifts to get my complete company in. The turnaround time was
14 about almost an hour. So, it was a good distance away. We would have helicopter
15 gunships in support and TACAIR (Tactical Air Support) would be in support. They gave
16 me all this indication. The company besides my forward artillery observer, they gave me
17 another forward artillery observer who would be responsible, and his responsibility
18 would be to coordinate the airstrikes, air support going in. I don't know why they
19 couldn't give it to my FO, but that's another story.

20 KC: Right.

21 EF: I mean, I don't know why. At the time, I only had close to eighty-five men in
22 the field. The plan was that the initial group would go in and what they were going to do
23 was land us in four separate landing zones that somewhat surrounded the area. So, the
24 first two lifts would go in, hold in position where we hit, and then the second group
25 would go in and once they were on the ground, the first two would then be like the
26 blocking position and the other two groups would link up and they would be the ones to
27 sweep into the supposed compound. Well, the immediate response I had is, "I don't have
28 enough men to do that." So, the battalion commander agreed with me on that, and he
29 basically pulled everybody that was my company in the rear and had them get their gear
30 and come out and assigned me the two squads from our Alpha Company to supplement.
31 By the time I got on I had close to 140 men that were going to be air lifted out. The

1 concept was that we were going to go in and hit the ground and be out that same day. So,
2 all we had to carry in was no rations, it was just water and ammunition. So, we're going
3 in, in basically light. To secure our gear, because we were up in the mountains, they
4 brought in—the rest of the Alpha Company came in and Alpha Company would come in
5 and secure the pick-up zone as we left and secure all of our gear that we left there and fly
6 out. I flew out back to the company and called the platoon leaders together, gave them the
7 mission, and you get that starry-eyed look, he says, "Are you shitting me? You really
8 want to do this?" Y'know, it was kind of a hard sell on my part. Y'know, to show
9 encouragement for it because I questioned the insanity of it, too. Just because where was
10 my artillery support. I was a firm believer in artillery, but I wasn't going to get anything.
11 Then even with the gunships and aircraft, they have limited time on station. So, if
12 something happened, where would my support be? So, we got the briefing and I let him
13 know we were getting additional men coming in and we started receiving—some
14 choppers came in with some troops later in the afternoon. Alpha Company was
15 approaching and then I got the word that our battalion S3 is on the way out to talk to me
16 about the operation. This helicopter lands and he had built a sand table based on the aerial
17 photos of the suspected camp. He started pulling this sand table off not realizing that the
18 router blades were still going.

19 KC: So much for the sand table. (Laughter)

20 EF: Stuff just comes all over the place. I'm sitting there and I was laughing at
21 him. He was a very confident officer, he was a West Point Officer, but sometimes his
22 brain just wasn't connected. It was just funny trying to pull this sand table off. The little
23 things that he had put on the sand table as far as vegetation and hooch's were flying all
24 over the place. He pushed it back over, ran over to me and apologized for the sand table,
25 gone on, and left. Alpha company came in and it was Captain Jackowski again, we talked
26 about it. I called the battalion commander trying to get from a spirit standpoint. We were
27 not authorized to wear our soft caps in the theater, jungle hats in the field. We had to
28 wear our steel pots at all times. I requested and got approved from the battalion
29 commander that on this mission we could wear our jungle hats. Which made the men feel
30 good, they liked that.

31 KC: Sure.

1 EF: So, they didn't have to take their steel pots. So as night settled down, I just
2 quietly laid down looking at the stars and saying, "This is not a good idea. I'm not 100
3 percent behind it. Intelligence on that we've received or at least it's gotten down to me
4 has never been good." I remember getting intelligent about my first tour about the pink
5 elephants that were attacking somewhere. It was just questionable and really
6 apprehensive about it. I was not feeling good about the mission. Like I said, I did not
7 sleep that night. Then around four o'clock in the morning I got a call from the battalion
8 commander informing me that the mission had been cancelled.

9 KC: Why?

10 EF: Never found out why it was cancelled, but it was one of those things that it
11 didn't bother me a bit.

12 KC: That's really odd that it would have so much concern about this. Just
13 knowing it's not a good idea and then the next morning cancel.

14 EF: Yeah, I don't know. I guess the higher-ups started questioning the
15 intelligence. Maybe even the battalion commander even started questioning the
16 practicality of sending a group in on the suspected area that was outside of artillery
17 support and was actually in an area that was, y'know, owned by the VC/ NVA. It was an
18 area you didn't go into normally without force. So, it was one of those things that maybe
19 common sense prevailed and maybe it was a suspected VC/NVA POW area versus being
20 confirmed. That's the thing they probably did, it was not confirmed. So again, I felt very
21 relieved that that mission was cancelled. The men were upset because they had to put
22 their steel pots back on, but I don't think any of them really were upset about it. And so,
23 since it was cancelled was one of those things that that day, we just stayed in—the day it
24 was cancelled, Alpha Company moved out to their area of operation. So, we just stayed
25 there all day until around 1500 hours and we moved out to a new location to stay the
26 night.

27 KC: Alright, why don't we stop there for today?

28

1 Kelly Crager: This is Kelly Crager continuing an Oral History Interview with Mr.
2 Elpidio Fahel. Today is July 27, 2010. I am in Lubbock, Texas, on the campus of Texas
3 Tech University. Mr. Fahel is joining me by telephone from his home in Humble, Texas.
4 Mr. Fahel, you mentioned that there were a couple of things that you wanted to discuss
5 today between your time—toward the end of your time in the field there with the 23rd
6 division before you come back as the battalion S4. So, if you would, please, pick up on
7 the stories.

8 Elpidio Fahel: Okay, first thing I wanted to cover was I was still the Bravo
9 Company Commander on the field and Colonel Stottle, who was the battalion
10 commander came out to visit the company. When he was with the company, it was mid-
11 afternoon. He said that he had to fly up to the EVAC hospital in Chu Lai to visit some of
12 the battalion wounded up there. He asked me if I would like to accompany him, which I
13 said I would. We flew up to the EVAC hospital there to visit some of the wounded from
14 the battalion. One of the primary individuals that Colonel Stottle wanted to visit was a
15 platoon leader that the day before had stepped on a booby trap mine and was seriously
16 injured. So, we flew up to the EVAC hospital. My appearance was one that we'd been in
17 the field. We had not had a resupply, so I was pretty dirty as far as my uniform and
18 everything else. I hadn't shaved in a day or so. We got to the hospital, Colonel Stottle
19 checked in and asked where this platoon leader was. We were escorted and told where to
20 go. We walked into the area that he was at, and he was on the bed. We were briefed that
21 he had lost both his legs just above the knees and he would be evacuated to Japan the
22 next day. We went over there and stood beside the bed and Colonel Stottle talked to him
23 for a very short period of time. I just said, "Hello" because I did not know who he was or
24 I never met him because he was in the Charlie Company, I believe. We stayed there for a
25 while. What struck me was how positive he was in reference to his injury and that he was
26 going to continue to move forward and that he would not let that be a burden to him in
27 his future life. So that was really encouraging to me. After we spoke with him, we pulled
28 away and the nurse was with him, and she just briefly talked to us and one of the
29 comments she said was in his current state that she did not believe he really understood or
30 realized the seriousness of his injuries and the impact it would have on him and his later
31 years. One of the things from this, that just really reinforced to me, the seriousness of

1 what could happen in a combat situation. The other thing that I was impressed with was
2 the care that our troops were receiving in the hospital, and somebody was wounded as
3 serious as he was to be able to get medevac'd and taken and flown up to that EVAC
4 hospital to receive the treatment that saved his life. She also indicated that he didn't
5 realize the seriousness of his injury and that part of the rehab that he would be going
6 through in the later years will probably be very difficult for him. One of the things I
7 regret is I never really found out exactly what happened to him afterwards and I really
8 don't even remember his name. One of the reunions that I attended of the battalion, one
9 of the other individuals with C- Company remembered, again, the incident, but never
10 remembered his name. They were trying to do some research to find out who he is so at
11 least he can find out what happened to him afterwards. And I think that's one of the
12 things that has happened to a lot of the veterans in Vietnam. Individuals that were
13 wounded and evacuated from the location and back to the states that we never really
14 knew what happened to him or lost complete contact with them. The majority of the ones
15 that we have found at reunion sites or had returned to the unit and spent most of their
16 time to the unit, those who had been evacuated, we have seemed to have lost contact
17 with. The other thing I wanted to talk about was—Again was out in the field and received
18 a call from the battalion commander saying that he was sending a helicopter out to pick
19 me up and bring me back to 411. So, a helicopter came out. I got on, flew back to the
20 base camp, reported to battalion TOC and he told me to go down to the mess hall and
21 report there was somebody there that wanted to talk to me. So, I went down there and
22 walked into the mess hall and there was Colonel Norris who was my battalion
23 commander with my first tour. He greeted me and said, "Young man, I'm glad to see you.
24 I've heard some good things about you from Colonel Stottle. How are things going?" I
25 told him it was a rough time, but I really appreciated the lessons learned from my first
26 tour that's really helped me. And he said, "Well that's good." He said, "The reason I'm
27 here is that I am the Chief of Infantry branch back at the Pentagon. I'm making a tour of
28 Vietnam and identifying those officers that have been performing well and wanted to talk
29 to you about your career." We sat down and basically, he said, "Here's your career
30 pattern for right now. You're going to complete your tour here as a company commander.
31 Colonel Stottle said that he was going to keep you in the battalion and go back and

1 become one of the staff officers. You'll return to the states. I'm going to send you to
2 Airborne School or Ranger School in infantry advance course and then hopefully to the
3 degree completion program in two years. How does that sound?" And I said, that sounded
4 great, but I didn't want to go to Airborne School or Ranger School.

5 KC: Why not?

6 EF: Basically, because I spent two tours in Vietnam, and I didn't want to do any
7 of that stuff. From my experience at OCS, I just didn't want to go through the harassment
8 that I knew that I would go through both through Airborne School and Ranger School. It
9 was one of those things, y'know, I've had enough harassment with shots being fired at
10 me. I didn't want to go through that.

11 KC: Right, did you tell that to the Colonel?

12 EF: I told that to the Colonel. He said, "Well, we'll see about that." So, we talked
13 some more, and he said, "Good to see you." I went back and joined the company. So,
14 from a practical standpoint you talked before about what was my future layed before me
15 so it was at this point, I said, "Y'know, I could possibly make a career out of the military
16 if I could do those things." The major thing that really enticed me was the fact that
17 sending me back to school to get my degree, which was one of the things I knew I was
18 lacking as an officer not having a degree. So, that was it. Received word, again, about
19 leaving the company. There was a Captain Henderson that came in and he accompanied
20 me for about two to three days just like I did with Captain Kelbs.

21 KC: Let me interrupt you here if I may, Mr. Fahel. You've got this new guy
22 coming in, this new company commander. Now, had he led a company before?

23 EF: No, he had not. He was a Special Forces trained officer and I really don't
24 know that much about him, but I think he did have another tour, but it was an advisor
25 capacity, but not with an American unit, but I'm not fully sure of that.

26 KC: Okay, now during these couple days when he's shadowing you, trying to
27 figure things out and the lay of the land literally and figuratively, what sort of ways are
28 you trying to convey what y'know about this outfit and what they've been involved in
29 and how to handle them? How are you trying to convey all that to him?

30 EF: Spent a lot of time at the area we were operating in was, we were pretty much
31 static as far as the company CP element and the movement we were making. So, we had

1 a lot of time to just sit down and talk. I went and discussed each of the strengths and
2 weaknesses that I perceived of the platoon leaders and the strengths and weaknesses of
3 the platoon sergeants within the company. I talked about how the fire support was
4 coordinated with Dean Devault which was our FO talking about the terrain and the fact
5 that we were just moving up these particular areas. Then went over with the map and just
6 pointed out where is that we've had contact in the past, the type of contact we had and
7 reinforced the aspect of not walking down trails to avoid the booby traps and making sure
8 the security—I told you that right now I felt the company, y'know, the platoon leaders
9 are very strong and it was not an issue that you had to ride them to make sure you knew
10 what they were doing. Basically talked about the things that I carried in my backpack,
11 y'know, what I would do during the day and that from a company commander and the
12 way we were operating, the majority of all the contact incidences that would be involved,
13 would be involved with the platoons or squads that were away from the company CP so
14 the important aspect was to ensure we knew their locations at all times so that if
15 something did happen, we can get the support in to them as soon as possible. And just,
16 y'know, let him ask questions of me as far as, y'know, what was happening and
17 everything else. I think the key things that I was able to do with him was just going over
18 again, our map sheet since we just worked on one map sheet and the terrain and being
19 able to talk about the different times, we moved over certain terrain and how difficult it
20 was. How the platoons functioned there going down into the valleys and the area. A big
21 discussion concerning the area of the horseshoe and that area as far as the type of contact
22 we'd have there. The problem that we would have in that area was mainly with the booby
23 traps and mines. Just giving them that general overview. I even talked to them about
24 Colonel Stottle and his leadership style. He was a pretty good person at letting the
25 company function under the company commander and wasn't one that was over the
26 commanding unit. Talked about battalion S3 and how he functioned and some of the
27 other areas. I also discussed the aspect of his administrative responsibilities that he would
28 have back in the back with the First Sergeant and the company XO that were in the rear
29 area and how I would coordinate with them on my supply requirements. In the field, each
30 company had a representative for our firebase that we could communicate on a regular
31 basis letting them know what our supply requirements were. That person would

1 coordinate with the battalion in the rear back at Duc Pho and the company on our supply
2 requirements and go from there. It was just a three- or four-day time of moving. With the
3 company we had no contact during that period of time. He was, y'know, able to get
4 somewhat—like I didn't initially—it was very difficult for him as far as the physical
5 exertion of walking and carrying all that information and stuff on your back. I sort of
6 laughed at it because I remembered how difficult it was for me.

7 KC: Did you feel that he was well prepared coming from a Special Forces
8 background to leading ground infantry?

9 EF: Y'know, that was a hard thing. I think from what I remember in talking with
10 him was he did have a sense of importance for security. He also from some point of view,
11 I think he would be one that would look out for the welfare of the men, and he wasn't
12 going to be what I said a reckless individual charging into the situation. I think he had the
13 tactical common sense that would enable him to perform out in the field. So, I felt
14 comfortable handing him over to, or handing the company over to him. Y'know, it was
15 good. The other aspect, I was ready to get out. So, it was like in reality I would have felt
16 good about.

17 KC: Well, that brings up another point. Y'know that you're leaving, that you're
18 going back to battalion. What are you feeling? What are you thinking about getting out of
19 the field from this?

20 EF: At this point I was two things. One, I wanted to get out and I think I was even
21 more cautious in the last two weeks as far as making sure that the security was out and
22 that I wasn't going to do anything stupid. I was very, in some ways, overcautious in
23 doing that. Also, it seemed like for the last two weeks that, gee, the clock did not move at
24 all. It was a long two weeks. I think part of that was where my first tour when I was in the
25 field as a platoon leader or even when I was a company commander there was enough
26 action going on and enough movement that during the day, it kept you occupied. The
27 second time, the platoons were out doing their search and destroy missions and we were
28 sitting up on the hilltop during the day doing nothing. So, that really went slow.

29 KC: Right.

30 EF: I can remember every once in a while, the vivid memory that I have, a picture
31 is when a helicopter came in and picked me up and I left flying off that hilltop which was

1 one of the high mountain hill tops that we were on and just how the chopper took off. As
2 we got higher and higher, y'know, the company sort of disappeared from sight. Y'know,
3 away to the units it was one of those things nobody really came up and said, "Goodbye
4 sir, we're going to miss you." It was one of those things that I think it was something that
5 was just expected where one day the company commander would be me and the next day
6 would be somebody else. Again, because of the real, I'd say, lack of being down at the
7 lower levels, I really didn't know that many men. My main contact was with the troops in
8 my command group and my platoon leaders. It was one of those things in some ways I
9 was sad, and one of the things I remember as I took off is I made it through without
10 losing a man. That made me feel good. The company made it during that command deal.
11 We had some wounded, but I didn't lose a man. But I was sure happy to get on that
12 chopper and leave.

13 KC: Sure. Alright, now you're on this chopper, you're headed back to battalion
14 headquarters, staff office. Is that what you said?

15 EF: Right.

16 KC: Okay, you're headed back to Duc Pho. This is the rear, for you anyway. You
17 are now going to be an S4. A battalion S4 which is logistics.

18 EF: Yes.

19 KC: You've been two tours in the field leading troops, leading platoon, leading
20 companies of all kinds of action. You've seen the real war and now you're going to be in
21 charge of supply. What's that like for you?

22 EF: Well one is that I knew I wasn't going to be in contact, I'd be back in the rear
23 and the only thing I could only say from a logistics standpoint well, I did have some of
24 the logistics training in OCS and tried to recall that. I did have, when I was a company
25 commander with my first tour, the battalion S4, who I talked to quite a bit observing what
26 he was doing as the XO because the officers were such a small, tight group back in that
27 first year. So I had some concept of that my primary responsibility would be getting the
28 resupply from Duc Pho and getting it out to 411. Then once 411 received it, a minor
29 responsibility of getting those supplies out to the companies in the field. As the S4 I knew
30 that I would have a service support platoon leader lieutenant that would be on 411 that
31 would coordinate activities at that location. Back in the rear I had a maintenance warrant

1 officer and a supply warrant officer what would be helping me. I had two or three
2 enlisted working in the supply back in the rear. A lot of the supply responsibility in S4
3 was to coordinate the requirements that were received by the company and basically
4 coordinate the companies getting it to our heli pad and then ensuring that we have the
5 proper helicopter depending on the amount of supplies going out. Whether it was a Huey
6 would take it out or a little bit of supplies or a chinook would take it out. Or a decision
7 would be made if it was really a lot of supplies that were required by the battalion of
8 coordinating getting a convoy that would go up Highway-1 to Quang Ngai than to the
9 firebase. I knew that y'know, a lot of it would be that and there really wasn't that much
10 else involved in the rear area as the battalion S4. The main thing was to keep the troops
11 happy with the resupply and making sure they had plenty of the rations that were
12 required. The process was pretty well already set up, so they had the policies and
13 procedures, and it was just sort of coordinating it and standing back and making sure that
14 the companies were doing their job in their requirements for it.

15 KC: Did you ever try to work harder to get special things to your old battalion or
16 to your battalion?

17 EF: There were things that we get special requests for, but it's sort of like as a
18 scrounger, I wasn't the best at it because I never really had that much experience. What
19 my supply warrant and my senior NCO were very good at it, so it was easy just to say,
20 "We need this." And they say, "Okay, sir, we'll take care of it." So, it was one of the
21 areas, again, that I was very fortunate that I had a good group of subordinates that were
22 working with me that made the job very easy. Both my maintenance warrant and my
23 supply warrant were excellent individuals. Had been in the Army for a long time. When
24 they came into Duc Pho, they made sure they made their contacts and established the
25 rapport with the supply people at brigade, and the supply people at division. I think the
26 warrant officers are pretty tight groups, so they knew all the warrants that were up in their
27 area. The NCOs that were in supply made good contact. So, it was just that type of buddy
28 system and taking care of everybody and just had to make sure they knew what the
29 requirements were.

30 KC: How long had you been in the field before you were pulled out?

31 EF: About five-and-a-half to six months.

1 KC: So, it was about half of your second tour?

2 EF: Half my tour was as a company commander. So, it was back to that. That was
3 one of the things when I joined the battalion that was pretty evident that they were
4 rotating out by six months. Whether you were a company commander or a platoon leader.

5 KC: Right. Did you miss being out in the field?

6 EF: No.

7 KC: That's a pretty fast and simple answer. (Laughter)

8 EF: Yes, I think just getting back and being able to have three hot meals a day,
9 being able to get up, shower, shave, brush your teeth have—definitely have a clean set of
10 fatigues to put on every day, clean underwear, clean socks on a regular basis. Being able
11 to walk around with a bush hat on and a .45 only and not carrying anything on your back.
12 It was such a change and such a relief of not being out there. So, it was not enjoyable
13 from that perspective. Just being over there wasn't enjoyable, but it was a lot better than
14 being in the field.

15 KC: Sure.

16 EF: After my first tour where I didn't have, let's see, an extensive time in the rear
17 area, this time I was looking forward to my final six months of just being back in that
18 safe environment.

19 KC: Now you already described your duties as the battalion S4. Tell me about life
20 in the rear.

21 EF: Life in the rear there, it was just an extreme routine. I'd get up between six
22 thirty in the morning, y'know, shave, brush my teeth, put my clothes on, and mosey on
23 up to the mess hall, get my coffee, spend about an hour in the mess hall and having
24 breakfast that usually consisted of powdered eggs, powdered milks, some cereal,
25 pancakes, bacon, and several cups of coffee. We'd go back to the S4 area to see what was
26 going on, find out what and coordinate with my support platoon leader on 411 to find out
27 if there was any additional special requests that had come in prior to what he had called
28 in the night before. Contact the company XO's to make sure they had their requirements
29 received and would prepare to it. The helicopters would come in between two and four in
30 the afternoon, to pick up the supplies. Like I said, we'd make a determination of which
31 type of helicopter we would request or if we would have to take a convoy up. That would

1 be most of the thing in the morning. Do some paperwork, wander around the battalion
2 area, and then back. Have lunch, again, go up there and have my coffee, sit for about an
3 hour talking to everybody. Come back and start overseeing the supplies being
4 consolidated on the chopper pad. That was right out in front, maybe 150 meters from the
5 battalion S4 location was we had our own little, small chopper pad that we could
6 provide—where we could have our choppers come in for our battalion. The chopper
7 would come in, we would rig the supplies based on the type of chopper and the chopper
8 would come in, pick it up, head out, go back to the office, sit and do nothing, and then it
9 was chow time. In the evening it was one of the things you get up there right around five
10 o'clock when the chow line opened. You'd get in line, eat your meal, and we did it
11 quickly in the evening meal because the objective there was to get out and be able to be
12 on the basketball court or the volleyball court and participate in those two activities in the
13 evening. Whether it was basketball or volleyball we'd be out there. We'd stay out there
14 and play until it got too dark for us to play. Then we'd go back, and the battalion always
15 had a movie every night. A projector and an outside screen with plywood boards put on.
16 Very poor sound, everybody was in the rear area—Not everybody—would come out and
17 we'd watch the movie. Most of the times it was more just something of passing of time,
18 nothing spectacular as far as a movie. What was enjoyable were the comments that the
19 troops would make off and on through the movie, y'know, laughing or adding their view
20 of how the script should be changed, and it'd reflect these words.

21 KC: What kind of movies would you get? What kind of things would you hear
22 from these guys?

23 EF: Y'know, I can't remember the movies. See, this was in 1970 so these were
24 movies that came out in '68/'69 timeframe. They were rather recent movies. Most of
25 them were either comedies or dramas. Like I said, I can't even remember. Y'know, they
26 would just make a lot of times, obscene comments on what should happen versus what
27 actually happened.

28 KC: What other sorts of recreation did you get into, In terms of—?

29 EF: Recreation would be getting—we had a small building that was built which
30 was the officer's club that we had back in the rear. We had about twelve officers in the
31 rear area—If we could get enough together, we'd have a poker game and we'd have

1 poker after the movie or whatever. So that was one of the major recreation area things
2 was playing poker. If we cannot find enough individuals to have a good poker game, I
3 probably went back to my hooch, put on some records—not records, tapes, and listened
4 to the radio. Chief Toombs which was my supply warrant officer taught me how to play
5 cribbage, so we played cribbage quite a bit during that period of time. One of the other
6 recreations things that we did which was kind of stupid, we took our M-16 rounds, took
7 the lead out, pour out a lot of the powder, and then plug it with soap. Then we'd sit in our
8 thing and wait for a rat to run around, and we'd try to shoot the rats with our soap.

9 KC: The things you can find to occupy yourself.

10 EF: Oh yeah, that was one of the things I remember about being in the S4 shop
11 was that there was rats all over the place. You could see them running on the rafters,
12 they'd run on the floor in front of you. At night, you could hear them scurrying all over
13 the place.

14 KC: Besides trying to shoot them with soap, what else did you try to do to handle
15 them?

16 EF: Oh, we had rat traps, poison things set out. I think some group in the medical
17 group or at brigade, Vector Control, was constantly out trying to eliminate the rat
18 problem. Y'know, you'd sit there and one of the times, I don't know if it was me or one
19 of the other guys in our S4 shop did that with the soap and hey, how dangerous could this
20 be? He shot at a rat, and it missed, and it went through the corrugated metal paneling on
21 the side of the hooch. So, we said, "Hmm, maybe we had too much soap or too much
22 powder in that one."

23 KC: Yeah, might want to empty something else out of there.

24 EF: They're saying, "Somebody can get hurt."

25 KC: What about—and we talked about part of this before. What about the use of
26 drugs? Alcohol, drugs? You talked to some degree about this already.

27 EF: The drug problem back in the rear area was extremely serious. You could just
28 walk through our battalion area, and you could smell the marijuana and incense burning
29 to cover it up. There was a hooch, y'know, you could just walk through it, and it was just
30 horrible. It wasn't as bad during the day, but once dinner and the rear area troops had
31 finished their job, that was their primary recreation. Some of them would be playing

1 volleyball and basketball and watching a movie, but even those that did that afterwards,
2 that's what they were doing. Drugs were readily available. We had I know some US
3 soldiers that were dealers. The Vietnamese that would come on post and do their different
4 jobs were dealers. So, it was just readily available. Where I said out in the field it was not
5 a problem. Back in the rear area it was an extreme problem. You'd take a good troop out
6 in the field that performed tremendously. A good soldier in the field and you'd get them
7 back in the back area and boom, that first night they were there and going in. I've often
8 wondered how many individuals started their drug habit from being in the rear area at a
9 base camp. The soldiers that I had in my S4 section I was responsible for were—I'm sure
10 they used, but during the day they performed, and I just took an attitude of I wasn't going
11 to worry about it. In all reality, the individual that had the primary responsibility was the
12 headquarters' company commander. I just said, "These men are all part of his command.
13 If there's a problem, that I'm having with one of my troops, my responsibility was to
14 maybe council and talk to them, but if that didn't work was to give them to the company
15 commander and let him handle the situation." So that's basically what I did. Looking
16 back, it wasn't the proper attitude to take, but again, I'd been six months in the field, and
17 I really didn't want to do anything to make my life really miserable back in the back. To
18 coincide with the problem with the drugs, it was the extreme problem with race. The
19 blacks, when they came into the rear from the field, they had one platoon sized area that
20 they just congregated in. It was perceived as being off limits. Nobody went into that area
21 around that. You could walk by no problem. The headquarters company commander and
22 the senior NCOs, nobody, not even me, would go into that hooch. It was just perceived as
23 not being safe. Their attitude of not working, not doing anything, and being high on drugs
24 was a tremendous problem that we faced in the rear. I think it sort of mirrored the racial
25 tension that was going on in the states. Again, you could take an individual that was out
26 in the field that was black, and he was a good soldier, bring them back into the rear and
27 would get into that group. If he did get into that group, would become a major problem
28 on that. Prior to my time back in the rear with the battalion, I really didn't consider
29 myself much of a racist, but after a short time back there, y'know, the prejudice really
30 came out in reference to the blacks and the problems that they were creating.

1 KC: Now, did you see this as just a problem of caused by African Americans or
2 do you think there were extenuating circumstances that were there to help increase a
3 problem?

4 EF: I think it was, one, was the attitude. Again, the racial tensions that happened
5 in—it started in you might say back in the race riots that happened in '65/'66. The killing
6 of Martin Luther King and the awareness of the black pride. The influence of the Black
7 Panthers on these individuals. You'd have enough individuals, then again, this was 1970,
8 that were drafted into the military that were exposed to that environment in the states that
9 when they got into a secure area, base camp rear area, were able to take up that attitude
10 and talk more about it. So, you had the rebel rousers that would come in and more and
11 more of them would come in. then you had individuals, y'know, as far NCOs and some
12 other officers that would add fire or fuel to the fire in reference to their attitude and their
13 comments that they made.

14 KC: Such as what?

15 EF: Oh, y'know, just saying you're worthless, y'know, get out here and calling
16 them niggers and just being completely disrespectful toward them as individuals, but
17 again, their attitude towards the military was very negative. They had a complete
18 disrespect for authority. They had—those individuals, I had two blacks that were a part of
19 my S4 section that didn't associate with them. They were called Uncle Toms. In addition,
20 that attitude then, the drug issue just compounded that negativity that came in and the
21 problems of race relations. I know that when I went to Germany after, y'know, a few
22 years later that the problems of race relations in the military, again, was very relevant and
23 a major problem which was in '73 through '76 that there was an extreme problem with
24 race again and drugs when I was in Germany. I think one of the incidences that happened
25 was that one of the company XOs—then again, these individuals that would go into this
26 area, the blacks, would then have a reluctance to return to the field. If they came in for
27 whatever reason, you'd get them into that hooch, and it was hard to get them out to get
28 them back out to the field. The company XOs are the ones that had to deal with that and
29 the company First Sergeants. Again, because of their unwillingness to, you might say,
30 confront them in the hooch, they waited until they were in the mess hall to eat, and they
31 were out, then they'd confront them. We had once incident where one of the companies

1 XOs wanted an individual to go out to the field. I think he was, again, targeting the
2 individual for whatever reason and making life difficult for him. It grew where he just flat
3 refused to go to the field. The company commander found him outside of the hooch and
4 then used force with some other—with the First Sergeant himself and then one or two
5 other whites basically just escorted him to the chopper pad, brought some equipment that
6 wasn't his and a weapon and said, "Here, you get on a chopper, you're going out to the
7 field." Well, several of the other blacks appeared with their weapons and it became a
8 standoff with them. One group of blacks standing there and a small group of the other
9 ones with the individual. The helicopter landed to take them out and just stayed there. He
10 didn't move. They couldn't get him to move. The troops, the blacks, y'know, were lined
11 up there with their weapons. Like I said, our S4 pad was 150 meters from there. Between
12 the S4 office and our Heli pad faced the sleeping bunker of the S4's enlisted guys. I took
13 my—I had my first—my chief warrant officer and my supply sergeant and two of the
14 other blacks that were in my S4 section moved out there with our weapons and just stood
15 there behind the bunker in a position to take action if something did happen in reference
16 to it. The battalion executive officer was alerted to the situation and his name was Major
17 Holman and I'll talk about him later, but it was probably one of the best things he did.
18 And the only good thing he did while he was the battalion XO is that he approached and
19 told the helicopter to take off without the trooper. The helicopter took off which had
20 reduced the tension level. However, as they both stayed there and the blacks demanded
21 that he come back with them, Major Holmes said, "No, just stay where you're at." Very
22 shortly after, the helicopter took off what I'd say almost a platoon of MPs came up with
23 their gun jeeps. Came up and arrested all the blacks that were there. There were about six
24 or seven other blacks that had their weapons. They were all arrested and carted off. I
25 don't know really what happened to them. I heard they were court marshalled, but we
26 never saw any of those individuals back in the rear area again. But that incident
27 somewhat compounded the tension that was between the blacks and the leadership of the
28 battalion in the rear. Our battalion was not unique. Talking to some of the other
29 individuals throughout the brigade, it was a common practice as far as that. It's sort of
30 like you alluded to the movie, "*Platoon*" where they were all in their hooch smoking.
31 That's somewhat, at that time, what I perceived.

1 KC: Now, when you came up behind them, like you said you got some of your
2 warrant officers and other NCOs, did y'know what the situation was, or did you just
3 come across this and see this stand off?

4 EF: I somewhat knew what the situation is. I knew that the XO was going to use
5 force because they talked about it at lunch time. He was going to get this guy and get him
6 out there. He was going to set him straight. I think this particular black, and the XO have
7 had words before in the rear area within the past few days. It was something that I was
8 aware that was going to happen. Again, we were watching when he brought him up there.
9 We could see it from our area and then we saw the other blacks come up. The situation I
10 was aware of prior to he was going to try to use force to put him on. When somebody told
11 me there were some other blacks that had their weapons that were on their chopper pads,
12 that's when I said, "Okay, we need to be prepared to do something, too." I don't know
13 what I would have done. Okay, if the shooting starts, we have to shoot somebody, but I
14 didn't know who. I was just hoping that, again, from my show of force of being where we
15 were at, that they would see it and maybe it would cause them not to take any action
16 because they knew that there were some other people that were in a position to take
17 action. In support of the company XO.

18 KC: That must have been a bizarre scene.

19 EF: It was, it was a bizarre scene. Then the tensions were extremely high in the
20 battalion area after a few days after that. It was like one of those things I think even when
21 we played basketball or volleyball, we had several of the blacks that would be playing
22 with us. In the next few days, you didn't see them. They were nowhere around. The only
23 ones that I saw were the ones that were in the mess hall and the two that were part of my
24 S4 section.

25 KC: Right, do you think this was out of fear of reprisals or did they just not want
26 to associate with the white soldiers?

27 EF: Y'know, I think it was just that, "Hey, we're not going to associate with." I
28 don't think there was any fear of reprisal from it because I don't think there was—again,
29 I wasn't going to, not being the headquarters company commander or the battalion
30 executive officer, I didn't know in reality what was going on in their mind or what they
31 had planned. I think at the time it could have been a reprisal concern because of the

1 attitude of our battalion executive officer and the headquarters company commander at
2 the time was a concern. Again, the other thing was that they also knew at the time, since
3 they took the six or eight individuals that were there standing off with their weapons out,
4 they were primarily the ring leaders. And the very vocal ones. We reduced the rebel
5 rousers were not there after that.

6 KC: What kind of effect does this have on morale generally? Not just throughout
7 your outfit, but throughout the rest of the people who were around you.

8 EF: It was a very negative effect. Again, you're talking about we didn't see the
9 blacks but there were the rumors of the fragging's going on or, y'know, a leader that had
10 a mysterious accident at times. Then you were concerned—I was concerned that they
11 may start doing something. Y'know it could be because I was standing there with my
12 weapons, y'know, was I a target now? The reprisal on their part. So it was that type of
13 extreme tension that was going on. You could tell just how everybody in our battalion
14 that was in the rear area spoke and walked. It was like before it didn't bother me to walk
15 safe at night after the movie that was in the mess hall back to my battalion S4 area by
16 myself, but with this incident it was like, y'know, I waited and made sure there was
17 somebody with me. I think everybody else, y'know, you started walking in groups versus
18 single file at night.

19 KC: Did you ever see any violence towards officers?

20 EF: Um, no. Well, yes. There was some violence that was directed towards our
21 battalion executive officer. I'd like to talk about him now.

22 KC: Okay, please do.

23 EF: Major Holman was a National Guard Officer. In my opinion and the opinion
24 of basically everybody in the rear area, very incompetent. He stayed in his hooch most of
25 the day. He got drunk at night. He belittled people on a constant basis. He was just an
26 individual that should not have been over there. Like I said, he commanded no respect
27 from the men. The officers and Senior NCO's that were in the back pretty much tried to
28 shield the rest of the men back there from him. He was extremely disrespectful to all the
29 officers and Senior NCOs. If something would happen from one of us would do
30 something he didn't like, he'd just lay into us. Y'know, "you'll get yours." One incident
31 that really stood out was one night he called all the officers and Senior NCOs together.

1 And this is about one o'clock in the morning and made us stand in formation. He was
2 drunk, and he just told us what a sorry group of individuals we were. How worthless we
3 were and that we did not show them any respect. He was going to make sure that we
4 would respect him. He just rambled on for an extended period of time. I was standing
5 there with Captain Kelbs who I replaced as the company commander of Bravo Company
6 and, y'know, started rolling our eyes, "What are we going to do?" Y'know, every once in
7 a while, a flare would go off in the perimeter and illuminate the area. It was just a weird
8 sight to see. This group of about fifteen officers and NCOs lined up in two files listening
9 to this executive officer and his ramblings going on. He was just a very difficult person to
10 work with. He finally dismissed us, and we went back into our hooch. Captain Kelbs and
11 the battalion Sergeant Major were on the first chopper out of the base camp in the
12 morning and met with the battalion commander. Within a week, Major Holman was
13 removed and sent up to division headquarters. I never heard from him again.

14 KC: In essence promoted for this?

15 EF: I don't think he got promoted. I think he just got out of the area. Yeah, there
16 was no promotion in it for him. There's no way I could see him getting promoted. From
17 that particular incident and some of the other things that had been reported to the
18 battalion commander, y'know, he knew he had to relieve him of his duties.

19 KC: Okay, so he was actually relieved of duty?

20 EF: He was relieved as the battalion executive officer.

21 KC: Okay, okay I see.

22 EF: Which was a good thing because again, as a battalion executive officer, he
23 could provide no guidance or did not provide any guidance to me as an S4 logistics
24 officer or to the S1 or any of the staff or NCOs back within the rear area how to do our
25 job there better. We were just basically doing what we thought we should be doing and
26 how it should be done with no guidance or direction from him. Like I said, most of the
27 time he was just an individual that made life more difficult than it should have been.

28 KC: Hmm, very interesting. Did you get a chance to go on leave in your second
29 tour while you were there?

30 EF: Yeah, I went on R&R to Hawaii. I can't even remember when I went, but it
31 was after I'd been back as an S4 for maybe a month or two. So, I flew to Hawaii again,

1 met Mary, and this time she brought Candy with her. So, it was a week of being with
2 Mary and being with Candy, who was what? About just over two years, two and a half
3 years old. It was just a very pleasant time being about to spend time with Candy and
4 seeing her and how she'd grown the time she'd been there. She had started talking at this
5 time so she could communicate. She was able to run around and do her thing. So, we
6 would go out, walk the beach by the swimming pool of the hotel, go to the international
7 marketplace where she was fascinated by the fish swimming in the ponds and the
8 different things there. It was just an enjoyable time seeing her at that stage. I think
9 departing Hawaii and returning to Vietnam was easier this time than the first time
10 because again, I was going back as a battalion logistics officer. So even though before I
11 was going back as a company XO, I think it was easier this time knowing what I would
12 be doing and what I was doing wasn't as difficult as the first time. So, y'know, sitting in
13 the back of my mind was that in a way, my future was laid out as far as what I would be
14 doing once, I returned from Vietnam. In the prior tour when I left, there was always,
15 "What am I going to do with the rest of my life?" Here was a potential of what was going
16 to happen was much more positive. In a way I was looking forward to getting back there
17 and then returning to the states and say, perusing a career in the military.

18 KC: Right, right. Now, did Candy remember you when you met in Hawaii?

19 EF: I don't think she actually remembered me from the standpoint, but I think
20 Mary said, "There's your daddy." So, she knew the concept of Daddy and maybe there
21 was something she remembered, y'know, sort of like when I first saw her. It was funny,
22 we got off a bus and for whatever reason, we had to walk through, not a tree line, but a
23 bush line. I walked through and I remember Mary and Candy standing there and when I
24 walked through, Candy saw Mary pointing to me and then Candy sort of looking.
25 Initially, I think she was, "Who is this guy?" But I think a little bit more encouragement
26 from Mary, she came running to me, I picked her up and hugged her.

27 KC: Tell me about the rest of your tour there with the S4?

28 EF: Oh, I think one of the things that happened about—let's see, Major Holman
29 left and about three or four weeks later we got another executive officer in. His name was
30 Walt Shurgurt. Major Shurgurt was the company commander of Bravo Company, the 3rd
31 of the 22nd at fire support base Gold, Soui Tre. At that big battle that the battalion was in

1 prior to my first tour. He was an excellent executive officer. I mean, I think he had been
2 to the advanced course, so he knew the requirements of the logistic officer and the first
3 day he came through he just conducted an inspection of the logistics there and just tore
4 me a new asshole. Y'know, it was like basically completely incompetent type thing. He
5 tore into the maintenance office, he tore into my property book, supply warrant. The
6 NCOs quickly heard what was going on and they ran. He tore into everybody in the rear
7 area. He did it in a way that was professional. I mean, y'know, he tore me a new asshole,
8 but he did it from, "This is what you're doing by the book. This is what you should be
9 doing."

10 KC: What were you doing wrong?

11 EF: You name it, I was doing it wrong. It was just like the property book, PLL list
12 (Prescribed Load List). We had no records of what we had back in the rear area. Our
13 property book was not up to date. We'd walk into a certain supply area and the supplies
14 weren't organized in a proper organization so you could rapidly find something we
15 needed. There was no communication logs established or maintenance of communication
16 equipment. The motor pool, even though we were repairing vehicles, we didn't have the
17 proper maintenance logs maintained per vehicle. So, we didn't keep the proper—it was
18 more the paperwork that was required for the military to do it. Our requisitioning with
19 support documents were weak. So, it was just one of those things where, okay, you need
20 to get it and do it right. The S1 section, I know he had their documentation of what the
21 troops were doing as far as their personnel records and updates of company rosters,
22 battalion rosters. A lot of the things that should be done on a daily basis that were not
23 done on a daily basis that Major Holman could care less about. Major Shurgurt made sure
24 that we started doing things right. And sort of like if you could do it right the first time it
25 made life easier in general. I think in the end it was a good experience to me from a point
26 of view, okay, I had no concept of what a logistic officer was supposed to do until after
27 my time with Major Shurgurt. I think one of the good things about that, when I got to the
28 officer advanced course and we went in and did our logistics, that portion of the training
29 there that I had a good working knowledge of what should be done so it made my time
30 and efforts in that portion of the advanced course much easier for me because of that
31 experience. He was just an excellent executive officer. Even though he made life difficult

1 for us, he was an individual that really was able to change the morale in the rear area.
2 When I left, the morale was at a much higher level than it had ever been during my six
3 months while we was there. He had a lot to overcome where the rear area morale was at
4 with Major Holman and moving forward with that.

5 KC: What was your personal relationship like?

6 EF: Very good, we sat around and talked. Then again, his methodology and
7 approach to pointing out deficiencies of the logistic area. It was more what he did was he
8 pointed out the breakdowns in the process that we were doing, versus attacking the
9 individuals personally. So, it wasn't where he was calling us a bunch of incompetent
10 individuals, he was talking that the process was broken down because we were not
11 recording things the way they should be recorded. It wasn't such a personal attack against
12 us and that was something that I remembered and still, in my later years, when there was
13 a deficiency or something broke down or somebody did something wrong, you attacked
14 the process and not the individual. In that way, the individual is more receptive to
15 improving what they were doing and making the corrections versus when somebody
16 takes up personal attacks. When Major Holman would do it, it was a personal attack on
17 you as you're incompetent. So, Major Shurgurt and—what happened, I think, everybody
18 in the rear area had a good working relationship with Shurgurt and they all respected him
19 as an officer. I think the other aspect of it too was they could see his leadership style and
20 again, he didn't talk about Soui Tre, but we talked about what happened at Soui Tre and
21 what his company did. So, there was that respect of him being a commander in a major
22 battle. They had that respect for him as a combat leader and that carried onto being a
23 leader in an administrative function.

24 KC: Alright.

25 EF: So that was that. The other area that I think I'd mentioned prior with Major
26 Holman that we also had our headquarters company commander that created problems.
27 Within a month, maybe a month and a half of Major Shurgurt coming back as the
28 executive officer, he relieved the headquarters company commander of his
29 responsibilities.

30 KC: Is that right?

1 EF: Yeah, again, this particular company commander, his first tour he was
2 looking to, y'know, get out and be a company commander in the field, but my feeling
3 was is that you didn't want him in the field. Personally, I did not respect him as an officer
4 just because his lack of action in confronting the drug problem and confronting and
5 taking action against the blacks. When I say taking action, I say doing something to
6 minimize the tension in there with that. There was some other issues. I think even the
7 battalion commander had made a decision that he was not going to move him out. There
8 was some other company commanders that were coming up to come back to the rear area
9 or spend their time. His name never came up as a potential going out there so he would
10 be at headquarters. There's, I think, some incidents, again, of his complete inaction in a
11 lot of his attitude that was very negative that Major Shurgurt picked up on and observed.
12 As the battalion executive officer, he sort of was holding the officers and Senior NCOs
13 accountable for their actions in reference to their area's responsibilities. That was
14 something that this particular company commander never really accepted any
15 responsibility. He spent most of his time in the mess hall goofing off or playing with the
16 hooch maids. Playing with the hooch maids is what got him relieved. So, one of the
17 things that I had observed when my first tour was at the battalion S4 of the 22nd Infantry,
18 2nd Battalion, was also the headquarters company commander. So, when he relieved the
19 headquarters company commander, I approached Major Shurgurt saying, y'know, that I'd
20 be willing to take over the responsibilities of headquarters company command and the
21 logistics officer at the same time. And he said, "Are you sure?" And I said, "Yes, I
22 would." I talked to him about my observation while I was the executive officer with the
23 2nd Battalion and our major that did that. He said, "Okay, I'll recommend that to the
24 battalion commander."

25 KC: Why did you want to do this? Why did you want the extra duty?

26 EF: I don't know. It was one of the things I think again, I remember how this
27 particular major did that. Again, it was one of the things that impressed me as a role
28 model as far as what an individual could do. I would say, "Hey, why not?" Again, we had
29 been enough time that I had established a relationship with Major Shurgurt and also,
30 again, use it from if I took over that responsibility that I would have somebody that could
31 support me in decisions that I would make. Also, there were some things that I wanted to

1 do that because of the drug problems and the race problems in the back of my mind
2 saying, "Maybe I could do something to minimize the issue that we were facing."

3 KC: How were you going to approach that?

4 EF: Well, part of the thing was that I had a good rapport with the two blacks that
5 were in my section. The other blacks that were in the area that were, when they'd come
6 out of their hooch, and they'd go into the maintenance area or one of the other areas
7 working. During the day I'd go in and talk to them and, y'know, say hi. There was some
8 feeling on my part that I had a certain rapport with the blacks that from a standpoint, they
9 may not have respected me, but they didn't dislike me. I was sort of like a neutral person.
10 I was an S4 so when issues of other things that happened between the race problems, I
11 was not in the forefront of taking action except the one time behind our bunker when they
12 refused to go to the field. So, there was that issue of maybe I could talk to them. I had a
13 feeling at the time, y'know, and this again with discussions of Shurgurt, we had talked
14 about the problem. That's one of the things that when he came in, he talked to us. When I
15 say us, the headquarters company commander, myself, and Kelbs. We were the three
16 captains that were back in the rear area. So, he talked to us, and I think he quickly
17 dismissed the headquarters company commander, but he talked to Kelbs and I quite a bit
18 in reference to what was going on. So, he had a sense, I think again, from his experience
19 and back around realized that one of the major problems that was happening was a lack
20 of attempt to communication with the blacks from the command. All the communications
21 that came from command were always either punitive or increased workload. Y'know, it
22 was always perceived as being extremely negative. So, again, I looked back and I don't
23 know why. Except again I remember the S4 headquarters company commander my first
24 tour and how much I respected him and said, "That would be a good thing to do."

25 KC: So, was your request accepted?

26 EF: Yes, it was accepted. I think it was the last three months of my time in
27 Vietnam, I served as the headquarters' company commander and the battalion logistic
28 officer.

29 KC: That must have kept you pretty busy for the last three months.

30 EF: That really kept me busy. I think that it was something that got me involved
31 as the headquarters company commander. Now I had a direct command responsibility

1 over the commo section. The people in the commo section, the battalion medics were
2 actually, all those were assigned to me. So, everybody that came into the battalion
3 headquarters company as far as replacements, y'know, I did the initial when I reported in,
4 I had the opportunity to talk to all these men and do different things with them. So, I
5 became much more aware of what was going on within the whole battalion. So, it was a
6 great learning experience for me. One of the individuals that I remember coming into the
7 battalion was one of the battalion medics that was posthumously awarded the Medal of
8 Honor for actions in May of 1970. So, I remember vividly the opportunity of briefly
9 talking with him as he reported in and actually met him one other time when I flew out to
10 411 and he was with the company, but he was with the battalion aid station back in the
11 rear area on 411. It gave me, like I said, the opportunity to go into and work on, say, the
12 race relations issue. In the past, like I said, this hooch where the blacks were at, if any
13 Senior NCO or officer walked into that area, they were doing an inspection that would be
14 negative towards the troops. They were trying to find drugs and so they weren't received
15 well. The first time I did my walk through—and as headquarter company commander I
16 was authorized to walk through everything in the area to, y'know, to inspect it. The first
17 time I went into this area where the blacks were, my inspection there in my mind is I
18 wasn't looking for drugs. I was looking out for the welfare of the men in reference to the
19 living condition and health and safety issues and that's how I approached it. So, I didn't
20 say anything about the smell of marijuana. I made some comments about some electrical
21 wiring, how that could be a fire hazard. They had some other things that were hazards. I
22 asked them about the rat problem, what have they done, and do they have any rat traps
23 out? So that's the approach I took which was not threatening from a standpoint I
24 perceived to that. From that attitude, I think all that—there was established a much better
25 line of communications. It never was a great line of communication, but it wasn't as
26 negative as it was in the past. I could approach the men and talk to them where in the
27 past, the headquarters company commander came up to them and there was very little
28 dialogue. It's usually just one way. So that was the function as the headquarters company
29 commander that I did in reference to the blacks. So, it was really an interesting time for
30 me to be able to do both functions and to understand what the battalion was doing. They
31 gave me an even bigger picture of the requirements of a battalion staff responsibility that

1 helped me when I went to the advanced course. So, it was one of those things, in
2 retrospect, from a career standpoint, “Hey, I’m getting three more months of command
3 time.” So that was one of the other aspects and I thought as far as my evaluation report,
4 that if I could perform that task, that that would be a tremendous plus on my records of
5 assuming both those responsibilities.

6 KC: Right, for potential higher command or battalion command or whatever they
7 let in your future. Hmm, alright, clock’s ticking down. Skip Fahel is thinking about
8 coming home.

9 EF: Okay, there’s two incidents I would like to talk about prior till we get its
10 countdown time.

11 KC: Yeah, please do, please do.

12 EF: Okay, and this is again—the first time I was at the battalion, still a battalion
13 executive, not an executive officer, but battalion logistics officer. Captain Kelbs who was
14 the battalion S1 flew out to 411 to meet with the battalion commander and my function
15 was I met with him briefly. I don’t remember what was discussed. I went and talked to
16 my service support platoon leader. On a regular basis, I would fly out or drive out to 411
17 just to meet with the battalion commander. I think I would do it probably maybe once a
18 week we would make that excursion. What I remember about that particular excursion is
19 when Captain Kelbs and I got on the chopper to return back to Duc Pho, the pilot had to
20 fly to the advisor compound that was in Quang Ngai City. So, it was like a starter patch.
21 So, the pilot took off and just, y’know, dipped down and was low leveling towards Quang
22 Ngai City. I made a comment to Kelbs that, “Isn’t there an ARVN Rifle Range down this
23 way?” And just about that time, we both looked up and we could see the berm of the rifle
24 range that we were flying towards. I looked over and Kelbs was looking over and he
25 pointed out, he said that there’s a red range flag. Which meant that they were on the
26 range. It was like the pilot came up and he went over the berm. Just all of a sudden, the
27 rifles opened up and we could hear the cracks of the rounds going past us. Kelbs pulled
28 his .45 to his hoister, put it to the head of the pilot, and told him to land. Pilot landed, we
29 jumped off, and we walked the rest of the way to Quang Ngai. Called for a jeep, the jeep
30 came up and picked us up. We went back to Duc Pho, right to the aviation unit
31 commander and just let into him about what that pilot had done to us.

1 KC: What accounts for this pilot basically getting himself lost right in the middle
2 of this mess?

3 EF: He wasn't lost, he was just being a hot shot, really. He was low level, and he
4 was like nineteen, twenty years old. Y'know, they have no fear at that age. In most of
5 the—I always felt the ones that were flying hueys always wanted to fly gunships. So, it
6 was one of those, "Hey, do this." He may not have at all realized that there was a rifle
7 range there. He was probably not paying attention; his copilot was probably not paying
8 attention and didn't even notice the range flag. They just thought it would be a nice thing
9 to fly down at low level. When you flew off Hill 411, the firebase, it was easy just to sort
10 of go down and fly very low level all the way to Quang Ngai City because it was just all
11 low rice paddy and nothing there. You really didn't have to worry about any type of VC
12 shooting at you during that. It was a relatively safe area. We flew back and again, Kelbs
13 was fit to be tied, and I don't blame him because at this time, a very short timer. He's
14 getting ready, within a week or two, DEROS back. I just remember because it was funny
15 when the helicopter sort of flared up, both Kelbs and I hit the bottom—just basically
16 dropped on the floor of the helicopter like it was going to added protection. Y'know, he
17 sort of leveled off. That's when he pulled his .45 out and said, "Land, now." He didn't
18 want to fly with that guy anymore.

19 KC: Yeah, being that short I guess that would certainly influence him.

20 EF: Oh yeah. Again, like I said, we flew back directly to the aviation commander,
21 reported the incident, and I don't know what happened to the pilot. Hopefully he was
22 grounded or something. Sort of at the time I think he's probably been grounded for
23 maybe one day. So, I don't think anything really seriously happened to him. The other
24 incident was again, this time when I was the logistic officer and the headquarters
25 company commander, flew out and met with the battalion commander and our logistics
26 support people out there and the other individuals that were part of my command as
27 headquarters company commander. Got on the chopper to fly back and there was two
28 other troops with me on the chopper flying back. We were flying at a respectable
29 elevation and the pilot turned or the co-pilot turned and said some helicopter gunships
30 had spotted some VC in the open. And for whatever reason, this pilot decided that he was
31 going to go add support. Don't ask me why again. We were flying along, and this was the

1 area between highway one and the South China Sea where they were at. So, it was near
2 the coast. It was an area that you would expect to have some VC in the area. I remember,
3 he was flying along maybe had dropped down to a lower elevation and I looked off to my
4 right and saw a gunship coming in and firing its rockets. It was like, "Oh gosh, what's he
5 doing?" He flared up in time to get out of the fire of the gunship. I don't think the
6 gunships realized that he was there. He came up flying around and the gunships were
7 circling, and they were communicating with each other. They spotted one lone VC. A
8 suspected VC was on one of the dikes. The pilot said, "We'll get him." He indicated that
9 he was in a drop down and capture. He wanted us to get out and capture him. Y'know,
10 "You've got to be kidding me?" So, he comes down and lands and hovers the chopper on
11 the dike and says, "Get out." Well, I don't know why, I jumped out. One of the other
12 troops jumped out with me. There was just me on the ground with my .45 with one
13 magazine. This other troop with his M-16 and I don't know how many rounds he had. He
14 said that the VC had gone into a covert that allowed the flow of the water between the
15 paddies. We walked over there and as we were walking over there, it was maybe twenty-
16 five meters from where we landed, the helicopter takes off. So, I'm sitting there, "Oh
17 shit." Here I am, down on the ground, just two of us in this area. There's a VC
18 supposedly in this covert and so fortunately the trooper that was with me remembered
19 some Vietnamese and was able to call and get the guy to come out. So, this individual
20 walks out. It must have been eighty years old, y'know, really—Y'know, a hardened VC.
21 We get him up there and he's all bent over. We call him over and they were there, and I
22 look up and the helicopter is, y'know, circling above. I wave them down and he comes
23 and picks me up and takes us back to the Duc Pho. The MPs are there when we land to
24 take the suspected VC for interrogation which I sort of laughed at. I went and got in my
25 jeep and went, again, to the aviation battalion commander and told him what happened.
26 So, from the other stories that I told you about my time in helicopters, I do not have a
27 fond memory of riding in helicopters.

28 KC: I would guess not. Especially when you have nineteen-year-old chauffeurs as
29 it were.

30 EF: Yeah, that was a thing again, is that some of the times when they would go
31 into areas, there was a few times I was in when we would fly out to 411 and fly back that

1 we would have to, before we'd fly back, would be we'd have some supplies on the
2 chopper going into where one of the companies were to provide them with resupply. That
3 was not a fun time for me. Again, a lot of times they were in areas where you could
4 expect hostile fire at the helicopter. I didn't mind driving or riding in a helicopter. You
5 would take off from 411 in Duc Pho and go up to 1500 feet and stay there then go down.
6 I felt much safer there. The other times I talked about; we would take our resupply to 411
7 by convoy. So, I would take my Jeep and my driver and usually my chief warrant officer
8 would accompany me, and we'd lead the convoy that would be either two or three deuce
9 and a half's. We would get on Highway-1, and it was a secure road so we would drive
10 that at all times of the day. So that was not an issue. They just wanted to make sure we
11 were off of the road by night. There weren't any incidents; we hit Quang Ngai and take
12 off the road and drive up to 411. The only time that we would do that was if the engineers
13 had already gone by and had cleared the road to 411 and driving through there. Did that
14 was many times without incident. We would also, every once in a while, have to drive up
15 to Chu Lai to go up to division for whatever reason and pick up certain supplies. Again, it
16 was an enjoyable ride up on Highway-1 driving through the different villages and seeing
17 what was going on and seeing the people. It was an experience to be able to drive and see
18 the local population. Again, I was just happy that as far as my interaction with the local
19 population that was the most of it. Never had any real interaction with any of the local
20 people on that. So, y'know, that was two things. When it came time for me to return to
21 the states, I got copies of my orders, and it was going back to Fort Benning through the
22 infantry advanced course. I did not have orders to Ranger School, did not have orders to
23 Airborne school which I was happy about. But then in the back of my mind I said, "Well,
24 did I shoot myself in the foot?" In reference to having the Army pay for my college. That
25 I did not know what the results were there because I had no additional communications
26 with Colonel Norris. So, y'know, as the days counted down, I was getting anxious to
27 return home and see the family and get on down to Fort Benning. One of the things that,
28 as far as the Duc Pho base camp, there was only maybe, at the most, one or two times that
29 mortar rounds or rockets were fired into that base camp. They all hit on the way out of
30 our area of operations. So there was never any hostile fire directed towards Duc Pho in a

1 rear area. It got where you were never really concerned about safety. You got very
2 complacent in reference to not worrying about that type of enemy action.

3 KC: Alright, you've got orders, you're not going into Airborne, you're not going
4 to Ranger school, you're headed home, you see the family. Describe your reunion with
5 the family real quick before we get you.

6 EF: Oh, it was a very positive reunion. Again, I flew in this time, again, to
7 McCord up in Seattle. I caught a plane from there to Los Angeles where I was with my
8 parents for a short period of time. Actually, my brother was there. I made a decision to
9 drive with him down to Las Cruces, New Mexico, and El Paso where he lived. So, I rode
10 down with him which is about a fifteen-hour drive. I stayed there maybe a day with him
11 and then caught a flight back to Kansas City to meet the family again and to reunite with
12 the family. When I got off the plane, Mary and Candy were there. This time, Candy
13 recognized me. Again, y'know, she came running and said, "Daddy, daddy, daddy." It
14 made tears in my eyes, but it was a very warming reunion. When I returned from my first
15 tour, Mary and Candy were living with her parents. This time, when we moved back to
16 the Kansas City area, we got an apartment, so I returned to an apartment versus the in-
17 laws. It was like all our furniture was there and other things. Really coming home and it
18 was a very enjoyable time. It was like a relief coming home and again from a perspective
19 of apprehension of what I would be doing next. I knew from what everybody was saying
20 that I would be going for an advanced course and that it was nine months. Chances are
21 that I would not be returning to Vietnam for an extended period of time. I would not get
22 my third tour unless I volunteered for it. There was always the other things in reference to
23 degree completion program that I may be able to get the degree completion program and
24 depending on what they would send me to, that would be an extended period of time for
25 me, too. The apprehension or concern of what I would be doing for the family as far as
26 providing for was not weighing on my mind. So, it made that thirty day leave more
27 enjoyable. It was a good time to relax, spend time with the family and just completely
28 unwind from the experience of Vietnam. I had, coming back from this tour again for
29 whatever reason, I did not see any type of negative reaction from anybody that I met or
30 saw concerning my being a military person and returning from Vietnam. We flew out of
31 the Seattle airport and flew into Los Angeles. I again, do not remember anything negative

1 about that experience. The same thing when I flew out of El Paso back, still nothing
2 negative. All the short time in Kansas City, there was nothing negative that I can
3 remember about that. I read a lot about it. Again, from some of the experiences later on,
4 individuals talking about it. Usually, it created problems. So yet again, when individuals
5 talk about the welcome home that they received, how negative it was, I never had that
6 happen. Now, what I thought would be a welcome home like the troops from World War
7 II did or World War I? No, I didn't get that type of welcome home where people would
8 come up and say, "Thank you for doing your job." More or less, people would just come
9 up and say, "How are things going? What are you going to do now?" So, it was never
10 recognizing my service and never being negative about my service.

11 KC: Alright, now how much time did you spend with your family before you go
12 to __ (??)?

13 EF: I had a thirty-day leave.

14 KC: Thirty-day leave, okay. And you're just getting acclimated to life in the US
15 again and your wife and your child and all that I assume? Okay, so thirty days later you
16 report over to the advanced school. Tell me about your time in the advanced school.

17 EF: The time in the advanced school was great. Again, I drove down, checked in,
18 was able to get off post housing. So within about two weeks after I reported to Fort
19 Benning, we were able to get the family down and join us there. The advanced school
20 was what I'd say, it was a school. We had formations and I can't remember how many
21 were in our class, but we would have to be there at seven-thirty, eight o'clock. It wasn't
22 where we had a formation in the morning. We had a formation going to class. What we'd
23 usually have would be a—y'know, we knew our class and which classroom we were in,
24 but we'd just go into Infantry Hall and go to our classroom and sit down in class and have
25 different presenters on different topics with the objective of preparing us to be battalion
26 and brigade level staff officers was a mission of the Infantry Advanced Course. So, we
27 would finish the day around four-thirty, five o'clock. There'd be breaks during the day.
28 We'd go out into the hallways, and they'd have food set up that we could buy. We'd have
29 lunch at the Infantry Hall dining facility. It was a very laid-back experience. Y'know, the
30 OCS candidates were in there in classes in Infantry Hall. We'd stand back and sort of

1 look at them and sort of laugh at them. I'd say, "Shoot, that's where I was how many
2 years ago."

3 KC: Right.

4 EF: It was a pleasant experience. We had our PT (Physical Training) ever so
5 often. One of the things that we did quite a bit—not quite a bit but was organize different
6 teams within our particular company that would play the other advanced course
7 companies in sports. Ranging from flag football to speed ball, basketball, and some other
8 team sports that they were participating in. We had, within a class, an organized bowling
9 league that we participated in which was fun to do. Again, there was a lot of socializing
10 parties held at the officer's club, at the pool parties. There was an opportunity to play
11 golf. So, it was a very laid back, fun time for the family.

12 KC: Well, that sounds almost like your time in Vietnam. (Both Laughing)

13 EF: Just the same. Now, one of the things that happened at the advanced course
14 was Colonel Norris appeared again.

15 KC: Is that right? He keeps back for you.

16 EF: That's right. He was now the Chief of the Infantry School. Commandant of
17 the Infantry School. I didn't know that he had been assigned that. It was like I was
18 walking down one of the halls during a break in class and I hear this voice who says,
19 "Young man." Y'know, I knew immediately who it was. I turned and there was Colonel
20 Norris. He said how things were going, blah, blah, blah. He said, "Have you made your
21 application for degree completion program?" I said, "No, I haven't." He said, "You need
22 to do it. It's all basically set up for you. If you apply and get accepted to college and you
23 submit that paperwork, you've already been approved for the program."

24 KC: Wow.

25 EF: So, I said, "Oh!" There was a big rush for me to find out what the
26 requirements were, what I had to do to get accepted into a program. I was accepted at
27 Park University in Parkville, Missouri, which would be back in the Kansas City area
28 which was great because that'd be with Mary's family. I got accepted for a two-year
29 program. So, I would go two years to get my degree. Which was great. It was a great
30 program because they paid for tuition, books, and then I was still on active duty, so I

1 received my full day of pay and allowances, plus my housing allowance. So, it was a
2 carefree time again.

3 KC: So, turning down the Airborne/Ranger School didn't hurt you in this case?
4 The colonel is still looking out for you. He's your guardian angel.

5 EF: He's still looking out for me. That's why, like I said, he's been so
6 instrumental in a lot of things that would happen to me. He kept popping up. It was one
7 of those things, y'know, when I got down to the advanced course, there was a briefing
8 about the degree completion program, but for whatever reason, I didn't have the push to
9 do it. Once he said it, doing it, boom! So, I got accepted and actually departed the
10 advanced course early because my school year started. I got accepted to start during the
11 summer term. So, I had to leave early to get in and take my first classes. Again, being a
12 two-year program and then after that I would have another four-year obligation to serve.
13 It was at least, at that point in time, I knew that one, I'd have my college education which
14 would really set me as if I wanted to make a career it was a plus. There would not be a
15 negative if I didn't have it. Also, if I decided not to make it a career, I had an educational
16 background that would give me an opportunity to get a job. Very positive at this point in
17 time.

18 KC: That is truly amazing that this guy keeps popping up and your career path
19 keeps going where it goes, at least at this point.

20 EF: Right.

21 KC: What do you get your degree in while you're there?

22 EF: When I was at Park, I got my degree in economics and business
23 administration and then once I got there, I realized if I really worked hard, I could also
24 get a degree in history which I liked history. So, I doubled my class load and actually got
25 a double major of economics business administration, and history. It was one of those
26 things I look back at. Y'know, when I first went to college out of high school, y'know, I
27 had no work habits as such, but when I went to Park, just being in the military when the
28 professor gave you an assignment that's what I did. It was very easy for me in that
29 academic setting this time around. It was like, y'know, a level of maturity, a sense of
30 responsibility, a sense that you had to accomplish the homework assignment. I found it
31 very easy to do the assignment and perform well in that environment.

1 KC: Do you think that your two tours of duty in Vietnam and all this time in the
2 Army may have had something to do with that?

3 EF: I don't know if it was a tour. I think it was more from being in the military in
4 general and having that you have to accomplish your mission and mission came first. To
5 do that in college, it was when a professor said he wanted you to read fifty pages tonight
6 that was my mission. That's what I had to do. It was that sense of following orders and
7 accomplishing the mission that really aided to me. I think the aspect of being in Vietnam
8 as far as combat may have added a sense of understanding the importance of doing well
9 in that particular environment.

10 KC: Interesting, very interesting. Alright, so you've got your double major, you
11 are in the US Army, your career is looking good. You finish your time there at the
12 university. What's your next step?

13 EF: Well, the next step as I receive orders to Germany and my initial orders was
14 to the 8th Infantry Division. Just prior to me departing to Germany, I change my orders
15 that assign me to—this is about two to three weeks prior to my departure. Assigning me
16 to 5th Corps Artillery. Which, as an infantry officer, why am I going to artillery?

17 KC: Right

18 EF: So, I'm driving to Charleston, South Carolina, to put my car on the boat. On
19 the way I stop off and visit some friends in Washington D.C and then go to the Infantry
20 Branch to talk to a counselor to find out what's in line for me. I go to him, and he
21 basically says, "Shoot, your ticket's punched. You've got everything lined up." I don't
22 know if I said, but Colonel Coffman who took over from Colonel Norris prior to his
23 assignments of Vietnam was in Infantry Branch. Even though I disliked him, he did write
24 me a letter to infantry branch prior to my departure in Vietnam, then I had Colonel
25 Norris. Both of those letters were in there. He said "Blah blah blah. You're going to
26 Germany. I see you were originally assigned to the 8th ID, but now you're going to 5th
27 Corps Artillery. Let's see why you're going there. Oh okay, there's a need for a financial
28 management officer to do their budget. It looks like they were in looking for officers that
29 were on the way over that may be able to do that. You were flagged because of your
30 degree in business administration and economics." He said, "What we planned for you
31 there is that you'll be the financial management officer for maybe a year, year and a half

1 and then you'll be transferred to the 8th ID and there you'll either be a company
2 commander or a brigade/battalion staff officer. Your command time that you already
3 have is good, so I don't think it's important that you have command time. You may want
4 command time when you come back from Germany or whatever. We'll worry about that
5 a little bit later. The main thing is to get out and perform well in those functions and then
6 go from there." This was in '73 that I went over. So, I went over, reported into the 5th
7 Corps Artillery as a financial management officer. Once I got there, I found out that the
8 corps artillery command operating budget was submitted to 5th Corps and the comptroller
9 5th Corps just tore it up and said it was a horrible budget. The commanding general of
10 artillery said, "Well, if you want a good budget, give me somebody who knows what
11 they're doing."

12 KC: And this is what you inherit?

13 EF: That's what I inherit. They didn't have anybody there. So, I went down,
14 again, it was in Darmstadt became the 5th Corps financial management officer. The
15 military community of Darmstadt consisted of the 5th Corps Artillery and its target
16 acquisition battery, two engineer battalions and two signal battalions. I was the only
17 infantry officer in the military community of Darmstadt.

18 KC: Did that cause you any issues?

19 EF: It did. I got assigned every single additional duty that you could think of. I
20 was the community commissary officer, the PX officer, the theater officer, the A/YA
21 (Adolescent/Young Adult) officer, the voting registration officer. I inventoried the
22 commissary I don't know how many times. I inventoried the PX. Like I said, I got every
23 additional duty that they could think of. Seems like came my way. It was one aspect of it
24 was it was a great learning experience as far as understanding, budgeting, and
25 government budgeting process and how to read Army regulations that pertain to
26 budgeting and other issues there. That was the good aspect of it. The bad aspect of it was
27 I just hated being the only infantry officer. Again, it was something I got picked on all the
28 time. It was not a pleasant experience because I had nobody else to talk to that was
29 infantry. Even, you might say, war stories, they wouldn't even listen to my war stories.

30 KC: Yours don't count.

1 EF: Mine don't count. Y'know, I'm not artillery, I'm not the queen of that, I'm
2 the queen of battle, I'm not the king of battle. Queens are below us.

3 KC: (laughing) Well, just very briefly here and we'll close it off after the couple
4 questions that I have then pick it up at another time. Once you came back to the United
5 States after the 2nd tour, what was the state of the United States Army as you saw it? In
6 terms of discipline, morale, pay, attitude, reception from the outside of the military. What
7 was it like to return to the military back in 1970? Or through the rest of this time, I guess.

8 EF: Okay, is this after my time in Germany?

9 KC: After your time in Vietnam.

10 EF: After Vietnam? I think it was hard for me to tell when I was at the advanced
11 course. Again, I was in an Army environment. It was very protective, and it was very
12 positive. When I went into Park College is when I first got exposed to the strong anti-war
13 attitude that was prevalent in the nation. It's there I got exposed to, and again, because of
14 the classes I was taking and the professors and the student body; got exposed to the
15 attitudes towards the military that was negative, the attitude towards government that was
16 negative. Really understanding, you might say, what influenced the hippy culture was
17 prevalent and was forcing or happening in changing this. The changing attitude of the
18 younger generation. I wasn't that much older, but those that had recently graduated from
19 high school who were freshman, juniors in college had a completely different attitude
20 than I had ten, fifteen years ago as far as love of country, patriotism, respect for the
21 individual, and respect for authority. It was going south. It was something that I could see
22 that it was very negative to me. In a way, when I was at Park College, there was about
23 fifty other military there that were in the various stages of a degree completion program.
24 So, there was that group of military that we pretty much kept to ourselves and socialized
25 within that group. Again, I had somewhat a protective environment around me. Attending
26 classes, one of my history professors, one of our major assignments and discussions we
27 had was on the Pentagon Papers. Again, that sort of opened my eyes to what was going
28 on at the highest level. I started really looking at the causes of the Vietnam War and why
29 we were there, really, differently after that particular course and my exposure in that
30 civilian environment. It was a really an eye opener for me. Even more so than in my time
31 I spent in Omaha. Part of that is I can remember certain students that would walk into

1 class, y'know. The guys in the military always had a nice polo shirt on and khakis.
2 Y'know, we looked respectable. The rest of the students would come in with their jeans
3 with holes in them, y'know, their ass hanging out. Their clothes had not been washed in a
4 while. It was really a cultural shock to see these students being forced into it. One of the
5 nice things was, "Gee, I can get out of that class and go and get away from it by going to
6 the organization." Which we had was called the Saber and Quill. The good thing about
7 the Saber and Quill, not only did we have the military, or those that were from the Army,
8 we also had some Navy members, Air Force, and Marines. It was being exposed to the
9 whole military there and talking to the Marines and their experiences, their attitudes, the
10 Air Force. It was, again, a good broadening of my prospective on the issues that were
11 happening in the United States at that time. The race problems were strong during that
12 period of time. I think we still had an extreme drug problem during that period of time.
13 That was all, y'know, you could see that within the students, the regular students there.
14 So, it was an eye opener. Again, a big aspect of it to me was, y'know, it changed my
15 really, the understanding of why we were in Vietnam and started me questioning why we
16 went into Vietnam in the first place, and did we throw away all those lives? Why? The
17 same thing happens even that impacts on me with the current War on Terror, y'know,
18 why are we doing it the way we're doing it for so long? Different issue in reference to
19 why. I think the War on Terror impacts the security right here in our homeland. Where
20 Vietnam didn't really impact our security being that far away.

21 KC: What about the state of the military?

22 EF: I think the state off the military, again, once I got to Germany the state of the
23 military in '73 through '76 I think was a sorry state of affairs. In Germany, the race
24 problems were extreme, the drug problems were extreme. It was during my three years
25 there, it was a military that I really did not want any part of. The company commanders
26 were required to be there when the troops woke up at the night and be there when they
27 went to bed at night. Any incident the company commander is held accountable for. They
28 had drug classes that require your troops to go to, race relation classes. There was so
29 much training that a soldier would have to go through or be forced to in race relations and
30 drug on a repeated basis, the drug testing on a repeated basis. The company commander
31 was just holding a hand. A number of company commanders that were getting relieved

1 was overwhelming. I think the combat readiness of our units in Germany were sorely
2 lacking as far as the morale and my experience and some of the individuals I knew while
3 I was in Germany. The morale of the officer corps was very, very poor. Y'know, like I
4 said, it was an environment that I did not want to get into. I did not realize this until a
5 little bit late in my tour. After about a year with 5th Corps Artillery, I contacted 5th Corps
6 G1 about being reassigned to the infantry unit. They said, "We'll see what we can do." A
7 request came down to have me reassigned to an infantry unit. The 5th Corps Artillery
8 commander refused it. He said that they needed me here. To make a long story short, I
9 spent 39 months—the 39 months I spent in Germany were as the 5th Corps Artillery
10 financial management officer and the financial management officer in the military
11 community of Darmstadt. I never made it to an infantry unit. I'd probably say that I'm
12 one of the few infantry officers that spent at least 39 months in Germany, but never spent
13 a night in the field. When 5th Corps Artillery was alerted and had to move out on alert
14 mission, my duty was to ensure the evacuation of dependents. I would stand at the coffee
15 machine and go have some donuts and wave at the people going out. The field gear that I
16 was issued the first few days, I never unpacked.

17 KC: I'll be darned.

18 EF: So, it was disheartening from the standpoint that I never made it with the
19 infantry unit. In one way, it was good because I'm confident that if I would went to an
20 infantry unit at that time, I'd probably have gotten relieved in a very short order. I just did
21 not agree with what the Army was going through during that period of time.

22 KC: Well, let me—I want to take you right back to that. Did you believe—you
23 talked about the responsibilities of company commanders and that they had to be there to
24 hold people's hands. That they would be relieved if continuing drug or race problems
25 were not addressed effectively. Do you believe that company commanders in the Army
26 were given enough authority and power to deal with these things effectively?

27 EF: No. I think they were given the authority and responsibility to deal with it, but
28 they weren't given the proper tools to do with it. I don't think the individuals at the
29 highest levels of the military at the time really understood the severity of the problems
30 and how to deal with the problems. They had the race relation courses. The thing was
31 there, you'd bring a group of individuals into a classroom, and you'd have somebody talk

1 to them about race relations. I had to go every year so three years and three sessions I set
2 through it. Again, I just sat there and most of the ones was just, "Hey, it's three." And it
3 was like a week or two course that was from eight to five, they could sit in the room and
4 not have to be doing any other details, so it was a break for them. So it was that type of
5 attitude. The thing with the drugs, we had constant drug testing going on. There was
6 classes that they had to go through. If you had a positive, then that troop would be pulled
7 out for counseling. It was just that everybody was being held accountable, I think, for the
8 wrong areas and the company commanders just not given the proper support to resolve it.
9 It was like an old mentality of the military to be in command at the time. I looked back on
10 it and even then, I was extremely happy that I did not make it down to an infantry unit. I
11 also realized my career in the military was probably shot. Y'know, the reason I say that is
12 that this, starting in '74 they started having the reduction in forces of the military.
13 Officers were being rifted on a regular basis. They would look at different aspects of it. I
14 looked at my time and shoot, I had six or seven months in the advanced course, two years
15 in college, and then I had another two and a half/ three years in Germany. So, I had six
16 years, almost, not in an infantry unit. I knew I was not, in theory, competitive with my
17 peers that may have had more time in the infantry unit and excel in that. The other aspect
18 of it too, like OERs (Officer Evaluation Report) as an infantryman in an artillery unit
19 were not as high as the other artillerymen. I know that you're supposed to rate officers,
20 y'know, at the time compare other officers and where would you rank them. I know I was
21 always as an infantryman below the artillerymen. So, it was one of those things where it
22 was a negative time. I think, as far as a personal relationship with family started to
23 deteriorate at the time. Because I was so unhappy in that environment.

24 KC: Well, why don't we stop there for today, Mr. Fahel?

25 EF: Okay.

26

1 Kelly Crager: This is Kelly Crager conducting an Oral History Interview with Mr.
2 Elpidio Fahel. Today is July 29, 2010. I am in Lubbock, Texas, on the campus of Texas
3 Tech University and Mr. Fahel is joining me by telephone, again, from his home in
4 Humble, Texas. Okay, Mr. Fahel, let's pick it up where we left off.

5 Elpidio Fahel: I guess where we left off was just my duty in Germany. I spent 39
6 months with the combination of 5th Corps Artillery and the military community of
7 Darmstadt, Germany, which is about thirty, forty miles south of Frankfurt, Germany. I
8 think the things I can remember about that duty was that one, did not get to join an
9 infantry unit. I spent the whole time there. Very disheartening and depressing you might
10 say time as far as the military career. It really went from a point when I reported to
11 Germany being very gung-ho after getting my degree to a point now, that seeing how the
12 military was going in reference to the downturn from Vietnam. The racial problems, the
13 drug problems that were in Germany. It was just not an environment that I was happy
14 with. Also, I knew from being realistic that my ability to get promoted and stay in the
15 military was probably a problem because I was almost five, six years away from an
16 infantry unit so I felt that I would not be competitive. And it did happen that I was over
17 there about four months prior to leaving I was notified that I was passed over for major.
18 So, at that time, when it came time to get orders to returning to the states, what I'd look
19 for was—requested duty assignments in the mid-west. So that if I got passed over again
20 then I would be located somewhere where I would look at settling down. Even though I
21 was born and raised in Los Angeles, I had no desire to go back and live in Los Angeles. I
22 really liked the attitude and the people and everything that was really located in the
23 Midwest.

24 KC: Let me interrupt you here before we get you back to the states. One of the
25 things you mentioned last time, and you brought it up again today talking about the issue
26 of race as it was playing out there in the Army and Germany. You talked about these, I
27 guess courses, for lack of a better term. You said about two weeks' worth of these racial
28 courses training you on the issues of race and problems and hopefully solutions. What
29 were they teaching you for two whole weeks during these courses in the mid-1970s about
30 racial issues, racial attitudes, and how to try to get through to them? What was the Army
31 trying to teach?

1 EF: Y'know, now it's hard for me to even remember what the instruction was. It
2 seemed like to me it was trying to identify, y'know, to those you might say to recognize
3 that we did have a prejudice in us, and methods of trying to overcome it and looking at
4 the individual and trying to do away with the prejudices that we had. They went into not
5 only the issue with blacks, but with other prejudices that we had, the reasons for it. I think
6 the issues of the slavery issues, the reconstruction period. It was an area to, I think, try to
7 provide us with an education on how the culture developed where there was a prejudice
8 and actions as an individual that we would have to take to one, acknowledge one that
9 there was a problem that we may be part of it and that we would have to take actions
10 personally to face those prejudices and overcome them.

11 KC: Now, were these courses designed for white soldiers only?

12 EF: Oh no, it was a complete mixture. It was a course where you'd have both
13 blacks and whites there trying to again, bring out the feelings of the blacks about how
14 they may feel that society was against them and things they had to overcome in some
15 ways to be tolerant of the culture and society that got them into that position and how
16 they needed to also, from their perspective, contribute to removing the prejudices because
17 in the sixties and seventies, with the actions of more militaristic aspects that develop in
18 the black and the black power, that that also increased to the whites, their alarm, and
19 brought out more of their hatred or prejudices, too. The point there was trying to educate
20 that both sides had a responsibility to defuse the situation and to work together.

21 KC: What do you think, looking back on it all these years later, what do you think
22 about that effort in the 1970s in the Army?

23 EF: I think in looking back you had to start somewhere just at any program. And
24 so, the military, I know, and the government would try to bring the best minds together
25 to, y'know, study the problem and figure out what was the best course of action to take. I
26 think, again, with the problems to overcome how many decades of this type of attitude is
27 not something that is overcome overnight. It is one of those things that the education is
28 what, in any problem that you have, the more facts and education that you can receive
29 and try to remove the emotional aspect of it to get down to that faction data so that person
30 can make a good value judgment based on that. I think in retrospect at the time, I wasn't
31 really enthusiastic about it, but I can look back and say, "Okay, they started, and they

1 knew that there was a serious problem and that was one of the processes to start doing it.”
2 I think the one is that by admitting that there was that problem in the military versus just
3 sweeping it under the rug was critical. If they would’ve not addressed it, it would have
4 just continued on. Again, everybody had to attend the race relations. Even the
5 commanding general of 5th Artillery had to sit in on a course. So, it wasn’t something that
6 was for the lower enlisted, it was for the complete chain of command as a requirement to
7 go in and sit in and participate in these programs.

8 KC: Do you think it did any good?

9 EF: I think for both sides that were, you say, the less radical. Not the far-left wing
10 or the far-right wing, those more in the moderate to center, I think it helped them to
11 understand it and not be as, y’know, be more understanding and willing to work towards
12 that. I think you had your extremes on the far-right and the far-left. Y’know, the red
13 necks and you might say the Black Panther mentality that it did not any good to. They
14 were hostile and were against it. I also think from the black’s perspective with their
15 dislike for authority that those individuals that were in command that had a responsibility
16 in a unit for discipline and ability for a unit to accomplish its mission, they resented that
17 type of somebody leading them. And anything that the commander would do by that
18 group, would be seen as being racist and picking on them and isolating them. So, I think
19 this was in ’73 through ’76 and I think over time I think when we went from and changed
20 the military from having so many individuals that were drafted and then came into a
21 volunteer Army, I think also that changed the makeup of the military by being an all-
22 volunteer Army and got individuals that weren’t as radical on both sides and able to
23 change. I think also, starting in the ‘80s and the ‘90s, the attitude of the country shifted
24 the economy, took a different course. We were not fighting a war so a lot of the friction
25 that was developed between the races sort of—it didn’t go away, but it wasn’t getting in
26 the headlines as much as it was before. The issue of race was not a major topic that you’d
27 see constantly in the news media and hitting on that.

28 KC: Another issue you brought up again was drugs. I don’t want to just continue
29 to harp on these two topics, but the issue of race and the issue of drugs in the US military
30 following the Vietnam War was very important and you’re here to see this firsthand.
31 Describe for me, the level of drug use—illegal drug use by American soldiers as you saw

1 it there in Germany and what steps were taken? You already talked about the urinalysis
2 exams and things like that. What sort of effect did it have as you saw it?

3 EF: I think, and again, after the Vietnam War there were still a great many of
4 individuals that stayed in the military that developed a drug habit when they were in
5 Vietnam also. I think the individuals that came into the military during that period of
6 time, a great many of them probably had experimented with drugs in their high school or
7 in their college. So, it was part of their environment was, in some ways, with that age
8 group accepted. So, they did not really see anything wrong with it. Being in Europe, the
9 supply was readily available. That was one of the major problems in controlling the drug
10 problem was the access was so easy to get to. All you had to do is get off your military
11 base and, boom, you can easily get the drugs of choice that you wanted. The military did
12 their drug program, they had drug education programs just like with race relations where
13 they would talk about the evils of drugs and the problems that, that could cause you.
14 There was the constant, besides the urinalysis tests, y'know, constant inspections in the
15 barracks and troop barracks trying to confiscate it. They had dogs that would come
16 through the barracks and so it was a major problem that was being fought. I think from a
17 company commander standpoint, the ones that I talked to, that was their biggest issues
18 was in dealing with the race problem and dealing with the drug problem that distracted
19 from their tactical mission that they had. I think, y'know, in looking back the issue as far
20 as how prevalent it is, I would say, y'know, at least sixty, seventy percent of the troops
21 were users. It could have been more. Like I'm saying about the lower enlisted grades. I'm
22 sure that some of the junior officers were also users. Again, the junior officers just
23 coming out of college was something they had access to. And again, part of the problem
24 was that, that generation still, in a way, does not see certain drugs as being a problem.
25 Y'know, as far as recreational use. "What the problem is it if I go up to my room and
26 have a few puffs and just, y'know, take it easy for the rest of the night with marijuana and
27 just lay back and be cool." They did not see that as a problem.

28 KC: You mentioned that you didn't get a promotion. That you were passed over.
29 You talked about being the only infantry officer in the entire artillery unit. What kind of
30 affect did that have on you to be passed over? Did you see this coming?

1 EF: Yeah, I saw it coming just because I wasn't competitive. It was one of those
2 things that yes, I was disappointed that I didn't do it, but also, I wasn't going, "Why did
3 they pass me? How did they pass me over?" Attitude. Yeah, I was disappointed, "Darn I
4 didn't make it," but then I also, in a way, was upset, y'know, say with my superiors in 5th
5 Corps Artillery by not giving me the chance to go to an infantry unit. To stay in
6 Darmstadt and not give me the opportunity to do something else. So, there was some
7 bitterness on my part of the individuals that would not release me to move into an
8 infantry unit. I also felt that after a certain point in time, being in Germany, I would say,
9 shoot, I would have gotten relieved and kicked out right away if I wasn't in an infantry
10 unit just because of what the mission was and how I perceived being a company
11 commander which you might say is the old Army where I'd walk into the mess hall
12 around nine o'clock, have my coffee, talk to my First Sergeant, give the mission and the
13 day schedule to the platoon leaders and go back and do something else and paperwork.
14 That wasn't the case.

15 KC: If that wasn't the case what was the case? How did you see that?

16 EF: Basically, you'd go in and, like I said, you were there as a babysitter.
17 Y'know, you had to be there to wake up the troops, you had to make your inspections. If
18 an individual did not—if you had a bunch of the troops take urinalysis and you had
19 positives, then you were pulled up on the line. "Why do you have this many positives?"
20 They had measurements and if you had a certain number of troops tested positive, then it
21 was you were not doing your job as a commander. If you had troops that would go to a
22 race relation class or cut the class and not attend, you were held accountable for that. So,
23 things in the past you could take in disciplinary action, taking events of the soldier. Well,
24 now it was you would take against the soldier, but they'd also take action against you.

25 KC: Okay.

26 EF: And it was from the very top down. The battalion commander would get
27 called in by the brigade commander for, y'know, the results of his urinalysis testing, call
28 in the company commander. It was that type of issue where there was so much hands on,
29 cover your ass action that was being taken, a lot of—really more of the administrative
30 areas that the tactical combat readiness of the units really suffered.

31 KC: Okay.

1 EF: I don't know what the data was, but I always questioned back then when I
2 was there, "What was the combat readiness of our units over there?" So much of the
3 troops were not receiving the training, the military training there. They were receiving all
4 this other, I'd say, garbage.

5 KC: Alright, when did you leave Germany back from the states?

6 EF: I returned—shoot, I think it was—I want to say September of '76, sometime
7 in '76.

8 KC: Okay, what kind of United States did you find when you got back?

9 EF: Uh, let's see I flew back to see the family and we settled. My next duty
10 station was at Fort Riley, Kansas.

11 KC: So, you've got your wish.

12 EF: I got my wish, Fort Riley, Kansas. I was assigned to one of the staff officers
13 as director of industrial operations base support area. I think when I returned back to the
14 states, this was in '76. Going into Kansas City, I really did not see that much difference in
15 the states. To me, I may have just been blind to everything. I went in with the family and
16 then I went to, again, to Fort Riley and again in the military, as far as the states, cause
17 there was the issue that the North Vietnamese had taken over all of Vietnam. Y'know,
18 we've lost the war. There was, in some ways, if you were in the civilian population, you
19 just didn't discuss the war or that you were in the military. So, it was just get on with
20 your life and move forward.

21 EF: And then Fort Riley, it was the 1st Division was based there. So again, I was
22 in a military environment and really didn't pay attention to what was going on. I just
23 went in, did my job, and from there.

24 KC: What did you think about the way the United States left the war in 1973, the
25 Paris Accords and then, of course, the inevitable fall, or I shouldn't say inevitable, but the
26 fall of Saigon?

27 EF: Oh, I think as it was something greatly upset me that the way we pulled out
28 and I think it was more than upsetting from the fact that how the press reacted to it.
29 Y'know, the old saying is that the military never really lost a major battle in Vietnam, we
30 just lost the war. Did we really lose the war? Yes, we pulled out, our mission wasn't
31 accomplished. We pulled out and made then decision that when the North Vietnamese

1 actually attacked, the final battle not providing any type of air support or support to assist
2 them to do it. The quickness in which the South Vietnamese collapse was staggering, in
3 my mind, that they could collapse so fast. Again, they had been bolstered so much and
4 protected so much by our military, especially then, the Air Force, that it was something
5 like that. I think the pictures of seeing Saigon fall were very haunting to me. That
6 happened when we were in Germany. It just sort of like put the military again, in
7 perspective of the military at a low. Even though I had pride in my service over there, it
8 was something that it was like all those—the two years I spent over there were wasted.
9 What did we accomplish at it? World War II we had a major victory. World War I we
10 had a victory. The Korean War, we didn't have a victory, but we've kept the South
11 Korean country free and had a barrier on the 38th parallel. At least the North Koreans
12 stayed north of it and that the North Koreans were able to recover. In Vietnam, what did
13 we do? There was still, at that time, I think the negative attitude that was still there. A lot
14 of the population estates towards the military and towards the soldier as far as the hate
15 there and calling them baby killers, but not addressing the problems that we had
16 concerning the government leadership. We had the issue, again, with the Watergate
17 Scandal. I think at the time there was this—going into a really bad time as far as the
18 attitude toward the country towards its government and towards the military. I think a lot
19 of individuals just wanted to put that history behind us and concentrate on what we
20 needed to do to get the country moving forward again.

21 KC: Now, did you say that you were passed over again for promotion?

22 EF: Yeah, I was passed over when I got to Fort Riley, I was called into the
23 Colonel's office and notified I had been passed over. So, I'd have ninety days before
24 separation. They'd pay me twenty thousand dollars and then I had to decide where I
25 would go. I made the decision that family was in Kansas City—my wife's family was in
26 in Kansas City so I elected to go there. When we separated, just packed up our bags, said
27 goodbye to the military, and went to Kansas City to look for a job.

28 KC: Were you angry with the military at all? Bitter?

29 EF: No, I wasn't bitter with the military as far as the decision to let me go. I also
30 recognized that the military gave me a chance, to at least, through paying for my college
31 gave me the tools that I could find a job and I think find a good job in the civilian

1 environment to give me that opportunity. They gave me, again, the leadership
2 opportunity, the training at Fort Benning and OCS and the advanced course and my two
3 years of college. I felt it gave me, really, a good opportunity to get out and just start a
4 whole new life, you might say, in the civilian environment. Also, the way the military
5 was, and I separated in '77, was not something I wanted to stay in. So it was, y'know, I
6 was upset, but I was looking forward to the change and moving forward.

7 KC: Alright, now one of the things that you mentioned that you wanted to talk
8 about today was the role of the reunion associations or the veteran associations and the
9 reunions that often times result in this. I've attended numerous Vietnam Veteran's
10 reunions over the years as part of the work that I do. I've seen a lot of different dynamics,
11 I think. Sort of get an idea of how important these things are. You wanted to talk about
12 your experience. Tell me about getting back involved with your unit's associations.

13 EF: Okay, to lead up through that, some more history to cover the time. I got out
14 of the military in 1977. I did not hook up and see another person I served with until 2000.
15 So, there was a good twenty-three years. Was it twenty-three years?

16 KC: Yes.

17 EF: Twenty-three years that I was focused on my civilian. In '77 I said I got out. I
18 alluded to my wife, and I were having problems. We got a divorce in 1980. Then I
19 remarried in 1982 to my current wife, Karen. We've been married for almost twenty-
20 eight years now. I think the impact of going into the military and the experience in
21 Vietnam, even though, like I alluded to before, I didn't think it impacted me, but looking
22 back over the years I can see how it did impact me with my first wife and all that. I think
23 also the problem of withholding my emotions inside of me would be one of the major
24 problems that my wife and I had. But, I got married in '82. I got into healthcare
25 administration where I was an administrator for ophthalmology practices. Very fortunate
26 in that role as an administrator and had the opportunity to be an administrator and an
27 executive director of an ophthalmology practices in Kansas City, Houston, San Antonio,
28 Baltimore, Sarasota, Florida, and Port Charlotte, Florida, then again back in Houston.
29 Very fortunate that every time I moved, it was where they recruited me to move versus
30 looking for a job. I've had a very successful career outside of the military. I think also,
31 Karen had two daughters when we got married that were three and two years old that kept

1 us occupied. And so, working in my career and the move going into different practices
2 for the time, I just kept focused on that. I did a lot of reading—continued reading about
3 the military and then my Vietnam experiences and other experiences in Vietnam. I never
4 really, y’know, thought about Vietnam as such being a negative. Prior to the time of the
5 reunions, I had a difficult time understanding why individuals that came back from
6 Vietnam would have such a difficult time adjusting to the environment back in the states.
7 I had an attitude well shoot, they were probably losers when they got drafted so they were
8 losers when they got out. They didn’t understand what Post-Traumatic Stress was, I
9 didn’t really care what it was. I didn’t think I had it because I seemed happy and well-
10 adjusted with my second marriage and my career and watching the two daughters grow
11 plus Candy growing up in Kansas City. It was one of those things that didn’t impact me. I
12 didn’t think about it that much. Then in late 1999, I was on the internet and was looking
13 at the Vietnam Wall site and they had links and one of the links was for the 3rd Battalion,
14 1st Infantry. So, I went and looked at that one there and posted a message on it. Thinking,
15 “Well shoot, if the 3rd Battalion, 1st Infantry has a site, I’m sure the 22nd Infantry has a
16 site. I went in there and posted a message on that. I was just truly amazed at the responses
17 to my postings on the web.

18 KC: Let me interrupt you here and ask you, do you mind sharing what you posted
19 and what the responses were?

20 EF: Oh no, the first thing, y’know, gave them my name, I served as company
21 commander of Bravo 3/1 Headquarters Company 3 Commander from September ’69 to
22 September ’70. That was it. On the other 22nd Infantry was the same thing. Y’know,
23 basically this was my name, my duty assignments with the unit, and my period of time.
24 So that was it. Most of the responses that I received was, “Welcome home, glad to find
25 you. We’re going to have a reunion. Do y’know or remember any of these people?” That
26 was the just of all the responses. One of the responses that really impacted me was from a
27 Norm Nishikubo. He was in Charlie 2nd Battalion, 22nd Infantry and he asked me if I was
28 the Bravo platoon leader in November of ’67. I responded back, “Yes.” Now, I got a
29 response back from him saying, “We owe our lives to you and your platoon.” Cause that
30 was the platoon that I went in with Charlie Company and helped them extract their
31 wounded. So, it was that. Most of the communications that I had was really just a

1 welcoming home. There were two or three like Norm's that told me about the experience.
2 One of the things that surprised me was even though I got quite a few responses in the
3 22nd Infantry, none of them were from Bravo Company. They were mainly from Alpha
4 Company and Charlie Company. I found out later that there really hadn't been too
5 much—the effort to locate Bravo members was not that strong. Charlie Company did a
6 good job when they got back of trying to contact people. They were a little bit more
7 organized in doing that. About five days after that initial posting, y'know, it was like for
8 those next three or four days, every day when I got home from work, there was additional
9 responses of welcoming me back and the phone rang. I picked up the phone and the
10 person on the other side of the phone said, "Is this Fullback Bravo 3-6?" That was my
11 call sign with the 22nd Infantry. It was Colonel Norris.

12 KC: Again?

13 EF: Again.

14 KC: Wow, this guy won't go away. (Both laughing)

15 EF: He won't go away. And we talked for about an hour talking about, y'know,
16 my military career, what happened to me, what he had been doing. He talked about the
17 22nd Infantry Regiment Society and was hoping that I would go to one of the reunions.
18 The next reunion would be in 2000. I think it was in the October/November timeframe of
19 2000 was the next scheduled reunion in Cleveland. So, from there and then I sent my
20 membership fee in to join the society so I could get their newsletter and do some other
21 things. The first reunion I went to was with the 3rd Battalion, 1st Infantry, Hill 411. It was
22 in Washington D.C and that was in July of 2000. So, I was going to have a reunion with
23 both my units. Relatively within a very short period of time of each other. I think, as you
24 may have talked with other people going into the reunions, y'know, there's always a
25 concern. Okay, what's my reaction going to be? It's sort of not knowing when I see these
26 individuals, y'know, one as being a company commander going through their first unit.
27 Y'know, would the men remember me as their company commander? Would they be
28 mad at me? How would they interact with me and how would I interact with them? All I
29 had to go by was, y'know, some of the postings about how much the individuals enjoyed
30 the reunions and how much it meant to them getting together with their brothers. It was
31 one I was looking forward to, but it was anything apprehensive of what my reaction

1 would be in going to the reunion. I flew into D.C. for the 3rd Battalion, 1st Infantry
2 reunion, checked into the hotel then went into the hospitality suite. When I walked in, the
3 person there greeting everybody at the time was Colonel Stottle who was my battalion
4 commander. So, I introduced myself and we talked, and some others came in. I think my
5 reaction was I was happy to be there, but it wasn't an emotional issue for me as it was for
6 a lot of other individuals that attended the reunions, and I don't know why. Maybe it's
7 because I controlled my emotions. For some reason, when other individuals would see
8 you and break down and cry and give you a hug. Y'know, I would do it, but I wouldn't
9 break down and cry at it. It was just another event that getting into could share war stories
10 and talk to them. I think the area, as far as getting to the initial reunions, that impacted me
11 the most was the ability of everything I wrote about my tours, I had somebody to verify
12 and verify what I had written was actually what happened. That my memory was good,
13 and I had basically my facts straight. So, I had a good time, I felt comfortable with the
14 men. It was at that reunion when they started talking about the different individuals
15 started talking about the problems that they had when they returned to the states. Again,
16 how they were greeted by the population. That had an impact on me. Again, I really had
17 no negative direct negative contact with anybody in reference to coming back. Talking to
18 the individuals that did, I could see how much that did anger them and they still had that
19 anger on that which surprised me. Again, I looked back and I didn't have that. I also
20 started to realize that maybe the post-traumatic stress was something serious that I,
21 y'know, where I couldn't understand why somebody would be like that, started to
22 understand it in a greater deal. That actually got me to start doing some reading in
23 reference to World War II and the Korean War and the problems that are not very well
24 publicized of the problems of a lot of individuals even though they were in World War II,
25 greeted as heroes, some of them still had a difficult time adjusting and accepting the
26 horrors of war that they saw. The other part in the discussion with the troops that I was
27 with is that I realized, really, how lucky and fortunate I was during my two tours that I
28 didn't see a lot of the pain and suffering that was inflicted on a lot of the soldiers and that
29 they were able to see. The actual, y'know, when I look back at it, my actual contact I had
30 was very limited in the broad spectrum of things. Really, you might say the 700 days I
31 was in Vietnam I was under fire, critical intense fire, shoot for maybe not even ten hours

1 or maybe fifteen hours total. I was realizing maybe some of the horrors that individuals
2 saw that caused them their stress, I was not exposed to. Made me really appreciate how
3 fortunate during my two tours of the type of action I saw and what I did do. It was, like I
4 said, a great eye opener to me to start saying, "Maybe the preconceived notions that I had
5 in the previous 23 years while I was getting on with my life and doing it very well, there
6 was a lot of individuals that did not do that well." Some of them were—their mental
7 condition, their physical condition was deteriorating rapidly. One of the individuals at the
8 3/1 was one of my platoon leaders that had serious health problems and was almost blind
9 from macular degeneration. His physical health as far as problems with lungs and other
10 issues made me think, y'know, "Gee, how lucky I was." That first reunion on the 3/1
11 really made me think that I was extremely lucky in my two tours and gave me a greater
12 appreciation. We had our memorial service at the Vietnam Wall, and I had visited the
13 wall before and where other individuals would have a difficult time, y'know, in facing
14 the wall. I had a difficult time doing it, but it was not like as these other soldiers, the
15 regular rifleman that was in the fox holes that lost friends that they spent every day with.
16 And that they knew in more intimate that I ever knew anybody that I lost. So, it was one
17 of those things that I look back at, y'know, how fortunate I was in my two tours. My next
18 reunion with the 22nd Infantry was in Cleveland, and it was a great reunion from the
19 standpoint. Colonel Norris was there, and we sat down and talked. There was three or
20 four individuals that were in Charlie Company that came up and thanked me for that one
21 action as a platoon leader and how they've realized that they may not have made it if it
22 wasn't for the action that the platoon took. There was one of my men that was actually in
23 my platoon who was from Hawaii who was there. It was sort of like, he looked to me,
24 just like he did back 30 years before. We sat down and talked quite a bit. At that reunion,
25 what was really fascinating to me with the 22nd Infantry is the society is not just World
26 War II vets, it also has—I mean, Vietnam, it also had its World War II vets. To sit down
27 and talk to the guys that went in on D-Day first wave was just fascinating to me to listen
28 to them talk about their experiences. I always felt, y'know, the guys in Korea and World
29 War II had it much more difficult than we did in Vietnam. Because at least in Vietnam,
30 we didn't have enemy artillery firing at us. Where both those other wars, you had enemy
31 with artillery firing at you. It was a great reunion and I enjoyed it. I think again, at that

1 reunion seeing the impact of their service in Vietnam had a lot of the individuals that
2 were their post-traumatic stress was serious and just having the opportunity to talk to
3 them briefly and just observe them in their interaction. Observing other individuals that
4 that was their first reunions of how they would see somebody that shared a foxhole with
5 them and how, y'know, that was a coming home and being accepted because so many of
6 them denied it and just really, for the time, until they joined and came into a reunion
7 didn't acknowledge it, were afraid of the reaction. It was an emotion release for them to
8 do that. So, from my perspective it just gave me a different attitude towards it. Again, I
9 could not understand it. Even when I'd see pictures and things on the news about veterans
10 getting together is like, y'know, I'm not the lovey dovey huggy type person so it was
11 hard for me to acknowledge that. I'm still not that way. I understand it more now than I
12 ever did before. So that was the time in the first two reunions. The 3rd Battalion, 1st
13 Infantry's reunion is every two years and I've made every one of those since that first
14 one. The 22nd Infantry is every eighteen months and I've made everyone since that first
15 one, too. One of the key things from the reunion was the reunion that we had, the 22nd
16 infantry had in Cleveland. The 2nd battalion, 22nd Infantry active Army unit was stationed
17 at Fort Drum and the battalion commander brought all of his company commanders to
18 that reunion. So, we had the World War II vets, we had Cold War, we had Vietnam, and
19 now we had our Global War on Terror vets. Actually, it wasn't Global War on Terror yet.
20 Or was it? 2002. When was 9/11?

21 KC: 2001.

22 EF: Okay, so it was Global War on Terror. They had just come back from Bosnia,
23 so they were deployed as Peacekeepers in Bosnia. That's what it was. The battalion
24 commander was Lieutenant Colonel Steel, and he was the Ranger company commander
25 in Mogadishu, during the thing in Black Hawk Down. It was interesting to have that link
26 and see that individual there, too. I met the Bravo Company Commander, talked to him at
27 great lengths and he actually invited me to visit the company at Fort Drum. I said, "I'd
28 love to do that." We set up a time to do it. Actually, finally in April or no, August of
29 2002, I was able to fly back and meet and be a guest of Bravo Company. 2nd Battalion
30 22nd Infantry at Fort Drum. That was, you might say, was one of the most memorable two
31 days that I've ever had. The reception of the troops was just fantastic to me. I had

1 dinner—when I got in and had dinner with the company commander, told me they had set
2 me up in the Fort Drum Inn. He said that his executive officer would pick me up in the
3 morning for Company PT. So, I got there, I got my PT shirt on and went over and joined
4 the 3rd Platoon for PT, which was a great photo op. I was able to do two or three
5 pushups, but you got a still picture. You don't know how many I did. (Laughter) And
6 doing some other exercises, but then what really got to me was that the platoon leader
7 formed the platoon in formation, called me up, and then you had each member of the
8 platoon come up and shake my hand. I was in tears because they just came up and they
9 shook my hand and they basically said, "Sir, thank you for your service. We look up to
10 you for what you did in Vietnam." It was such an emotional thing. Sort of like this was
11 my welcome home from Vietnam. It just changed my whole attitude. I was so impressed
12 with this volunteer Army and the soldiers, their physical conditioning, their attitudes. It's
13 just like, "Oh my God, we can't lose a war with these guys. They're so great." I met and
14 had time with the battalion commander and his staff. The battalion went on a battalion
15 run and had a battalion formation. Again, I ran with Bravo Company. I have some picture
16 ops there. It was a five-mile run, but I think I ran a mile. I have pictures of it. Again, it
17 was just that time that was so great. Since 2002, I've been very fortunate that I've been
18 able to visit that battalion at least twice a year. Usually, it's tied in with their formal
19 dining ins or formals that they'd have prior to deployment or right after their return from
20 their deployment. I had an opportunity to meet and see the soldiers for almost eight years
21 now and watch the battalion, observe their training prior to their last deployment to
22 Afghanistan, which, they're still there. I got a call from the battalion commander inviting
23 me to Fort Polk where they were going through their Joint-Readiness-Training. So, I
24 drove there and spent three days with the battalion and observing their training that they
25 were going through prior to their deployment to Afghanistan. Also, I had the opportunity
26 to go up to Fort Drum—not Fort Drum, but Fort Hood and visit the 1st Battalion, 22nd
27 Infantry that was stationed there. That has given me, again, got me involved with doing
28 things. Colonel Norris in 2003, 2004 constantly bugged me. In reference to what
29 happened there, I became the president of the 22nd Infantry Regiment Society. I'm still
30 president of that society. Some of the things that I've done, one, was that at our reunion
31 that the 3rd battalion, 1st Infantry had in San Antonio in 2003 or something, I can't

1 remember exactly when it was, we had a memorial service was on the grounds of the
2 Alamo. As we were having our memorial service, the Alamo Rangers came up and
3 disbanded us and said that we could not have a religious function on the grounds of the
4 Alamo.

5 KC: Oh wow.

6 EF: Which upset several of the other guys almost got into fights, but cooler heads
7 dispelled them and broke it up. Found out that actually, what had happened is that we did
8 get permission from the Daughters of the Texas, what is it? The Daughters of the Texas
9 Revolution, whoever runs the Alamo. One of our members was on their board and we
10 submitted a letter to them to get permission to do it. That letter of permission never got
11 down to the chief at the Alamo Security, so they broke it up. What they did was to
12 present and put in the Gallagher Courtyard, a paver that honored the members of the 3rd
13 Battalion, 1st Infantry service in Vietnam. Well, that was in the newsletter, and it just
14 happened that our next reunion was in San Antonio for the 22nd Infantry so I coordinated
15 with the Alamo and worked on doing a dedication of the 2nd Battalion, 22nd paver in the
16 Gallagher Building. We also had a plaque, or not a plaque, a parchment made up that
17 listed all the KIAs of the 2nd Battalion, 22nd in Vietnam that was presented to the
18 individual or to the Alamo that's still hanging in the Gallagher Building. So that's
19 something I'm very happy about. As that, I've also, in October of 2004, I think it was, I
20 was designated as a Distinguished Member of their Regiment by the Secretary of the
21 Army.

22 KC: Sounds like this has been a very beneficial thing for you.

23 EF: It's been, y'know, getting involved with the societies has been very beneficial
24 to me. Y'know, again, it's sort of like going to visit the troops. It just seems like every
25 time I go it just revitalizes me. Y'know, just pumps me up to go and talk to the men,
26 spend time in the mess hall, eat their food. The battalion commanders have been very
27 receptive to the old timers going there. Even the one time the division commander came
28 up to a group of us. There's about six or seven of us that actually are there all the time
29 when they have a function. Made the comment that the 22nd Infantry is the only unit on
30 the post that gets the support of its veterans like that. We're all over the place. We have a
31 guidon that we carry with us. It's a Vietnam triple deuce with our battle streamers and

1 some other things on it. We're recognizing one of the members had a sign that he puts on
2 his car when we go to Fort Drum that says, "22nd Infantry Staff Car." So, we just park
3 anyplace we want to. It's been very rewarding and again, the battalion commanders have
4 been very responsive to that. They have asked us on one occasion prior to deployment
5 had us talk to all the junior leaders in reference to what we perceived as some lessons
6 learned or some words of guidance that we as veterans could talk to them about. One of
7 the other battalion commanders had the group of us come up after they returned from
8 deployment talking about returning to the states, returning to your family and what they
9 needed to do to adjust to it and how they could adjust. I think one of the key things that is
10 happening is the family readiness groups that they have of keeping the families together.
11 I think that's one of the keys. In Vietnam, the family that was left in the states really
12 didn't have anybody else to talk to. There was, y'know, like my wife went to her
13 parent's. Well, we were with a group at Fort Benning, but we all dispersed. Where the
14 troops nowadays are assigned to a permanent unit and pretty much, a large majority of
15 the families stay in that area because that's where the troops would return to. So, they
16 have these readiness groups that are looking out and working with the families. They also
17 have a much better counseling service addressing the problems that the troops have and
18 the major problems they have now is with the suicides and addressing the troop suicide
19 programs. That's one of the things that we talked about was, y'know, indications where
20 you may be thinking about suicide and what you need to do. A lot of it was you needed to
21 talk to somebody and let them know that you're feeling certain ways talking to the family
22 and letting the families know, the wives and mothers, if there's indications and what they
23 need to do to try to talk to the soldier to get him help from that. So, y'know, again that
24 aspect of being with the troops again have been very rewarding. Going back to the aspect,
25 y'know, with the reunions and the troops coming and adjusting to the conflict in
26 Vietnam. I still see when we have—we're still finding now, y'know, members and their
27 first-time reunion. They were getting up to 45 plus years that, y'know, will come in and
28 say, "I was so scared to come and talk to somebody about the experience. I was afraid
29 what would happen." Getting in with a group of their fellow brothers in arms and
30 somebody that they knew in Vietnam. Everyone after the fact just says how great of an
31 experience and they just wish they would have made the connection a lot sooner than

1 waiting. I think a lot of them, too, y'know, when they came back from Vietnam just like
2 me, got going into the realization that they really had to look out and provide for their
3 family. So that was a priority, but they still had the problems of adjusting to civilian life.
4 They were not providing any type of support. There was nothing when they came back
5 from Vietnam and were released, some of them were released right from Oakland and go
6 to another military station, spend some time there, but released. Nobody talked about—
7 there was no counseling on how do you adjust? Things you needed to look out for. Very
8 little information was given to them about the potential services that were available at the
9 VA (Department of Veterans Affairs) or some other locations to help them adjust to it. I
10 think, y'know, again some of the readings I did, y'know, that made me realize that the
11 Vietnam Vet in a way was not unique. The soldiers that returned from Korea and World
12 War II had similar problems, but they were not highlighted like the Vietnam Vets were.
13 One of the things, y'know, initially prior to getting in and observing the different soldiers
14 at the reunions was this was just a crutch that they were going to use. "I was a Vietnam
15 Vet." To get the sympathy and the handout on it. I think, again, the individuals that I
16 talked to, the anger that they had and still have concerning their treatment upon returning,
17 y'know, that's why there's such a strong push among Vietnam veterans to be so
18 supportive of the soldier in today's environment and to get the population. I think they've
19 done that is to separate what the military is doing from what the government officials are
20 doing. The military there is doing their job and at the direction of our politicians. If
21 there's an anger of being in Afghanistan or Iraq, it needs to be taken out against our
22 political elected officials. Not the soldiers that are over there following the orders of the
23 government.

24 KC: Well, let me ask you just a few more questions.

25 EF: Okay.

26 KC: If I may here. One, as you look back on it, what did you learn about yourself
27 as a result of your time in Vietnam?

28 EF: I think I learned that one, is that for me, to overcome fear and that I did have
29 the ability to make good decisions that I also realized, while I was in Vietnam, that gave
30 me a focus that I really needed to focus on what I was going to do in the future. Prior to
31 going to Vietnam, it was an area of not knowing what to do. One of the other critical

1 things that my service in Vietnam made me realize is that if something isn't going to kill
2 me, then I'm not going to lose sleep over it anymore. So, going into my civilian work is
3 where I could keep calm, face a situation, and have the ability to, when I left the office,
4 not to worry about what was happening and really focus on family. I think the other thing
5 is after Vietnam, a few years later after I got my divorce, it really made me understand
6 that one of the major priorities had to be family. Even when I was in the Army, the family
7 wasn't a priority.

8 KC: Of course, you eventually learned to read a map as well.

9 EF: Yeah, well now they have GPS, so I don't have to worry. (Laughter)

10 KC: Another question for you. And this kind of ties into a lot of different things
11 that you already said, but just maybe kind of a straightforward fashion here. How has
12 your experience in Vietnam most affected your life?

13 EF: It's most affected my life of, again, really focusing in on the importance of
14 family on that. The attitude of being calm in any situation, not to lose my temper, to listen
15 before I act. I think it gave me a stability in my decision making from a military aspect of
16 doing it. It compounded the training that I had in basic training, in basic training and OCS
17 as far as structure and accomplishment of the mission. Just like I say, enabled me to be—
18 once I got out into the civilian workforce, a structure that was there. Also, a part of the
19 importance of looking out for the welfare of your men to accomplish the mission. Enable
20 me to take a philosophy of looking out for the welfare of the employees that worked for
21 me to assist me in accomplishing the task I had in the business world. I think the other
22 thing was, Colonel Norris, as a role model in his leadership style, y'know, is something
23 that has always been there for me. Even during the 23 years that I did not have the
24 military, many times I would think about his leadership style. Also, that one day where he
25 came and talked to me and got me to focus in on leading the platoon and not getting
26 down and getting depressed over the situation. So, I think that particular day when he did
27 that set the tone for me as far as when I would be faced with a very difficult decision not
28 to withdraw within myself and let the situation or the problems overwhelm me.

29 KC: My last question for you is a very broad one. What do you think, after
30 reflecting on this for some 14 hours now plus not including the twenty some odd years,
31 what do you think is the legacy of the Vietnam War?

1 EF: Good question. To me, I think if I was going to reflect on anything, the legacy
2 of it was a legacy that we had to separate the politician from the soldier. That we cannot
3 blame the soldier from the actions of our politicians that got us into it. I think also the
4 legacy of the turmoil and disruption that has happened during the '60s and '70s brought
5 on by that. To me, my legacy is that separation of the citizen soldier from the politician.

6 KC: Well Mr. Fahel, is there anything else you'd like to add to the record before
7 we close up the interview?

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

9 KC: Alright then, we'll end the interview right there then.