

ATTENTION: © Copyright The Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University. "Fair use" criteria of Section 107 of the Copyright Act of 1976 must be followed. The following materials can be used for educational and other noncommercial purposes without the written permission of the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University. These materials are not to be used for resale or commercial purposes without written authorization from the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University. All materials cited must be attributed to the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University.

**The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Larry Brooks
Conducted by Jason Stewart
Date 13 October 2010
Transcribed by Emilie Meadors**

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

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

1 Jason Stewart: This is Jason Stewart with the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech
2 University conducting an Oral History interview with retired Senior Master Sergeant
3 Larry Brooks. Today is October 13th, 2010. I am in Lubbock, Texas, in the Special
4 Collections Library on the campus of Texas Tech and Mr. Brooks is joining me by phone
5 from Las Vegas. Is that correct, sir?

6 Larry Brooks: Yes, that is correct.

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

9 LB: I was born in Sioux City, Iowa, on the 25th of February 1948.

10 JS: Okay. Did you grow up there in Sioux City?

11 LB: Actually, the hospital is on the Iowa side, and I was raised in a town called
12 South Sioux City, Nebraska, right across the river.

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

15 LB: My father was Alfred Francis Brooks, who was born in 1900 in Decatur,
16 Nebraska, and he worked most of his life at the Armour's packing plant in Sioux City,
17 Iowa. He worked in the beef kill. My mother was Marie Irene, her maiden name was
18 Karrer. She was born in Iowa in 1904 and she owned her own business in the small town
19 of South Sioux. She owned a baby store. I was adopted and when they adopted me in '48,
20 then she gave up the store and became a housewife for the remaining years of their life.

1 JS: Okay, all right. Well, what did you do for fun as a kid? Did you have any jobs
2 or anything like that growing up?

3 LB: I did. Of course, I think a lot of kids start out in this business. I was a
4 newspaper carrier for the *Sioux City Journal* in my early teen years. I worked in the
5 Motion Picture theatres. I started out at the State Theatre in South Sioux, and I helped run
6 the projectors and then cleaned the theater. That was really my first job. Then I got hired
7 in the summertime for the drive-in theater in Sioux City, it was called 75 Drive-In
8 Theater. They also operated the Orpheum Theater in Sioux City, Iowa. So when the
9 drive-in closed, then I was transferred down to the Orpheum Theater and then I also
10 worked at a Hollywood Theater, which they also—I believe they owned that one, at least
11 that, and worked at both of those. I worked as an usher and a doorman and a ticket taker.
12 You name it, I did about everything.

13 JS: All right. As a kid growing up there in Nebraska, did you have any interest in
14 the military as a kid? Had you had any relatives that had served in World War I, World
15 War II?

16 LB: Yes. To give a little background of my father.

17 JS: Okay.

18 LB: My father was very, very patriotic. He went down to enlist in World War I at
19 the age of seventeen and they wouldn't let him, he had to have his mother's permission.
20 Then, by the time he turned eighteen, the war was basically over. So he did not serve in
21 World War I, which he wanted to serve in. In World War II, he was forty years of age
22 and did not want to serve. He actually worked at Armours and that was one of those
23 businesses that they needed people to stay at their jobs. So he stayed home, but his
24 brother, my uncle, served in the Navy in World War II overseas and his older brother had
25 served in the Army in World War I and I believe World War II. He's actually buried in
26 San Diego, at the military—at Fort Rosecrans. So the family had a military background.
27 I'll be honest with you, I never really thought about being in the military. Although, when
28 I attended my first year at the University of Nebraska, I joined an Air Force ROTC
29 (Reserve Officers Training Corps) and attended classes with that. I didn't have, I guess
30 what you want to call a strong emphasis in my youth to join the military.

31 JS: Okay. Where'd you go to school?

1 LB: I went to school my entire youthful career in the South Sioux City School
2 District. I graduated from South Sioux City High School in 1966.

3 JS: 1966, okay.

4 LB: And then in '66 and '67, I went to the University of Nebraska as a business
5 major and flunked out horribly. I guess this is the best way to explain it.

6 JS: Right. Yes, sit. Well, as a kid growing up, did you pay much attention to what
7 was going on in the world with the Cold War and the U.S foreign policy and that type of
8 thing?

9 LB: I guess I was. My mother was fairly political. I always kept abreast to the
10 news and what was going on in Far East Asia and those type of things. The one thing I
11 remember, when I was at my fraternity house down on Lincoln, we used to go down
12 every night at 5:30 to watch Walter Cronkite on TV and get the updates on the war.
13 Which I thought was kind of funny at the time. Not hilarious to me, I guess weird. We
14 did watch it quite a bit that way.

15 JS: Yes, sir. Had you developed any sort of opinion on the war early on, watching
16 it on TV?

17 LB: Not really. You know, until I guess you enter a service, you just don't really
18 think a whole lot about it. I was kept abreast of the things that were going on over there
19 from—I want to say the Kennedy Administration on, but never, I guess believed that I
20 would be over there fighting in it.

21 JS: Yes, sir. Well, did you know anyone from your high school—prior to you
22 going, anyone from your high school or town that had served? Did you know anyone that
23 had been to Vietnam?

24 LB: Not really. I had known some individuals that I had worked with in South
25 Sioux that had served in the military, but I had never—we actually had a couple kids
26 killed from my hometown, but that was later on. I really didn't know anybody that was in
27 the military that much as far as that goes. It's your typical Midwestern city where you're
28 away from the military as far as that goes.

29 JS: Okay. All right, I know you mentioned following a little bit of the
30 development with the Kennedy Administration and what was going on over there. What

1 about the Kennedy assassination? Could you talk a little bit about your recollections of
2 that and your memories?

3 LB: I'll never forget that day. I lived about a half a block from the high school,
4 and I would usually go home over lunch. I left the building, left the school and walked
5 out the rear entrance and went home and my mother said, "The president's just been
6 shot." It shocked me so much I ran back over to the high school, and they were still
7 serving lunch. My science teacher was there, which was my next class after lunch. I told
8 him and he grabbed the principle, and I was kind of known as a jokester in high school
9 and I did not get along with the principal at all. The principle thought I was lying and was
10 throwing up a story. Of course, I never had lunch that day, never ate. We went to class
11 and the science teacher came up and said, "The president is dead." I remember the girls
12 crying. I guess that's the biggest thing. It's a day that will be enameled in my life for the
13 rest of my life anyway.

14 JS: You said you graduated in 1966?

15 LB: That is correct.

16 JS: Okay, and Nebraska—and you said you majored in business there at
17 Nebraska?

18 LB: Yeah, my first turn at the university. I was declared a business major because
19 I had worked at the theater, and I knew how businesses operated and I thought that would
20 be a good major for me as far as that goes. It wasn't. (Laughs)

21 JS: (Laughs) Right. Tell me about the Air Force ROTC program. Was that
22 mandatory or voluntary?

23 LB: It was a volunteer program and I really enjoyed it. I mean, the people that we
24 had come in and speak to us and talk about the military. I was very impressed. I was
25 impressed with the professionalism of the officers, I guess maybe that's the biggest thing.
26 Most of them, of course, were World War II veterans and I was impressed with the
27 program overall. When I came back, I should have joined the Air Force, I didn't. That's
28 another story. (Laughs)

29 JS: All right. So you were there for two years?

30 LB: Just one year, part of '66 and part of '67. Just within my first year of my
31 freshman year.

1 JS: All right. Well, once you decided at that time that college just wouldn't work
2 out for you, what did you do at that point?

3 LB: Actually, I came back to South Sioux, and I actually worked two jobs. I
4 worked at a furniture store during the daytime and then the theater at night. I guess—I
5 don't know if I was waiting to get drafted. You know, when you're young and you want
6 to party all the time?

7 JS: Right.

8 LB: It's just a different type of life. So I really don't have anything that I
9 physically wanted to do. I guess I wanted to get through my life. I guess maybe that's the
10 best way to explain it.

11 JS: Did you realize though that getting drafted was a realistic possibility, not
12 being in college?

13 LB: Yes, oh by far. I knew it would probably happen. I didn't want it to happen,
14 but I knew it probably would happen.

15 JS: When did you receive your draft notice?

16 LB: I received my draft notice in March of 1968 and was drafted on the 23rd of
17 March 1968.

18 JS: Okay. Prior to that, had you paid attention to what was going on, on the
19 television with the Tet Offensive? Were you aware of the developments that were going
20 on?

21 LB: I was aware of it. I didn't follow it too well because again, I was working two
22 jobs. So I didn't have a lot of time. My late sixties I didn't see a whole lot of TV, I guess
23 is the best way to explain it. Mainly, what I read once awhile in the papers, but I was so
24 busy with work and trying to earn money that I wasn't—I was aware of the Tet
25 Offensive, I just wasn't deeply involved in reading about it.

26 JS: Okay. Well, once you received that draft notice, what was your reaction to it?

27 LB: Shocked. (Chuckles) I don't know how to explain it in any other way. I had
28 had—as a child I had some ulcer problems and I thought maybe that might keep me out
29 of the service. I also had the worst feet you ever saw in your life, but that didn't keep me
30 out either. I guess I didn't—how do I want to say this? Again, my father was so patriotic
31 and instilled about doing the right thing that I guess I—I wouldn't say worried about it. I

1 guess I was apprehensive, but I wasn't worried about it. I figured it would work out in the
2 end. I didn't have a—as a late teenager, I didn't have a lot of direction in my life. I didn't
3 know what I wanted to do, I didn't know where I was going. That type of thing.

4 JS: Yes, sir. Well, what was your family's reaction to you being drafted?

5 LB: My mother actually called the Orpheum Theater and got me on the phone and
6 told me. She was a bit apprehensive, as I guess all mothers would be. I don't think she
7 liked the war, but she never said that to me. My dad was the same way. My dad never
8 spoke about it. You know, they went through a lot to adopt me. My dad was forty-eight
9 years old when they adopted me. They had gone through Omaha; they'd gone all over.
10 And then, my mother had worked for a dentist in Sioux City as a dental assistant for a
11 number of years and I think he had something to do with the adoption because I was
12 adopted in Iowa for a Nebraska family, which is basically unheard of in that time. I think
13 there were a lot of strings pulled. A little background as far as that goes. They really, I
14 think were worried about me, but they wouldn't say anything to me about it as far as that
15 goes.

16 JS: Right. Well, what do you remember about the actual in processing and having
17 to report?

18 LB: Well, I'll take you through it real quick. I was drafted in Omaha at the—I
19 can't remember the name of what they call it. Anyway, I took the physical there, they put
20 us up for the night. They put us on a plane the next evening and we flew to Minneapolis.
21 From Minneapolis we were on a puddle jumper that stopped all the way across western
22 United States, Montana, Idaho. And then, finally arrived at Seattle and we were met at
23 the plane late at night and it took us all day to get across the country. The first meal I had
24 in the Army was not only my worst, but probably one of my worst. I think they had been
25 investigated by the Congress. I think they had a lot of complaints because they made us
26 eat the meal so nobody would claim that they didn't get any food, type thing. Then again,
27 I had looked at joining the Navy in the submarine service and I had really good scores. I
28 looked into that, so I knew I was going to get probably a pretty good job. A friend of
29 mine from Sioux City had been drafted about six months to a year—maybe a year earlier
30 and he had really good scores. He ended up in a helicopter maintenance field area. So I
31 thought, “Well, they're not going to put an individual that's not intelligent enough to do

1 the work.” When I got to Fort Lewis, Washington, they were taking a number of
2 gentlemen out of my unit there and asking them to reenlist for one year and you could
3 pick any job you wanted. Well, I figured if they’re asking me to reenlist, they probably
4 got a pretty good job for me anyway. So I refused to reenlist and serve my two years as a
5 draftee.

6 JS: Yes, sir. So you went through your basic at Fort Lewis then?

7 LB: Fort Lewis, Washington, yes. A51, I will never forget it.

8 JS: I knew you mentioned that horrible first meal. Do you remember what it was?

9 LB: (Chuckles) No, but it was slop. Like I said, as a kid I had I guess what they
10 call a peptic ulcer, does that make any sense?

11 JS: Yes, sir.

12 LB: I’d had trouble with Army food the entire time I was in. I don’t ever
13 remember having a good meal until I was medevac’d from Vietnam, and they put us on
14 an Air Force plane, and we ended up in Japan. I was kind of like walking wounded, I
15 guess is the best way to explain it. A girl walked me down to the—the nurse walked me
16 down to the Air Force chow hall. She says, “There’s two lines. You can go in either line.”
17 I said, “What’s the difference?” She said, “Well, on the left line you get your standard
18 meal like meat and potatoes, that type of thing. On the right side there’s hamburgers.” I
19 looked at her and I said, “I get to choose?” (Laughs). I knew I was in the wrong branch of
20 the service.

21 JS: All right. Well, could you talk a little bit about basic and what it was like for
22 you?

23 LB: Sure. We were at basic for ten weeks. Not because we did anything wrong,
24 but they had just filled the battalion before we got there, so I was put in with the next
25 battalion with about twenty guys and we had a week, week and a half to fill out. It was
26 probably the hardest physical thing I had ever done in my life. In fact, I had lost so much
27 weight. Two reasons, because we were doing a lot of physical activity, but the food
28 wasn’t that good, and I didn’t eat a whole lot. They take pictures of you in your uniform
29 and send them home to your parents. My mother thought she got the wrong picture. I had
30 lost that much weight. It was very demanding. Probably the most demanding thing for me
31 was the thing that they call a low-crawl pit. Are you familiar with that at all? Or—

1 JS: Vaguely. Would you mind describing?

2 LB: Vaguely? Okay, it's probably a thing about twenty-five yards wide and it's
3 filled with sawdust and that type of thing. You have to crawl on your belly all the way
4 across until you get to the end. I just had a heck of a time doing it. I just thought I'd never
5 make it. The day we did it, they put tarps down over the sawdust. You weren't actually
6 crawling across on sawdust. Physically, that was the toughest thing for me. The only
7 thing that saved me—I'm not a fast person at all. I've never been able to run. The only
8 thing that saved me is I had two twin Chinese brothers from California that were in my
9 unit, and they were extremely overweight. They were always slower than me. That's
10 about the only thing that saved me through basic training. You know, we went through
11 weapons training and that type of thing. All the things that you would give to a normal
12 Army personnel. That low-crawl pit was probably the thing that sticks out in my mind the
13 most. During graduation I kind of have funny stories, but during graduation you're out on
14 this rock field at Fort Lewis and they tell you, "Don't lock your knees. Keep your knees
15 bent." Because you're out there for about an hour, forty-five minutes to an hour standing
16 information, that position of attention. I don't know how many times they said, "Don't
17 lock your knees, don't lock your knees." Anyway, we're standing out there and about
18 thirty-five minutes into this thing I hear, "Crash, ding, ding, ding, ding." One of the
19 officers had fainted and his helmet rolled off. I always through that was kind of funny
20 because they bugged us not to lock our knees and then the officers are the ones that do.

21 JS: Right. Well, you mentioned the weapons training. Were you guys training on
22 M14s and M16s?

23 LB: Yes. In fact, just a quick sideline,

24 JS: Okay.

25 LB: All my training, both at Fort Lewis and Fort Sill were on M-14s. When I got
26 to Vietnam, and they gave me my M-16, I didn't know how to operate it. I mean, I knew
27 how to fire it, it was a gun. But I didn't know how to tear it apart. I looked at my record
28 and it had just been signed off by a paper pusher. "Oh, he's going to be trained in the
29 M16." So they just signed it off. Typical Army.

30 JS: (Chuckles) Right. Yes, sir.

31 LB: As you can tell, I'm not too impressed with the Army.

1 JS: Well, I know you had a later career as an Air Force man as well. (Laughs)

2 LB: Yeah. When I joined the Air National Guard, it was just the difference
3 between night and day. They treated people as human beings rather than as numbers. I
4 guess that's probably the best way to explain it.

5 JS: Yes, sir. Well, I'll be interested to hear more of your comparisons a little later
6 on in the interview.

7 LB: Sure, sure.

8 JS: Well, could you talk a little bit about your drill instructors? A little bit about
9 those guys. Were they Vietnam veterans?

10 LB: I had an E6, he was our first drill instructor. He was about ready to retire, or
11 not retire, I think he was getting out of the service, he was fed up with it. He was an E6
12 and the one story I remember about him is he came up and he kicked me in the shins.
13 And he said, "You don't know how to march." I felt like telling him, "Listen, I was in
14 band for eight years. I know the difference between the left foot and my right foot." But
15 he just wanted to pick on somebody. I mean, I look back on that now and that's exactly
16 what it was. The gentleman that came in afterwards who was an E5—there was an E5
17 and an E4 that came in after he left, and both had Vietnam service.

18 JS: Okay. In the basic, did they ever talk much about Vietnam? Was there ever
19 much mention of it or was it just your general basic introduction to the Army?

20 LB: Well, they talked about it. They were always harping at you. You know,
21 about, "You never get yourself killed, but you get your friends killed." So they harped on
22 us quite a bit about it. It was a major—how do I say it? Topic discussed. I would think
23 almost every day, as I remember it. I could be wrong on that, but I remember them
24 harping on us all the time.

25 JS: Did any of those drill sergeants that did have drill experience in Vietnam, did
26 they ever talk about their own experiences to you guys?

27 LB: You know, as individual stories, I don't remember them talking about it at
28 all. I mean, they talked about Vietnam, but as far as individual stories, no. I don't
29 remember anything. And I would think I would have, had they brought something like
30 that up.

1 JS: Okay. Well, overall did you feel that the training you received at basic was
2 sufficient as far as preparing you for an introduction to military life?

3 LB: Yeah, I would say so. Probably, I would guess as high as ninety percent.
4 There are some things I dealt on that I just really didn't need to push. Again, I'm not
5 saying I'm overly intelligent by any means, but it was so rudimentary that maybe some
6 people didn't get it, I don't know.

7 JS: Okay.

8 LB: I just thought they could have done more things, unless things are more
9 repetitious like this.

10 JS: Any other memorable moments or funny moments or anything like that from
11 basic?

12 LB: From basic?

13 JS: That stick out.

14 LB: No. You know, the shots, standing in line for the shots. It was your standard
15 fare as far as basic training, the way I looked at it anyway. I've since been down to
16 Lackland, to the Air Force basic training and a lot of their things are similar. I think basic
17 training is pretty much similar. I got that impression anyway.

18 JS: All right. Well, anything else from basic before we move on to AIT
19 (Advanced Individual Training)?

20 LB: The only thing—has anybody ever talked about how they pick people for
21 certain things in the army? Let me go through it real quick.

22 JS: Okay, sure.

23 LB: Maybe you can understand it. When we were getting ready to graduate from
24 basic training, they'd take you down to the local theater. It's an Army theater, and they
25 put you in there. They kept calling guys' names for certain job areas like medical and
26 armor and whatever. They hadn't called my name yet. Because I thought I was going to
27 get a good job. They finally called me for artillery and the only ones that were called after
28 artillery was infantry, so I was very lucky to get what I got. I was very happy.

29 JS: Did they have you fill out a dream sheet or a wish list type thing?

1 LB: You know, I don't remember that they did. I think they were kind of upset
2 with me that I didn't re-enlist for one year and served three years rather than two, but I
3 don't remember filling out a dream sheet at all.

4 JS: Okay. But you were happy with the artillery assignment overall?

5 LB: At the time I was very happy with it. (Laughs)

6 JS: (Chuckles) Okay.

7 LB: Yeah, it was much better than infantry. I got to that point where I got very
8 apprehensive as far as, "Am I going to end up in infantry?" Of course, that was just after
9 Tet and they had a lot of, you know, injured and dead, so they were trying to fill their
10 ranks that way.

11 JS: Right. Well, as you were going through this—through basic training and
12 through advanced individual training, were you thinking that you probably were going to
13 be going to Vietnam eventually?

14 LB: I guess I always had that in the back of my mind. I thought that everybody
15 that got drafted was going to be in Vietnam, so I looked at it as probably a full non-
16 conclusion and that's where I was going to end up.

17 JS: Okay, so you went to Fort Sill for AIT?

18 LB: Fort Sill? Yeah, Fort Sill, Oklahoma.

19 JS: All right. How long did that training last?

20 LB: I want to say—I extended it by two weeks. I went through what they call
21 LPS, which was leadership preparation school. They were so short of cadre that they
22 would select certain individuals, or they'd let you volunteer to be like the in-house person
23 for your barracks and for your unit. And so, I volunteered for that and spent an extra two
24 weeks. They gave us really kind of a crash course in two weeks, which would normally
25 take—I guess probably six or eight. So I went through that and the people that I was
26 involved with there—the NCO's (Non-Commissioned Officer), not so much the officers,
27 but the NCO's were really top-notch instructors. I think they kind of put the cream of the
28 crop in that school. So I went through that and when I came out I was what they called a
29 platoon leader. Then we went through the basic artillery course with the rest of the people
30 helping them along.

1 JS: Well, could you talk a little bit about the artillery training and what that was
2 like?

3 LB: Yeah, it wasn't so much classroom. We did have classroom time, but a lot of
4 it was out in the field actually prepping on the artillery pieces. The basic course I think
5 just covers the 105 Howitzer. Of course, that's what I was stationed in, in Vietnam, so I
6 was fairly familiar with it. But they gave us a lot of field time, but they didn't give us a
7 lot of shooting time. In other words, we'd go out in the field and pretend to shoot the
8 weapon and that type of thing. I thought they could have dedicated more time to the
9 actual firing of the weapon itself. But I thought the training was good. I wouldn't
10 consider it excellent. I think there's a lot of things they left out as far as once I got to
11 Vietnam. There was a number of things that I picked up more from Vietnam than in
12 actual combat. Which, you know, you can't duplicate combat in a schooled atmosphere,
13 they just can't do it. So the training was good. I'm trying to think of other things that we
14 went through. Not at the top of my head, I can't.

15 JS: Okay. With this training, was it somewhat Vietnam specific as far as the way
16 the artillery would operate in Vietnam or get more general?

17 LB: No, it was really general. It was general stuff. How to fire the weapon, how to
18 stake it out when you first get there, It was that type of thing. I don't think they could
19 have duplicated it because I have talked to people on artillery units. I was way up north; I
20 was up in I Corps and it's all mountains. A Shau Valley, that type of thing. The firing
21 was so much different than the firing down—like say in the Delta when they were on
22 wooden boats. I don't see how they could have duplicated it. It would have been way too
23 much.

24 JS: Well, not to jump too far ahead here with this question, but looking back from
25 your perspective now, how do you think they could have improved it? What could they
26 have included that would have been helpful for service in Vietnam do you think?

27 LB: I think almost all of my units that I served with in Fort Sill, almost all of them
28 went to Vietnam. There were a few that went to Germany who later, I found out, ended
29 up in Vietnam anyway. I think they could have given us a better background of the
30 country. While I'm talking to you here, I'm looking for a book. A gentleman by the name
31 of Stanley Karnow, have you ever heard of him?

1 JS: Yes, sir. Right.

2 LB: He has written a book, which I've read over and over, *Vietnam: A Television*
3 *History*. If they could have—of course, it wasn't written at that time. If they could have
4 done more about that, I would have had a better understanding of the Vietnamese people.
5 You know, I think I would have been better equipped to serve in that country and do what
6 I did. They were very basic on their instructions of what was happening in Vietnam and
7 that type of thing. I think they could have greatly improved that.

8 JS: How about things like—I know it's not a soldier's job to question why and the
9 purpose and all that, but did they give you guys any sort of background about what the
10 United States was trying to accomplish in Vietnam? Was there any talk about any of that?

11 LB: You know, I don't remember any political—well, I guess it's on the political
12 side, but any political ramifications of what we were doing. It was basically like you said,
13 if you were a private in the Army, you're supposed to do what the guy over you says,
14 which was very hard for me. (Chuckles) I had a tendency to question. "Well, why are we
15 doing this?" When we got to Vietnam—I'm getting ahead of myself here, but when we
16 got to Vietnam, they wouldn't even tell us where we were at. I mean, that's very different
17 for me. I'm trying to write the history of the unit and to go back now and try to piecemeal
18 where everything else is. You know, I remember I was on a tall mountain top when we
19 first got there and that type of thing. They never told us the name. They left their younger
20 people in just a questionable type. I always tried to rectify that when I was a senior NCO
21 in the air force and the Air National Guard. I always tried to let people know what we
22 were doing, where we were going, why are we doing it. The NCO's in the army never
23 cared about that. They never cared about their people.

24 JS: But you think that—I guess a little bit of an introduction about the culture and
25 maybe a little bit about the language would have been something that would have been
26 very beneficial to the guys going over?

27 LB: Well, I think so. If they would've just taught us in Vietnam how to say, "Hi",
28 "Thank you", that type of thing, I think it would have put us on a much better footing
29 with the locals.

30 JS: Okay.

31 LB: That's from my perspective.

1 JS: Yes, sir. All right. Well, once you completed the AIT, was it at that point that
2 you received the assignment to Vietnam?

3 LB: Yes. I think it was at the end of the artillery course. They, again, called us
4 into—I think it was a theater or something and gave us orders for either Vietnam or
5 Germany or wherever we were going.

6 JS: All right. Well, once you—

7 LB: I don't remember anybody from my unit staying at Fort Sill or getting orders
8 for an artillery unit in the States. I think all of us were sent overseas. Either to Vietnam or
9 Germany.

10 JS: Okay. Well, once you actually received the assignment and finally knew that
11 you were definitely going to Vietnam, what was your reaction at that point? Do you
12 remember?

13 LB: Well, I wasn't scared. Again, I would call myself more apprehensive than
14 anything else. You know, it's like you said earlier, orders flow downhill and you're
15 ordered to do it, you go do it. I wasn't really scared; I just was a bit apprehensive on what
16 was next in store for me.

17 JS: Right. Okay. Did you have much time off between AIT and going to
18 Vietnam?

19 LB: I think I had about maybe two weeks. I think it was around two weeks and I
20 went back to my parent's home in South Sioux.

21 JS: Okay. Well, what was the actual trip over like? Can you talk about the actual
22 journey and getting there to Vietnam?

23 LB: Okay. I left to South Sioux, and they flew me to San Francisco, and we ended
24 up at what they call the Oakland Army Terminal.

25 JS: Okay.

26 LB: From there we were shipped overseas. We went, I think up to—I'm trying to
27 think of the airbase, its north of San Francisco. Travis.

28 JS: From Travis.

29 LB: From Travis we went to Japan and from Japan then we ended up in Vietnam.
30 It wasn't a military flight; it was a contracted civilian air carrier.

31 JS: Okay.

1 LB: One quick story. We were coming into Vietnam, and I think we flew into Tan
2 Son Nhut—I think that's where we flew in. I looked down through the clouds and I could
3 see the smoke coming up, and I thought, "My god, the city's under attack. We'll be
4 killed." I didn't realize they were burning shit at the time,

5 JS: Right.

6 LB: (Chuckles) But it scared the hell out of me. All I could think of was, "If we
7 get off this plane, where am I going to get my weapons so I can shoot somebody to
8 protect?"

9 JS: Once you actually stepped off of the plane, what was your impression of the
10 country at that point, upon arrival?

11 LB: The thing I would consider it most there, it's like we went back two centuries
12 in time—I just thought. Again, in '68 a lot of things hadn't been built up yet. I think we
13 landed at Tan Son Nhut, but I don't even remember there being an operations center or
14 place. I remember them putting us on busses, army school busses and putting us on there.
15 I remember the metal that was attached to the windows that was welded in so they
16 couldn't throw grenades onto the bus. They took us to—I think it was a place—I tried to
17 track back where I came into country and that type of thing and haven't had a whole lot
18 of luck, but they took us to a center for going out to the different divisions. They took
19 us—I remember they were building a swimming pool for the officers. Not for the enlisted
20 people, but they were building a swimming pool for the officers. We worked on detail for
21 a day or two. It couldn't have been over two days. My orders came down and I got
22 assigned to the 101st Air Borne Division.

23 JS: Okay.

24 LB: At that standpoint, then I left there, and I went over to—the 101st Air Borne
25 had a school, where everybody that came in-country went through this school and it kind
26 of acclimated you to the thing and it gave you a lot of training. It was probably one of the
27 finest schools in the Army, believe it or not. I apologize, I can't think of the name of that
28 school right now, but I'll try to get it for you.

29 JS: All right.

30 LB: We were there, I think an extra week or two, and then I was shipped up
31 country to I Corps and to the 101st Air Borne Division.

1 JS: Could you talk, I guess just a little bit more about the acclimation school and
2 some of the things that they were teaching you there during that?

3 LB: They taught us to actually kind of go out on a patrol and you're set up on a
4 patrol basis and walking through jungle. They would have trips there like the VC (Viet
5 Cong) would have or the NVA (North Vietnamese Army) and you would have to walk
6 point and catch those trips before you trip them and that sort of things. So it was very
7 inclusive as far as really the directly to what was going on, on the field. I'm trying to
8 think that's the thing I remember most, is doing the walking like we were grunts.

9 JS: Right.

10 LB: They did have some classroom work and they showed us how when you were
11 out perimeter, how to watch for things on perimeter and that type of thing.

12 JS: Any talk there or any lessons? Were you guys taught anything there about the
13 Vietnamese, about local culture and things like that?

14 LB: No. That was strictly military, and what you were going to do and once you
15 got to the field, this is how it's going.

16 JS: Okay. What was the specific unit you were assigned? I know you said 101st,
17 but—

18 LB: I was assigned to A Battery, 2nd 320th Artillery with the 101st Airborne
19 Division.

20 JS: Okay.

21 LB: And we were in the 1st Brigade. It was a 105 outfit. We fired artillery for the
22 1st of the 327th and the 2nd of the 502, and the 1st of the 502. Each artillery unit had three
23 infantry units that they fired for.

24 JS: Okay. All right. How did you get up north?

25 LB: We flew by—I think C-130s. I think they flew us by C-130s from Tan Son
26 Nhut to Phu Bai, which was just right outside of Camp Eagle.

27 JS: Okay. All right. So where were you actually based in?

28 LB: Mainly in—my first firebase that I went to was out in what they call the A
29 Shau Valley.

30 JS: Okay, right.

1 LB: We were there for a while and the Monsoons hit. We were on such a tall
2 mountain that the clouds were underneath us.

3 JS: Oh, wow. Okay.

4 LB: And we couldn't get resupplied. That was our big problem, they couldn't get
5 food and water to us. We ended up drinking the water off the tarps. I mean, it was bad.
6 They actually had—to kind of give you an artilleryman versus an infantryman, the cloud
7 cover was underneath so the resupply helicopters should get to a lower helicopter pad.

8 JS: Okay.

9 LB: They wanted volunteers from the infantry unit that was on a hill and the
10 artillery unit to go down, hike down and get this food and bring it back up. Well, it was
11 such late in the day that they hiked down there and coming back up at night, they
12 couldn't get back. But every artillery guy got back in. (Laughs) They were so scared.

13 JS: (Chuckles) Right.

14 LB: They wanted to get back to the base. Every artillery guy, but the infantry
15 guys were spread out all over this thing. Actually, ended on the night (unintelligible).
16 That's how bad it was. Army officers, I don't think have any forward-looking
17 capabilities.

18 JS: (Chuckles) Okay.

19 LB: Air Force officers are not only trying to fix the problems they have now, but
20 they're trying to look on to see, "Hey, where is the next problem and what can I do to
21 help it out before it even happens?" Army officers are not like that. I think that's a nature
22 of the different branches of the service.

23 JS: All right—

24 LB: And then—

25 JS: Go ahead.

26 LB: That was my first base and then from there we were transferred back down to
27 Highway One.

28 JS: Okay.

29 LB: I was on a number of firebases, a place called Tomahawk and Los Banos.

30 JS: Okay.

1 LB: I didn't realize at the time how they were naming these firebases. Well, if you
2 look back in the history of the 101st Airborne, it was a lot of places that they had been in
3 World War II.

4 JS: Okay.

5 LB: Which I found out later, I didn't know at the time.

6 JS: Right.

7 LB: It was a series of firebases and we got attacked one night. To give you a
8 background on how we were attacked, my first one over there, we were mortared at least
9 maybe three times or more a week from the enemy. When I left Vietnam, thirteen months
10 later, we were lucky if we were getting mortared once a month. That's how the war had
11 changed over that twelve or thirteen months that I was in combat.

12 JS: Right. Yes, sir. All right. Well, once you went up country, up there to I Corps,
13 did you go immediately upon arrival there up to the firebase in the A Shau or was there a
14 little time there at Phu Bai?

15 LB: Maybe a day. We went from Phu Bai to Camp Eagle. At Camp Eagle I met
16 with my 1st Sergeant that was 1st Sergeant of A Battery, who had been there forever. I
17 don't know if he had gotten in trouble in the States or what, but he was like an E7 and he
18 had been terminally there. They said he had been there since '65.

19 JS: Wow.

20 LB: He did not resupply me very well. I think there were three of us that went to
21 the unit. I don't remember him giving us anything at all. Maybe like a rough sack and
22 that type of thing. We got out to the unit and the guy says, "Where's your cot?" I said,
23 "Well, they didn't give me any cot." The Army just—I don't know. Excuse my French,
24 but they had their head up their ass.

25 JS: (Laughs) All right.

26 LB: When I was a senior NCO in the Air National Guard, we always took care of
27 our troops. If some young kid didn't have a cot, I'd give him my cot. That isn't the Army
28 way as far as the NCO. As you can see, I'm very bitter about the Army. (Chuckles)

29 JS: (Laughs) Right.

30 LB: It's about taking care of your troops and they didn't take care of us.

31 JS: Right. All right.

1 LB: I know I'm getting ahead of myself, but can I give you one other story?

2 JS: Sure, go ahead.

3 LB: I had four commanders in Vietnam, four battery commanders. Only one of

4 them was worth a shit. When he came out to the unit, I got to know him fairly well. He

5 said, "Well, when's steak night?" I looked at him and said, "Steak night?" I said, "We

6 don't get steak." He said, "Army regulation said we're supposed to get steak once a

7 week." I said, "I've been here seven months and I've never had steak once." Well, what

8 happened was the cooks were cooking them for themselves back in the rear.

9 JS: Ah, I see.

10 LB: What was supposed to happen is, they were supposed to have a day off,

11 they'd send the steaks out and we'd barbeque them and cook our meal. They made like

12 the potatoes and stuff. Believe me, that got changed. I know one week we had steak three

13 times in one week. That's how the whole thing—I can see why we lost the war. We

14 didn't take care of anybody. Anyway, that's a side story. Sorry.

15 JS: No, not at all. Not at all. Well, could you talk a little bit more about the

16 firebase there? You talked about it being on top of a hill, but just about the quarters, the

17 housing, and what type of food you guys were actually getting most of the time and that

18 type of thing.

19 LB: Okay. (Unintelligible) you said housing. We slept in bunkers.

20 JS: (Chuckles) Right.

21 LB: Anyway, how they build a firebase is they take a mountain top and they bring

22 a five hundred pound bomb in by helicopter and they drop it on the top of the mountain.

23 JS: Okay.

24 LB: The explosive guys come in and set it and blow it up, so that gets enough

25 room for easily a road grader to be helicoptered out and be lifted on the hill. Then he

26 bulldozes the mountain big enough to put an artillery unit on there. I would say where our

27 firing battery was from one edge to the other edge was probably thirty yards. Thirty by

28 thirty maybe. And then, of course, we have our ammo dump that they make, but we lived

29 in bunkers. Do you know what PSP is? Perforated seal planting?

30 JS: Okay, right.

1 LB: That's what we used for our roof, and then on top of that we would lay plastic
2 sheets down and put sandbags, usually two or three at least on top of that. Then, we lived
3 in those bunkers. What they did is, when our artillery rounds came in, they came in
4 wooden boxes. We would tear those wooden boxes apart to make walls and that type of
5 thing. It was very rudimentary. I'm trying to think of anything else, maybe questions you
6 might have. They had the ammo dump, they had operations which contained the
7 commander and what they call the FDC, fire direction control. Then, they had the guns.
8 And then, sometimes for protection, we would have—I think this only happened once,
9 but we would have like a quad fifty, which is a fifty caliber anti-aircraft gun.

10 JS: Okay.

11 LB: They brought that up to the base to keep firing down so the enemy wouldn't
12 crawl up the mountain. That first firebase I was on, it was the highest firebase that I had
13 ever been on and probably in Vietnam. We fired artillery down into the A Shau Valley. I
14 think the mountains were just so steep that they just couldn't climb it. We'd get mortared,
15 but we wouldn't get attacked.

16 JS: Now was it kind of on the edge of the A Shau or actually in it? Or—

17 LB: It was actually on the edge. I think it would be on one of the mountain tops.

18 JS: Okay.

19 LB: I have tried to find the name of it. I think it was called Eagle's Nest, I think.

20 JS: Okay.

21 LB: Don't quote me for sure on that, but I think that's the first one where we were
22 at.

23 JS: Okay. Had the unit been there very long when you arrived?

24 LB: No, they were just filling the bases when we got there.

25 JS: Okay, okay. Not to get too far ahead, but how long did you remain there?

26 LB: Probably—I'm guessing maybe two months. While I'm talking to you, I'm
27 looking through the book I'm writing.

28 JS: Sure.

29 LB: I know you like to have exact basic figures and everything else.

30 JS: It doesn't have to be.

1 LB: Okay. The other thing is, I don't know if you're aware of it but in an Army
2 unit, somebody at battalion headquarters is designated as the historian. The historian is
3 supposed to write down everything that happens. If there's an attack, you're supposed to
4 write down, "A Battery was attacked on this date and there were so many deaths" and
5 blah, blah, blah. Most of these guys did it an extra duty and it is so poorly written. It's
6 pathetic. I would have taken a lot more time and research to do it. Go ahead.

7 JS: All right. Well, could you talk, I guess a little bit about your first impression
8 of the unit itself, of the battery itself and of the guys? You don't have to use specific
9 names if you don't want to, but some of the characters you ran into there.

10 LB: Okay. Well, when I was first ordered, I was trained as what they call a 13
11 Alpha 10, which is a gun plumber. I fired the artillery weapon.

12 JS: Okay.

13 LB: When I first got over there, we only had five guns. Which normally, a 105
14 Howitzer unit has six guns. The battery was considered a hard luck battery and the reason
15 I say that is, previous to my coming over there, they had been overrun one time and
16 they'd lost, I think one or two guns. They didn't lose the position, but they lost a couple
17 guns and the NVA had attacked them, overran. Then, later on in '68, they went to this
18 place called Birmingham Firebase.

19 JS: Okay.

20 LB: And they were on the base, and I think it was the Marines—I think it was the
21 Marines, I don't mean to say anything incorrect. The Marines dropped two five-hundred-
22 pound bombs on them and killed a number of them and wounded a bunch.

23 JS: Right.

24 LB: They were, again—it was undermanned type thing. My first six to eight
25 months over there, we were just so short of men it was pathetic. I blame that a lot on the
26 battery commander, the captain that was in charge when I first got over there. Again, I
27 didn't know this until after I came back and I've researched, but the battery commander
28 wanted the battery to stand up right away after they'd been bombed by these two five-
29 hundred-pound bombs. He should have taken his time and said, "Hey, we need people.
30 We need stuff." He was gung-ho at the expense of his enlisted men. What was I talking
31 about? I'm sorry. I get off on tangents, I'm sorry.

1 JS: No, not at all. I was asking you just about some of the different guys in the
2 unit and things.

3 LB: People. I don't remember a whole lot of guys from the guns. Everybody over
4 there had a nickname. You didn't call him by Fred Smith, he was Smitty. But I do have a
5 listing of some of the men that I found in my research. None of my officers or NCO's or
6 fellow battery men stand out to me at all, to be honest with you.

7 JS: Okay.

8 LB: Not until—I was cross trained in the FDC, fire direction control.

9 JS: Okay.

10 LB: Once I got in that, that's when it really felt like a unit. We were doing things.
11 We were firing artillery, trying to kill the enemy. That was our job. Until I got into FDC,
12 which was probably about six months into my tour, that's when I really felt that I was
13 doing something. It's hard to say. And then I ran into a gentleman by the name of Larry
14 Hoy.

15 JS: Okay.

16 LB: Who—we still correspond each Christmas. We send Christmas cards back
17 and forth, believe it or not for these many years. I became a very good friend to him.
18 Then I had a—the third commander that we had, a gentleman. He was a captain at that
19 time, he retired a lieutenant colonel. His name was Clarence R. Buchwald. He retired a
20 lieutenant colonel. But he was probably the finest commander that I ever had. I would say
21 he is the finest commander I ever had. But the unit was considered a hard luck because so
22 many bad things happened to him. At that time, Captain Buchwald I thought really pulled
23 the unit together. I mean, we could fire—it was a different unit under him. He really had
24 a cohesion and the reason he came to the unit—he wasn't even supposed to come to the
25 unit. They'd had some—I didn't realize it at the time, they had some drug problems, and
26 he was sent out to the unit because the better commander that was out there got fired.

27 JS: Okay.

28 LB: So he really turned the unit around I thought. I consider him, at that time,
29 probably had one of the best firing batteries in the entire Vietnam War.

1 JS: Okay. All right. Well, when you first arrived there, being a new guy in
2 country, how were you received? Were you treated with any of the FNG (Fucking New
3 Guy) kind of attitude? Or—

4 LB: Yeah. I think that (unintelligible) in the entire Army, and I think in all units.
5 You're considered a cherry and I think until you proved yourself, they just didn't really
6 trust you. They didn't want to get killed and they didn't want you getting them killed, I
7 guess it's maybe the best way to put it.

8 JS: How long did it take for you to be accepted?

9 LB: Hmm, good question. I would say maybe sixty to ninety days at least.

10 JS: Okay.

11 LB: And that's a guesstimate.

12 JS: Would a big part of that be just proving that they could trust you, proving that
13 you were reliable under fire and that type of thing?

14 LB: I guess that's the gist of it. I never understood it. We had fired artillery in
15 Fort Sill, so we knew what to do. We'd had a couple of times that rounds had hit
16 friendlies. What happens at that time, they shut everything down. You cannot touch the
17 guns; you cannot do anything FDC. Both times, it was done by the forward observer. He
18 didn't know where he was at, and he fired in the wrong direction. Again, so much of that
19 is not their fault because they're in triple canopy or they don't know where they're at.

20 JS: Right.

21 LB: Well, I would think you'd fire a phosphorus round first to find out where
22 you're at, but that cost more time and it doesn't happen that way.

23 JS: All right. Well, with the whole new guy kind of thing, would they mostly just
24 not talk to you at first? Is that what it was, or did it go beyond that?

25 LB: I guess that, and I had a—when I was on the guns, the first gun commander
26 or NCO that was there, he was an E6. He was getting short, so he went back to the rear,
27 and they had promoted a guy that was on the guns by the name of Sergeant Perez. He was
28 an E5.

29 JS: Okay.

30 LB: Normally that position is an E6 or E7 position. That's how bad we were as
31 far as getting new troops out on the field. He was an all-around guy and I think—if I

1 remember, things kind of improved around him. Again, because number one, he was
2 new.

3 JS: Right.

4 LB: And I'd been there a little bit of time anyway.

5 JS: Okay. All right. Well overall, once you were accepted as a member of the
6 unit, did you say that everyone seemed to get along pretty well or were there problems?
7 Were there things like racial tension? Any problems? Any things like that?

8 LB: You know, I don't remember any the entire time I was there. I don't
9 remember of any racial tensions. I mean, we had people that were pissed at each other,
10 which was normal. But as far as racial tensions, I don't remember any at all.

11 JS: Okay.

12 LB: You've got to remember, most of these guys were airborne paratroopers, and
13 they jumped out of airplanes. They were crazy anyway. (Chuckles) I think they grew
14 together a lot better than maybe a regular LEG (Low-Entry Ground) unit. I still to this
15 day think I was in the best firing unit in the entire Vietnam War.

16 JS: Yes, sir.

17 LB: I think a lot of that. I always say the 101st saved my life. They were always
18 ready to kickass first and then take names later. I think that's what saved a lot of us from
19 maybe some doom that another artillery unit would have taken.

20 JS: All right. Well, given that it was, I guess somewhat late in the war—into '68,
21 how was morale overall with the unit?

22 LB: My personal opinion, I think it was good. I don't remember really seeing
23 anything anti-war until I got back in late '69. They told us to be careful around San
24 Francisco, the airport, and that type of thing. I don't remember individuals talking anti-
25 war or anything like that in the unit at all.

26 JS: Okay. I know you mentioned earlier a little bit about the drug issues. Had that
27 mostly been resolved by the time you had gotten there or were there still some problems?

28 LB: Some of that happened after I was in the unit. I know that there were some
29 people—they didn't want anybody on the guns or in the FDC smoking dope. That was a
30 no-no. I don't remember any people in my little unit, in my artillery piece, ever smoking
31 dope. Then I was transferred to FDC, and I don't remember anybody in there ever

1 smoking dope. I think that—I know in talking to my commander there were some
2 problems. I think that it was in the ammo dump. I think there were some guys down there
3 that not only had smoking problems, but I think there was one gentleman that was hooked
4 on heroin. I can't prove that. I don't know that it happened. But Colonel Buchwald would
5 be asked—they never told the privates anything. (Laughs)

6 JS: Right.

7 LB: They never told us where they were at, they never told us there was any drug
8 problems.

9 JS: All right. Well, I guess now if you could talk a little bit about your specific
10 duties as an artilleryman on the gun.

11 LB: Okay.

12 JS: What your daily routine would be like and what your specific duties were.

13 LB: Usually, in the late afternoon, early evening, they would send down what
14 they call—I'm trying to think what they called them. Fire support missions.

15 JS: Okay.

16 LB: What it was is when the infantry would walk for so long during the day, then
17 at night they would set up a position and put defensive positions around it. We would fire
18 artillery in support of them. Like say, five, six o'clock, seven o'clock in the evening we
19 would fire artillery rounds around them to make sure that we knew exactly where we
20 were firing. So if something happened during the night and they needed to call us, they'd
21 be ready and available.

22 JS: Okay.

23 LB: So we would fire DTs—they call them DTs, defensive targets. We would fire
24 those in the late afternoon and then again at night if needed. It wasn't unusual to get
25 woken up at two o'clock or three o'clock in the morning and fire rounds for the
26 infantrymen that were in place. During the day you would resupply your artillery rounds.
27 We would have to hump down the hill to the ammo dump and load up on our backs the
28 rounds, and we would stack them. The 105 artillery rounds are about three, three and a
29 half feet long in a rounded tube, cardboard tube. You would put one on each shoulder and
30 then they would stack four, five, or six on the back of your head and neck. And then, you
31 would walk up the hill with those on your back. That's how we resupplied our spent

1 rounds. Again, if the infantry was out during the day and they were walking and they'd
2 come under fire by enemy, they would use us to fire in the enemy's direction. So we
3 would have fire missions during the day too.

4 JS: All right. Well, could you talk a little bit about the gun crew itself? How many
5 people would be on the gun and what would the different duties be?

6 LB: Okay. Well, I guess you would want to call it the commander of the gun, he
7 was the top NCO. He would give the direction and then azimuth down as far as where
8 we're firing and then he would tell us to fire. There was a gunner that was on a position
9 to the left. As the artillery piece was facing out, in other words, the barrel is facing out
10 toward the enemy. On the left side, there's what they call the gunner, and he has an eye
11 piece that he uses to adjust the firing round from the order, from the sergeant.

12 JS: Okay.

13 LB: On the right side is the guy that runs the azimuth up and down of the cannon.

14 JS: All right.

15 LB: Then the other people, you have an ammo guy that gets the ammo ready.
16 Usually, they use just an impact fuse. In other words, once the round hits the ground, it
17 explodes. They can put a timing fuse on too. That ammo guy is responsible for that. And
18 then the other guys just help out and do whatever they need to be done. The guy that
19 loads the weapon. In my section, when I was there, there were six guys in the gun. I think
20 there's normally supposed to be like eight.

21 JS: Again, what you would be doing?

22 LB: I would either load the gun or do whatever they needed to do.

23 JS: Okay. All right. You talk about, I guess the procedure for actually firing a
24 round. From the point of getting a target to actually firing the shell. Could you describe
25 that?

26 LB: Okay. What would happen is in what we would call FDC, fire direction
27 control, there's radio operators and they are in constant contact with the infantry or—
28 there's a higher headquarters in the artillery too. They have a radio that talks to them.
29 Normally, the conversations between the infantry and us would be on this one radio. That
30 message would come in and they had big plotting maps. They would plot where the
31 infantry was and then if they knew there were enemy in a certain area, they would plot

1 that. Then there's a medal thing—there's a point at where the base is, that's the middle of
2 the map, and then this metal thing would come around and it would give you the
3 information that you needed as far as how to fire the piece, what azimuth, what angle and
4 how high up, and what charge. Artillery rounds have charges in them. They're little
5 pockets of fire powder, gun powder.

6 JS: Okay.

7 LB: You could do like a charge 3, which means there's three charges in the tube
8 and that's how you get the artillery piece to fire. There's a book that you go to that gives
9 you all that information. So they would say fire mission and they would give the location
10 of the enemy and we would plot that. Those individuals would give the information to the
11 head NCO of the FDC, and he would pass that on down operations. Operations, they call
12 him the sergeant of fire—fire sergeant? He would pass that up to the guns and that's how
13 an artillery unit is fired.

14 JS: Okay. Were there different—I know you talked about you could have time
15 delayed cues or an impact shell, but could you talk a little bit about the types—were there
16 different types of rounds and if so, could you talk about it?

17 LB: There were a couple of different types. The majority of the things we fired
18 was what we called an HE round, high explosion. They had a round—when I was talking
19 earlier about the unit getting overrun, they have what they call a flechette round.
20 Basically, what it is, it's an artillery round that's filled with nails and it's fired in the
21 direction of enemy that are approaching. We have those and we have WP, which is white
22 phosphorus. That's how the infantry, a lot of times, could tell where they were. They'd
23 have us fire a WP with a timed fuse and it would burst above them or near them and that
24 way they could tell where they're at.

25 JS: Okay. All right. How about different types of fire missions? What different
26 types of fire missions would there be?

27 LB: Well, there's your standard fire mission. That would be against enemy, a
28 known enemy in the area. You would have DTs, which is defense charters. Those you
29 fire in the late afternoon. I'm trying to think of anything else. I think probably those were
30 the main two missions.

1 JS: Okay. What about—did you guys fire harassment and interdiction fire as
2 well?

3 LB: Yes. Oh, yeah. Gosh, I forgot all about this. It's been too long. (Laughs)

4 JS: That's fine. It's all right.

5 LB: Those would come down. I talked to you about we had a higher headquarters
6 and those would come down from higher headquarters. I don't know how they picked
7 them, but we would fire them at night. I'm sorry, could we do (unintelligible).

8 JS: No, not at all. Not at all. All right. Well, any memorable fire missions or
9 memorable events from this first firebase you were stationed on?

10 LB: The only thing I know is when we did have a fire mission, it would last long.

11 JS: Okay.

12 LB: We extended a lot of rounds. Our artillery tube is just like a gun. You can
13 only fire so many rounds through it and then it has to be either mellowed down and done
14 over again or whatever. Cause it becomes inaccurate after so many rounds. You had to
15 count the number of rounds you fired and at what power. I know when I first got over
16 there, we fired a lot.

17 JS: Okay. I know you've mentioned that you guys were coming under mortar fire
18 quite a bit. Could you talk a little bit about what you guys would do when coming under
19 mortar fire? What would be the response to that?

20 LB: Well, a couple things. A round where the artillery piece—we had what we
21 call M-102A's, which was an artillery piece that could fire at 360 degrees. It had a big
22 tire on the back of it and it could be wheeled around. Well, outside of that wheel, in the
23 fire area, we would dig a little line that would be around it and you could go hide in there
24 if we had incoming. Usually, we went to the bunkers. The bunkers were the safest place. I
25 would say nine times out of ten we were always in the bunk. Which didn't mean too
26 much because our artillery, our little ammo place for the guns was right next to the
27 bunker. So if they ever hit that. (Laughs)

28 JS: Right.

29 LB: I never figured out the Army and their safety. (Laughs)

30 JS: (Laughs) Right. How about—were there ever any actual infantry attacks
31 against the Vietnamese?

1 LB: None while I was over there in '68—late '68 and '69.

2 JS: Okay.

3 LB: Well, no. I shouldn't say that. We were moving from one base to another

4 base and part of our unit was on Tomahawk, which was next to Highway 1. They came

5 under attack one night, but I was at the other location at that time. I personally did not

6 come under any infantry attack.

7 JS: Okay. All right. How would you guys move from one firebase? Would it be

8 by helicopter?

9 LB: Yes, almost everything explosive was by helicopter. You would pack

10 everything up and put it in these airplane strap things and then the helicopters would pick

11 it up and transfer it to the next base. The artillery pieces would be moved by helicopter,

12 but the ammo would be moved by helicopter, almost everything. We didn't have a

13 vehicle in the field, like a (unintelligible).

14 JS: Once you guys moved from that firebase in the A Shau or near the A Shau,

15 where did you go to next?

16 LB: We went from there—I think the name of it was Eagles Nest.

17 JS: Okay.

18 LB: From there we moved to a place called Tomahawk, Firebase Tomahawk.

19 These were all located in I Corps and we were there probably—I'm going to say maybe

20 two to three months?

21 JS: Okay.

22 LB: From there we moved to a place called Los Banos, which was South on

23 Highway 1. It was the first major firebase north of Da Nang.

24 JS: Okay.

25 LB: We were there and that actually had a building on it, believe it or not. They

26 had made—the people that were there before us had made a wooden chow hall and

27 they'd actually—you could eat in American standards, I guess. Anyway, they did send

28 out our cooks then and the cooks were actually in the field at that time. Before that, we

29 would always be resupplied by helicopter in the later afternoons with a hot meal. We

30 would get one hot meal a day, in the evening.

31 JS: Right.

1 LB: They would send in on these medal tins and you would just stand in line and
2 get your food and eat with a mess kit. For breakfast and lunch, we had C-rations and we
3 ate C-rations. There was a couple of different ways they did it. When I was on the guns,
4 this one sergeant, he would take a c-ration box. I think there were like twelve meals in a
5 box. He would flip the box over and then you would pick just whatever meal. Well, for
6 breakfast you may get pork. Ultimately, they started giving each of us a full box of
7 twelve. There were usually two breakfast meals in there and you could eat a breakfast
8 meal. It'd be like scrambled eggs and ham or something like that.

9 JS: All right.

10 LB: They weren't very good, either. (Laughs)

11 JS: (Laughs) Well, how about the hot meals? Were they any good at all?

12 LB: Yeah, they were pretty good. I mean, it was so much better than c-rations that
13 you didn't really want to complain. I went on a detail one time. I remember this, I went
14 on a detail, and I came back, and they'd already fed everybody in the unit. The only thing
15 left was asparagus. As a kid, I could never eat asparagus, but I found out as an individual,
16 if you're hungry enough, you'll eat anything.

17 JS: Right.

18 LB: I had three plate loads of asparagus. (Laughs) Today I can eat asparagus. But
19 again, the NCO's, there were four of us that were on detail, and they were going to be
20 back late, they should have saved food for us. NCO's, excuse my French, they had their
21 head up their ass.

22 JS: Right. Yes, sir. (Chuckles) All right.

23 LB: Am I too colorful?

24 JS: No, not at all. That's perfectly fine.

25 LB: Okay.

26 JS: I know you mentioned the C-rations and turning them upside down. Could
27 you talk a little bit more about those? What were some of the C-rations that guys liked
28 and some that you guys didn't like?

29 LB: There was a beef stew that was pretty good. I remember the one thing they
30 always wanted to trade for—you probably know what a C-ration is, but there are different
31 things in different metal contains, the little cups. And there was pound cake. People

1 would trade like two meals for one pound cake. I mean, it was quite a delight. I like
2 pound cake, but I don't like it that much. I always traded it for something else. The
3 worst—I don't remember the other meals. Oh, chicken and noodles was good. The one
4 meal that was just almost unedible was the pork. It was so greasy and so fatty, I tried
5 everything. When my mother said, "What do you need?" I said, "Send as much spices as
6 you can. Like 57 sauce and A1 and Worcestershire sauce, so we can cover the taste of the
7 meal."

8 JS: Right. Well, I guess if you could talk a little bit about your other job. A little
9 bit later on, when you were transferred to the FDC. If you could talk about what your
10 duties were there.

11 LB: In about six months, most of the guys who were in FDC were leaving. I
12 mean, there was probably—I would say maybe twelve to fifteen people in FDC, and they
13 were almost all going home at the same time. They knew they weren't going to be
14 resupplied with people from the rear. So I can't remember—somebody came to me and
15 said, "We understand you have a year of college." And I said, "Yes, I do." He said,
16 "Well, did you have any math?" And I said, "Well, I have trig in high school." I said, "I
17 have four years of math in high school including trigonometry." I said—the first year of
18 math in college I can't remember what the call it now. Anyway, I had that. He said,
19 "Well, would you like to cross train into the FDC?" They said, "We'll teach you how to
20 do it." Those guys were just the neatest bunch of guys, but they were different than the
21 guys on the guns. They were I think, better educated people. I often thought—I can't tell
22 you this for sure, but when they found out I had been to college, there was kind of a little
23 wall between me and the rest of the guys on the guns. Most of the guys were either out of
24 high school or didn't make it through high school. You don't have to be very intelligent
25 to be in artillery. I always felt there was this kind of wall because I had a college
26 education. Neither one of my NCOs had any college at all. The 1st sergeant didn't have
27 any college, which really surprised me because you get in the Air Force, and everybody
28 has college and all that. Some even have master's degrees. Anyway, when I went into
29 FDC, it was just a brighter group of people and they were more educated, and they just
30 wanted to know how things operated, I guess is the basic thing.

31 JS: Okay.

1 LB: So they brought me in there and taught me how to be an FDC man, how to
2 chart, how to do that. I had always been around maps quite a bit and they loved the fact
3 that I liked to make maps. So I was always making map boards. They got a kick out of
4 that. And then they put me in charge of the generators. The FDC needed lights, you
5 know, twenty-four hours a day. So I was known as the “generator man”. I had been
6 around engines quite a bit, so I knew what to do and how to change oil and how to check
7 them and everything else.

8 JS: All right. Well, could you describe the FDC itself? The facility and I don’t
9 know, I guess some of the different jobs that people would have in the FDC.

10 LB: Okay. When we’re on Tomahawk, our room was about—I would say it might
11 be smaller than twenty by twenty.

12 JS: Okay.

13 LB: But the charting maps were in there and you usually had two guys, one on
14 each map. You usually had two guys on the radios and then you had the FDC officer,
15 which is usually a 1st lieutenant or sometimes a captain.

16 JS: Okay.

17 LB: Then you had the NCOIC (Non-Commissioned Officer in Charge). We also
18 had what we called a FADAC (Field Artillery Digital Automatic Computer) computer.

19 JS: Okay.

20 LB: I worked on that. Not a lot, but probably did that more than anything else.
21 That was to double check the guys that were on the maps would make sure they were
22 getting the right information.

23 JS: Okay. Could you talk a little bit about—I guess, how that would do that? How
24 would it check them? How did it work?

25 LB: The FADAC computer would give you azimuth and longitude and that type
26 of thing.

27 JS: Okay.

28 LB: They were on little digits. It was like a circular thing in there. I don’t know
29 exactly how it worked, but it was like a huge disk in there and you’d plug in the
30 coordinates, and it would spit out the information. I don’t know how, but it worked.

31 (Chuckles)

1 JS: Sure, sure. (Chuckles)

2 LB: Sometimes we would fire information of the FADAC computer and
3 sometimes we would fire it off the maps.

4 JS: Okay. All right. And so, say a request for fire support, would it come directly
5 to you guys?

6 LB: Sometimes it would. If it was from the infantry units in the field, it would
7 come direct to us because there was what they called an RTO, radio telephone operator.
8 He would call it in direct from the field to us. A lot of the fire missions would come from
9 our headquarters, and it would come back from there. If the infantry was in trouble,
10 they'd want us right way. They'd get on the phone and call us on the radio.

11 JS: All right. So you began this job when you were still on Tomahawk at that
12 point?

13 LB: Well, I was trained in FDC on Tomahawk.

14 JS: Oh, okay.

15 LB: In actuality, when I went to Los Banos, that was my first FDC. That's when I
16 first got into my first missions and that type of thing.

17 JS: Well, before talking and asking you anymore about that, anything memorable
18 that stands out in your mind from Tomahawk?

19 LB: Other than the fact that when they got attacked that one time. I think there
20 was one individual that was killed. But again, I wasn't there at the time. I was down the
21 road, probably about ten or fifteen miles. So that was probably the one sore point about
22 Tomahawk. I don't know if you know, there's a book. After we left—this was quite a bit
23 of time after we left, but there was a Kentucky Army guard artillery unit that was
24 stationed there, and they got overrun. There's a book out about it. Let me give you the
25 name real quick. You can pick it up usually on Amazon.com. It's called, *The Sons of*
26 *Bardstown*. It's by a gentleman by the name of Jim Wilson. That's the location that we
27 were at when we left for Los Banos. They came in afterwards and got overrun. It wasn't a
28 very smart location.

29 JS: Now, about where was Tomahawk again?

30 LB: It was—I would say it would probably be equal distance between Phu Bai
31 and Da Nang.

1 JS: Okay.

2 LB: On Highway One.

3 JS: Okay. All right.

4 LB: And that's purely a guess. It's somewhere in that area.

5 JS: From the time you were there at the Eagle's Nest, was it—I guess, about
6 enemy incoming. Was that about the same, worse, better? Or—

7 LB: Tomahawk was probably about the same as Eagle's Nest.

8 JS: Okay.

9 LB: It felt like it was maybe a little bit down at the time. A little bit less than
10 Eagle's Nest. In Eagle's Nest we were getting hit pretty good. So it was less than Eagle's
11 Nest.

12 JS: Okay. I guess we can switch gears a little bit here. If you could talk a little bit
13 about the enemy. Your impressions of them from the interaction that you had with them
14 and the way they operated.

15 LB: We never really saw them. I think they were a fairly good fighting unit.
16 Again, we were fighting NVA. We were not fighting VC. There were very little VC in I
17 Corps. It's not that they didn't have them, it's just that the NVA was so much more
18 prevalent. You just never saw them. You'd get reports of them, they'd blow up bridges,
19 and you just never see them. They were kind of like a silent war.

20 JS: Okay.

21 LB: It's not like World War II where they knew that the Japanese were, and they
22 dressed and that type of thing.

23 JS: All right. Could you talk a little bit about—I guess, as far as whenever they
24 would fire mortars and things at you guys, do you know what type of mortars? Were they
25 also firing rockets and things at you guys as well? Or—

26 LB: We would get rockets every once in a while. On a later trip, when we left Los
27 Banos, the Americal Division was just getting their butts kicked. So they took the whole
28 1st Brigade of the 101st and went down to help the Americal Division. We were at a
29 couple locations down in their area and we were at a Special Forces base camp. We set
30 up right next to them.

31 JS: Okay.

1 LB: Rockets and 122s were fired at us that time. I don't remember any rockets
2 being fired up in the northern area at all.

3 JS: Okay.

4 LB: It was almost all mortar. I apologize, I can't tell you what kind it was.

5 JS: Okay, sure.

6 LB: Probably eighty, I guess.

7 JS: How about South Vietnamese troops? Did you guys ever see or have any
8 interaction with them?

9 LB: Yes, I was going to tell you, when we went down to support the Americal,
10 they brought a South Vietnamese 105 unit out and they didn't have any—I don't know
11 how to say it. They didn't have any coordination between the United States Army and
12 themselves.

13 JS: Okay.

14 LB: So they wanted two volunteers to go up and stay with the South Vietnamese
15 artillery unit. I didn't want one of the younger guys getting hurt, so I and another guy
16 volunteered, and we went up and spent probably a week with them. Our whole function
17 up there, it wasn't to fire artillery. They knew how to fire artillery. The guy, the officer
18 come over and he showed me, and I'd say, "Yes." I did not speak Vietnamese.

19 JS: Okay.

20 LB: Our whole function was we had a radio up there and when the helicopters
21 were going in with the gunships or they were taking troops in there, they wanted to make
22 sure they didn't fire because they were scared to death they were going to fire a round
23 and hit a helicopter of American troops. So my main job up there when they called me
24 and said, "Cease fire." I made sure they didn't fire.

25 JS: Okay.

26 LB: I thought they were good artillery. Again, I did not speak Vietnamese. I
27 didn't know half the time what they were talking about. I didn't know what I was eating.

28 JS: (Laughs) So you were eating their rations.

29 LB: Yes.

30 JS: How were they compared to American rations?

1 LB: You know, probably not bad. It had always been—until my later years here, I
2 had always liked spicy food and my one FDC captain, Samuel Calvillo was from—not
3 San Antonio—El Paso, Texas.

4 JS: Okay.

5 LB: And he had his mother send a bunch of Mexican food over. So he cooked
6 Mexican food for us one night. I was eating the hot sauce like crazy, and he said, “How
7 do you do that? Mexicans can’t eat that hot sauce?” (Laughs)

8 JS: (Laughs) Right.

9 LB: So I’ve always been able. Like I said, I don’t know what I was eating. I was
10 probably eating fish and everything else, but it was spicy, and it tasted good. You know,
11 anything’s better than C-rations.

12 JS: Right. (Laughs) So overall from your perspective, from what you could see
13 you thought that the ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) that you were working
14 with were competent I guess, in what they were doing?

15 LB: Yes, very much so.

16 JS: Okay. All right. You said you worked with them about a week?

17 LB: I think it was about a week. We were on top of this kind of hilltop and our
18 location was down a little bit from theirs and I was kind of up on the hillier top area and I
19 would just live up there with them for a week.

20 JS: Okay. All right. Were they fairly friendly and open towards you?

21 LB: Yes. Oh, very much so. Very industrious, wanted to do a good job. I was
22 impressed with them. I thought they did a very good job.

23 JS: All right. Okay, how about Vietnamese civilians? Did you ever have much
24 interaction with them?

25 LB: Very little. The 101st tried to keep their men away from the villagers and
26 everybody else. I had very little interaction with the locals.

27 JS: All right. Well, what little you did have, did you have an impression of them?
28 A positive, negative, as far as their feelings towards you guys and American presence?

29 LB: I wouldn’t say positive. I would say neutral.

30 JS: Okay.

1 LB: They always talked about them lacing cokes with acid. You were just so
2 scared as a young guy, you're just so scared of doing anything. You only drank coke
3 from a can. They were just something else. Like I said, with the Vietnamese military, the
4 ARVNs, I was very impressed with them.

5 JS: Okay. All right. When you weren't firing the gun or working in the FDC, I
6 guess if you ever had any downtime, how would you spend it?

7 LB: Usually, you would try to sleep. I still have problems sleeping. I'm a person
8 that needs a lot of sleep. When I was first over there, we were getting maybe three hours
9 of sleep a night. I was very sleep deprived and whenever we had extra time off or they
10 didn't have us doing details or anything, I basically slept. I just could never get enough
11 sleep and to this day I still have problems sleeping.

12 JS: Okay. All right. How about things like writing letters home, things like that?
13 Did you do a good bit of that?

14 LB: I got chewed out one time for not writing home. (Laughs)

15 JS: (Laughs) Okay.

16 LB: I tried to write home. My mother, bless her heart, she would type a letter to
17 me everyday and tell me what was going on and send me the newspaper. I just didn't
18 write home that much. My dad asked me when I came home, he said, "Why didn't you
19 write us more about what happened?" said, "Because you don't want to know what
20 happened." I said, "A lot of the things were just so bad, I just didn't want to write about
21 it." And he never said anything to me after that. His brother came home from World War
22 II and had a very similar—we talked about it a little bit and he had a very similar deal. He
23 was in the Navy, in the pacific and a lot of his friends were killed, and he just never
24 wanted to talk about it. After I was home about five years, my dad came to me and he
25 said, "You know, there's something wrong with you and you need to find some help." So
26 on my own I went to a thing called the Suland Health Center

27 JS: Okay.

28 LB: And a psychologist, not a psychiatrist, a psychologist helped me quite a bit. A
29 lot of it was getting back from Vietnam and living through it and just thinking about all
30 the guys that didn't make it.

31 JS: Right.

1 LB: So I was helped there at an early age anyway, I guess was that.
2 JS: All right. Yes, sir. Go ahead.
3 LB: I probably shouldn't tell you this, but I came back, and I tried to make love to
4 every woman I could.
5 JS: (Laughs) Right.
6 LB: That was my way of giving back (Laughs).
7 JS: All right. Well, anything memorable, anything we should mention about the
8 time at Los Banos?
9 LB: Not so much. Like I say, again, it'd quieted down. We did what they call a tip
10 shoot, that's what they do. They take a couple guns from location, and they go to another
11 location and they just fire, fire, fire, and then the helicopters come back and pick it up.
12 It's all done in one day.
13 JS: Okay.
14 LB: We went on a hip shoot to this place and fired, and it pissed off the NVA so
15 much that they started to come out of the mountain at us.
16 JS: Wow, okay.
17 LB: They had Cobras flying down the mountain shooting at them. I mean, they
18 were really pissed because we were out there. We weren't supposed to be firing in that
19 area, I guess.
20 JS: Right.
21 LB: That hip shoot, that was very reminiscent. Then, I ended up getting malaria
22 falciparum. There's different kinds of malaria, I didn't know that either. Anyway, they
23 had shipped me back to the rear at Chu Lai and the one doctor said I was faking, and the
24 other doctor looked at him kind of stupid. I ended up with malaria and they shipped me
25 from Chu Lai down to a place called 6C&C, it a convalescent center. That was right on
26 the bay at—was it Cam Ranh Bay? It was just south of Nha Trang.
27 JS: Right.
28 LB: Anyway, I'm down there and we get overrun by VC and they blow up the
29 water tower and everything else. God love him, Richard Nixon made a political statement
30 that he was going to withdraw troops from Vietnam. Well, he was. He took all the

1 hospital and all the wounded and shipped them to Japan. So I spent my last month and a
2 half in the Army in Japan. So Richard Nixon saved my life. (Laughs)

3 JS: Right. All right. Well, speaking of the issue of Malaria, were you guys taking
4 the two types of pills? The daily pill and was it the monthly or weekly?

5 LB: We took a huge orange pill every Monday and then we took I think a white
6 pill every day. It still didn't work on me, I don't know why.

7 JS: All right. If you don't mind me asking, what type of symptoms were you
8 having to let you know that you had malaria?

9 LB: Well, that's the other thing the doctor I think thought I was faking. But I'd
10 have fever, but I wouldn't have the chills. I'd just have a fever. Then it'd go away and
11 come back and go away. They shipped me to the rear. The medic out in the—that's
12 another thing, I'd like to find this guy's name, but we only ever knew him as Doc.

13 JS: Right.

14 LB: He says, "I think you're sick." He said, "I think you have malaria. I'm going
15 to ship you back to the rear." So they shipped me back to the rear and these two doctors
16 looked at me and they said, "Well, we think you're okay." Well, that night they were
17 having fried chicken. We never ever got fried chicken in the field and fried chicken is one
18 of my favorite dishes.

19 JS: Right.

20 LB: And they had fried chicken back there and I ate it, and about an hour later I
21 threw everything up.

22 JS: Right.

23 LB: That's when the other doctor said, "We're going to send you down to—" I
24 think it was Chu Lai or some other place he said. So they sent me down there and of
25 course, that's when I really got sick. I came home and I weighed ninety-eight pounds.

26 JS: Wow.

27 LB: I never weighed ninety-eight pounds in my life.

28 JS: How long had you been in country when you got sick? Do you know?

29 LB: Well, I was just about to go on R&R (Rest and Recuperation).

30 JS: Ah.

1 LB: So I think it was about my eleventh month, eleventh or twelfth month. I
2 extended. I hated the Army so much, I extended in Vietnam a little less than two months
3 because at that time, if you came home and you had less than six months, you got an
4 automatic early out. So I extended. I told the guy I wanted to extend, and my buddy Hoy
5 said, "You're crazy, you're going to get killed. You're crazy." Anyway, I spent the last
6 month, month and a half in hospitals in Vietnam and Japan. It worked out. Somebody up
7 there likes me. (Chuckles)

8 JS: But you did not get an R&R though, correct?

9 LB: Did—never got an R&R.

10 JS: All right. Well, could you talk a little bit about, I guess the experience of
11 going through the medical system there in Vietnam and Japan? And, what that was like
12 for you?

13 LB: With the exception of that one doctor, I thought most of the medical people
14 were very, very caring people. The nurses, when I was so sick, the nurses would take care
15 of me. Do you know what a harelip is?

16 JS: No, sir.

17 LB: It's a person that's got a cleft pallet.

18 JS: Oh, okay.

19 LB: They called them harelips when we were kids. This nurse, Army nurse, had a
20 cleft pallet I guess, harelip and she was so good to me. After I kind of got through it, it
21 got me well enough so I could be walking wounded. That's when they shipped me to
22 Japan. But anyway, in talking to her, you never ask anybody where you're from because
23 nobody knows where South Sioux City, Nebraska. So you usually say, "I'm from the
24 Midwest." Well, I was talking to this nurse, and she said, "Well, I'm from Nebraska."
25 And I said, "Really? I am too. Where are you from?" She said, "Norfolk." Which is about
26 sixty miles from my hometown. I said, "I'm from South Sioux City, Nebraska." I
27 couldn't believe it that you'd come all the way over there, you know, and run into people
28 like that. I thought the medical staff in Vietnam was top notch. I thought the medical
29 people in Japan were even better. They shipped me to a place called Higashi Kanagawa,
30 and it was the first train stop north of Yokohama.

31 JS: Okay.

1 LB: I was there for—I don't know, at least three weeks or something. I'd never
2 been in an earthquake before.

3 JS: Okay.

4 LB: This place had a pool, so in the afternoons we'd go out and sit at the pool. I
5 was sitting at this lawn chair, you know, a lawn sofa and I thought my buddy was kicking
6 my lawn sofa. I said, "What are you doing?" He said, "Nothing." We looked at the water
7 in the pool and the pool is just lapping.

8 JS: Right.

9 LB: And that we were in an earthquake. So that happened and then they ended up
10 sending me to a place called Camp Cama. It's an Army installation that was originally
11 Japan's West Point. All the buildings are the same as they were before. I was there
12 probably two weeks, something like that. And they made me pull details and then, they
13 ultimately shipped me home from there.

14 JS: All right. How were you treated for the malaria?

15 LB: Um, they give you—I think it's Quinine, I think it is.

16 JS: Okay.

17 LB: That's about the only thing they can do for you.

18 JS: Okay.

19 LB: It's a body—I don't know if you're familiar with malaria, but what it does is
20 it kills all your white blood cells.

21 JS: Okay.

22 LB: (Inaudible)

23 JS: Hello? Did I lose you? Hello?

24 LB: Are you there?

25 JS: It's breaking up a little bit.

26 LB: I hate this. (Inaudible) Can I call you right back?

Interview with Larry Brooks
Session [2] of [2]
Date 15 October 2010

1 Jason Stewart: This is Jason Stewart with the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech
2 University, continuing an Oral History interview with retired Senior Master Sergeant
3 Larry Brooks. Today is October 15th, 2010, and this is interview session number two.
4 Okay, you mentioned just a moment ago that there were a few things that you wanted to
5 cover. That we—

6 Larry Brooks: Yeah. I apologize, again, it's been a long time and there's a couple
7 firebases. When we were talking yesterday, I believe my first firebase was Eagle's Nest.

8 JS: Okay.

9 LB: Eagle's Nest, I've got locations. Eagle's Nest was on the eastern edge of the
10 A Shau Valley, northward approximately 35 kilometers, west, southwest of Wei.

11 JS: Okay.

12 LB: From there—I had told you yesterday, we moved to Tomahawk. That is
13 incorrect. When we came off the main base, we made a stop at a place called Fire
14 Support Base Veghal, I believe. Veghal was the artillery battalion's headquarters.

15 JS: Okay.

16 LB: We just stopped there for a day or two. They brought the guns to us, but we
17 didn't fire them or set them up or anything else. It was just enough to get us off the
18 mountain.

19 JS: All right.

20 LB: From there, we went to a beach area called Fire Support Base Beach, and it
21 was an ex-Marine artillery emplacement, and we went there for—I want to say maybe
22 two weeks, and then we ended up at Tomahawk. Yesterday I kind of skipped those two as
23 far as going. You asked me about Tomahawk. Tomahawk was a long QL1 near the north
24 end of the Hai Van Pass.

25 JS: Ah, okay.

26 LB: And 40 kilometers south of Wei, along that South China Sea. Then, the other
27 location was Los Banos. That was where we went to next. That was 34 kilometers north,
28 northwest of Da Nang. So I just want to kind of clear that up. Let's see, there were a

1 couple other things, and I can't think of them right now. I did want to tell you one story
2 when we were on, I believe it was Eagle's Nest. It was the first location we were at.

3 JS: Okay.

4 LB: When we're digging out the mountain and filling sandbags and making our
5 bunkers and everything. I tell this story and most people don't believe me, but we found
6 earth worms that were up to three foot long, two and a half feet, three foot long

7 JS: Wow.

8 LB: And were about one and a half to two inches in diameter. I thought they were
9 snakes at first, but they were actually earth worms. That's how remote this place was.

10 Js: (Chuckles) Right.

11 LB: I wanted to tell you. I don't know if anybody's ever mentioned that.

12 JS: Wow, that's—yeah.

13 LB: Okay.

14 JS: All right. Well, anything else before we continue?

15 LB: Let me check my notes just a second. I tried to write everything down that I
16 was going to talk to you about.

17 JS: Okay.

18 LB: Let's see. Of course, I can't find my notes now. Oh, I also have a listing of all
19 the men that were killed in my unit.

20 JS: Okay.

21 LB: Over the entire war. I didn't know if you needed that, or I can send that to
22 you. Also, you asked me if some other people in my unit had made an impression on me.

23 JS: Right.

24 LB: I have a card file. I'm trying to get in touch with—not get in touch but try to
25 keep a card file on everybody that served in Vietnam with A Battery. Can you hold on
26 just a second? I need to open here.

27 JS: Sure.

28 LB: I'd like to mention a couple names to you.

29 JS: Okay.

1 LB: First of all, there's a gentleman by the name of Mickey Adams who is one of
2 the gentlemen on our gun. Also, there was a Richard D. Boyle. He was the battalion
3 commander while I was over there.

4 JS: All right.

5 LB: I met him I think maybe once or twice, not real often.

6 JS: Okay.

7 LB: There was a guy on the guns by the name of David Brinkman and I've lost
8 contact. Most of these gentlemen I have not had any contact with. There was a gentleman
9 that was on the guns with me, kind of one of my first friends in Vietnam. It was a guy by
10 the name of—I apologize, I don't have his first name. His last name was Brazinski.

11 JS: Okay.

12 LB: And he was from Cincinnati, Ohio.

13 JS: All right.

14 LB: Let's see. I had two lieutenants that I thought a lot of. I thought they were
15 very, very professional. The first one was a Captain Samuel J. Calvillo. His call sign was
16 "Wetback". He was from El Paso, Texas, he was Mexican. A very, very neat guy.

17 JS: Right.

18 LB: There was also a gentleman from Florida that I was on the guns with, that I
19 befriended. The last name was Carter and again, I have had no contact with him.

20 JS: Okay.

21 LB: A gentleman that you might want to get in contact with that was in the unit
22 just about the time I left, he was in there from '67 to '68. His name is David Flood. His
23 address is PO Box 63—

24 JS: Actually, do you want to hold off on that since we're recording, so it's not on
25 the actual recording?

26 LB: Sure.

27 JS: Okay. All right. Do you want to just tell me at the end of the interview?

28 LB: You bet, you bet. I'm trying to get down to the—there's also a gentleman by
29 the name of Larry Gabbard, who is head of the ammo dump. I'm trying to find these
30 other two here. The other lieutenant captain at the time that was in the FDC was Captain
31 Freddy Jones.

1 JS: Okay.

2 LB: His call sign was "Two Bore". Let's see, I'm trying to think of one more
3 here. One of my commanders at the time I didn't think too much of was a Captain
4 Clinton Stokes.

5 JS: Okay.

6 LB: He was actually relieved of his command due to the drug problem.

7 JS: Okay.

8 LB: And then, another guy that was in FDC that was a very impressionable on me
9 was a gentleman by the name of Ted West. I've never had any contact with him. I just
10 wanted to give you some names there in case you want to co-locate them.

11 JS: Okay.

12 LB: Again, the best battery officer commander that I had over there was a
13 gentleman by the name of Clarence Buchwald, and I am in contact with him. I do have
14 his address too.

15 JS: Okay.

16 LB: If you'd like that later on.

17 JS: All right. Yes, sir.

18 LB: Okay.

19 JS: Okay. Yesterday—the day before yesterday when we left off, you were
20 talking about Malaria and what it actually does to a person, whenever the phone started
21 cutting out. I guess, if we could pick up there again.

22 LB: Sure, sure. Again, what malaria does to your body, it kills all your white
23 blood cells. Your white blood cells is what fight infection when you have a cold or
24 pneumonia. Malaria never leaves your body, but when it's really bad, it doesn't
25 necessarily kill you, but another thing could kill you. Rather than getting a cold, you'd
26 get pneumonia. So that's how that works on your body anyway. I was very lucky to get
27 over that in I would guess a really short period of time. I'm talking maybe three weeks or
28 something like that.

29 JS: All right. The other thing you were talking about, being at Camp Sama, is that
30 correct?

31 LB: Yes. In Japan? Yes.

1 JS: Right. How long were you there?
2 LB: I'm guessing I was there probably two weeks, maybe less. Maybe a week and
3 a half.
4 JS: Okay.
5 LB: When I was sick, I kind of lose track of time. You're in the hospital and
6 every day is the same.
7 JS: Right.
8 LB: It runs together.
9 JS: Right. All right. And that was the last place you were before you actually went
10 home?
11 LB: That is correct.
12 JS: And how did you get home? Was it a civilian transport or military?
13 LB: You know, I'm trying to think. I think we came home military air; I believe.
14 JS: Okay.
15 LB: I think it was a 141. It wasn't a C130, it wasn't a prop job. It was a jet. It
16 seems to me it was like a 141.
17 JS: Okay. All right. Did you come back to Travis?
18 LB: Yes, we flew into Travis. I was in Japan and flew to Travis and from Travis
19 they bussed us down to the Oakland Army terminal. Kind of a funny story, when we got
20 into Travis, we had already been issued uniforms and everything else like that. The
21 gentlemen that came back from Vietnam were still in their jungle fatigues. They had to be
22 processed through and issued new uniforms, where they had done that to us in Japan.
23 JS: Okay.
24 LB: They gave us kind of a night off. The guy says—he told us to be back at eight
25 o'clock in the morning and we'd be ready for processing.
26 JS: Right.
27 LB: The other thing they did for us that I remember very distinctly was when we
28 got to the Oakland Army Terminal, one of the first things they do is they fed us a steak.
29 They had a little area there where you could go up and eat a steak and they'd cook it
30 however you want it, which I thought was kind of a nice thing coming back from

1 Vietnam. Anyway, that evening we did not know what to do. The first time back in the
2 United States.

3 JS: Right.

4 LB: We ended up in Oakland at the Oakland Raiders bar and proceeded to get
5 fairly stewed. (Chuckles)

6 JS: (Chuckles) Right.

7 LB: So we partied all night with these girls and then the next morning we gave
8 them cab fare to get home. We got back to the Oakland Army terminal at about—oh,
9 seven forty-five, quarter to eight, something like that. We got in and there was this E-5
10 just running around with his head cut off and he finally figured out who we were, and he
11 said, “Where have you guys been? You’re AWOL (Absent Without Leave) and
12 everything else.” We looked at him like, “You’re crazy.” He said, “We’ve been looking
13 for you since six o’clock in the morning.” (Unintelligible) I looked at him and I said,
14 “You know, the sergeant told us to be back here at eight o’clock, we’re ahead of time.
15 Just cool your heel.”

16 JS: Right.

17 LB: Of course, I thought it was funny at the time, but I don’t know if we could
18 have gotten in any trouble or not.

19 JS: Right.

20 LB: Wanted to make sure to put that in.

21 JS: All right. Well, did you—coming back there and spending a little time there in
22 Oakland, did you run into any of the anti-war protests, anti-soldier type things? Did you
23 see any of that?

24 LB: You know, no we didn’t.

25 JS: Okay.

26 LB: I didn’t. Again, we processed through the Oakland Army terminal that
27 morning and they released us. I don’t think I had a flight until the next day.

28 JS: Okay.

29 LB: Another buddy that was in our group, he and I went and got a motel room,
30 and we stayed the night in I think Oakland again. We may have stayed by the San

1 Francisco Airport out there, but I just remember getting a room that evening and not
2 really doing anything. I didn't see any protestors or anything like that at all.

3 JS: Okay. Well, so where'd you go from there?

4 LB: From there I boarded an airplane the next morning and flew into Denver. I
5 remember having kind of a large layover in Denver for some reason. I don't know,
6 whatever it was. But then I flew from Denver to Sioux City, Iowa. It was late in the
7 evening. It was dark, I remember. I got into Sioux City and met my parents and my
8 friend, my closest friend from high school. They actually drove me home from the
9 airport.

10 JS: All right. How did you feel about being home again? Did you have any
11 trouble adjusting to life outside of Vietnam, back to civilian type life again?

12 LB: I guess I adjusted fairly good. I mean, when you come from a—you know, I
13 had been in Japan for probably three weeks, so it wasn't like I was coming right out of a
14 combat situation, you know, going to a processing station and then going home. I had a
15 little time flexibility in that time. I think that helped me somewhat. It gave me a chance to
16 kind of wind down a little bit better than maybe some of the individuals. I still had
17 problems. I slept with a shotgun under my bed for the longest time and my dad was
18 finally scared. He thought maybe I'd get up in the night and shoot myself or whatever, I
19 don't know. Anyway, he took the shotgun away, but I had to have a weapon. I remember
20 that, I had to have a weapon next to me for a long, long time. I'm talking maybe a month
21 or something.

22 JS: Okay.

23 LB: Again, it's winding down from that combat situation where you're under that
24 stress all the time. Again, I had sleeping problems from day one.

25 JS: All right. Were you finished with the Army at that point? Completely done?

26 LB: Yes. When you came back from Vietnam and you had less than six months,
27 they gave you an automatic early out and they transferred me at that time to the inactive
28 reserve. I think I was stationed—I think in Saint Louis, as what you would call a paper
29 soldier. I was on the books but (unintelligible), you know.

30 JS: Okay. Once you came home, did you continue to follow the war through the
31 media?

1 LB: Pretty much so. I think even up until the end. What was going on and I didn't
2 have any written contacts with anybody other than my one buddy from Illinois. It was
3 just like you were in the Army one day and you were out the next. There was just a
4 complete break there. I figured over the years that's probably not the best way to do it. I
5 wish I had stayed in contact with more people, but most Vietnam veterans that I have
6 talked to, they did the same as I. The contacts and the comradeship that you established,
7 when you left Vietnam, it just ended.

8 JS: Right. All right. As you were back home and following through the media,
9 what did you think of the way the war was going? The beginnings of Vietnamization and
10 the beginning of the Americans pulling out of Vietnam? What did you think of that?

11 LB: Well, I thought the Vietnamization was a good idea.

12 JS: Okay.

13 LB: Those people needed to fight for their country. If they wanted liberty, they
14 needed to fight for it themselves. I guess that's the thing that—one of the other things that
15 kind of upset me is you would see pictures on TV of these young men in Saigon or
16 whatever town it was. Well, why aren't they in uniform? What keeps them out of the
17 military yet guys in America have to go fight for their freedom? That didn't sit very well
18 with me. I always got the impression that the Vietnamese really didn't care. It was more
19 about Americans bringing the money over there.

20 JS: All right. Well, what did you think of the media's coverage of the war?

21 LB: I thought the media's coverage was fairly good. I mean, from an information
22 standpoint. I'm not a big fan of the gentleman that was fired from CBS, Dan Rather.

23 JS: Right.

24 LB: I don't know if you know any of the story about him.

25 JS: A little bit.

26 LB: He flunked out of boot camp. He couldn't even make it through the military.
27 I think there was a lot of prejudicial judgment on the military from announcers.

28 JS: Okay.

29 LB: It was so much different than World War II where the media was behind the
30 war and they recorded not only good things, they reported bad things too. But there was

1 always a slam on it that it was positive for the military. I always got the impression that
2 the media during the Vietnam War was not that way.

3 JS: All right. Well, once you were back home, what did you do at that point, once
4 you were out of the military? Did you start looking for a job or school? Or, what did you
5 do after that?

6 LB: I drank a lot.

7 JS: Okay.

8 LB: I drank a lot. Not at first. I didn't really look for work. Of course, almost all
9 my money from Vietnam I didn't spend any of it. So I got it all in my head, purchased a
10 car, and that was another thing. I'd purchased a car, a brand new 1970 Camaro and of
11 course, the Camaros that year didn't come out until '70 and a half. They were so far
12 behind on production they didn't actually come out until July; I think it was.

13 JS: Okay.

14 LB: I got so fed up I was going to buy another car and the night I did, they called
15 from my Chevrolet dealership that I bought it and said, "By the way, your car's in." I had
16 purchased another older car in between. I didn't really have payments. I was living at
17 home, so I drank a lot at night. I guess to relieve the tension. There was just still
18 something brooding inside of me I didn't know. My dad could see it, but I couldn't see it
19 myself.

20 JS: Alright. Well, if you don't mind me asking, how long did that period last?

21 LB: Good question. I would say until I found work, I would say it took probably
22 about—I'm guessing nine to twelve months. I ended up getting a job at a tool repair shop.
23 It was a warranty place that did warranty work for Sioux Tool.

24 JS: Okay.

25 LB: Basically, what I did, I became the parts manager and worked there and that
26 helped a little bit. My head boss was a World War II veteran, Army.

27 JS: Okay.

28 LB: We talked quite a bit, that helped. He was very, I want to say persistent on me
29 to go back to school. He was very flexible with my hours, and I went back to college, and
30 I took a few courses which ultimately helped me down the road. I don't think it really
31 helped at that time, but it gave me encouragement to get a higher degree.

1 JS: Right. All right. At what point did you decide to get back in the military? Is
2 this a little bit later on? Are we getting too far ahead?

3 LB: Um, this was—let's see, I got home in '70.

4 JS: Okay.

5 LB: And this would have been—I'm trying to think my dates. I want to guess like
6 '74 or '75.

7 JS: Okay.

8 LB: A buddy of mine that I had run around with in high school had been in the
9 Air National Guard unit in Sioux City. Everybody calls it the 185th. That was the number
10 185th Fighter Group.

11 JS: Okay.

12 LB: Anyway, he had been on the 185th when they got activated for Vietnam and
13 he got sent to Vietnam as an aircraft. He worked in aircraft maintenance. He'd gotten out
14 once they got home. Well, he came to me and he said—I was working two jobs at the
15 time. I was working at a furniture store, and I think I was still working at the tool repair
16 place. He said, "Let's go down and join the Guard." I had hair down to my shoulders.
17 (Laughs) I said, "What would they want me for?" He said, "Well, they're hurting for
18 people." He said, "They're looking for prior service people and they've got a program
19 called 'Try One'." He said, "You can join for one year and if you don't like it, you can
20 quit." He said, "It's only for a year and I'm thinking about getting back in. Would you
21 join with me under the buddy program?" So I said, "Well, I'll take a look at it." There
22 was something about not being in uniform. I can't tell you what it is, but it was
23 something about wearing that uniform. Again, my father installed a lot of patriotism in
24 me, and I think maybe that had something to do with it. Anyway, so we went down, and
25 he was talking to one recruiter, and I was talking to the other recruiter. He asked me what
26 I did. I said, "Well, I worked in artillery, which I know you don't have. But I also worked
27 in what we called FDC, and it was an operations area." I said, "I made maps." They
28 always got a kick. "Oh." He says, "I know where we can put you into." So they tested me
29 and my scores were very high, I could get into anything. So this was during the week and
30 then on the weekend I went down and interviewed with the colonel that was head of the
31 section and what it was, it was Air Force intelligence. What they do is they make maps

1 for the pilots that fly the missions. In other words, they were flying F-100s at that time,
2 fighters.

3 JS: Okay.

4 LB: What they were doing is, when they'd fly the mission, they'd have a map that
5 was attached to their leg, usually on the right side that was kind of a flip map and how
6 they fly the mission. This is where you're going to go bomb and this is what the mission
7 was, so they wouldn't get lost. Well anyway, I was very good at that, and the colonel was
8 very impressed with me, and he said, "Sure, we'd like to have you." He says, "By the
9 way, you know you have to cut your hair, don't you?" I said, "Yeah, I know. I don't mind
10 cutting it as far as that goes."

11 JS: Right.

12 LB: So at this time I also became a motion picture projectionist.

13 JS: Oh, okay.

14 LB: I was basically working nights. Especially in the summertime when we had
15 the drive-ins open, I would work every night of the week during the summertime. When
16 the drive-in shut down, then I'd go back maybe two or three times each week a night
17 shift. So I joined the Air National Guard and it was a completely different exposure than
18 what I'd had in the Army. It was almost exact opposite. In fact, one weekend, the colonel
19 got up and started washing windows. You'd never see that in the Army. I asked, I said, "I
20 can do that, colonel." He says, "No, no. I want to keep busy." He said, "I don't want to be
21 bored."

22 JS: Right.

23 LB: So I let him wash the windows. (Chuckles) Which, you know, you'd never
24 ever see anything like that in the Army.

25 JS: Right.

26 LB: It was a different bunch of officers; it was a different attitude toward people.
27 The NCOs were topnotch. In fact, in my career I probably ran into—you know, serving
28 28 years, I probably ran into ten NCOs that weren't worth a darn. The rest of them—you
29 know, a very, very small percentage of people that were out for themselves rather than
30 taking care of their people. The other NCO seemed to get on an NCO that wouldn't take

1 care of his people. I'm not saying it was brutal, but they let him know that, "Hey, you
2 need to take care of your people."

3 JS: Right. Yes, sir.

4 LB: So I joined for a year and I really enjoyed it. I enjoyed who I worked for, I
5 enjoyed doing the work. The recruiter that recruited me, came to me after a year and he
6 says, "I need to ask you a question." He said, "Would you be interested in becoming a
7 recruiter?" Well, as a projectionist I had gotten high up in the union and actually, I was
8 state secretary of the projectionist union for the state. I said, "Well, I work nights. I
9 can't." He says, "Well, if something happens, let me know." Well, we ended up going on
10 strike and it was a lock out. So my boss in the intel section was giving me what they call
11 man days. Extra days they had to come down and work on projects. Well, the recruiter
12 came over and said, "I understand you lost your job at this projectionist." He said, "You
13 think you're ever going to get it back?" I said, "Probably not." I said, "We don't have any
14 hope that it would." I said, "You never know." He said, "Would you like to go to
15 recruiting school?" And I said, "Are you sure you're talking to me?" I had never sold
16 anything in my life. Never had any training. So I accepted, I went through training
17 school, came back, and it was during the Jimmy Carter Administration and the Carter
18 Administration totally underfunded the military at the time. They were getting funds like
19 every six months. So they could only put me on orders for six months. I never knew from
20 one day to the next if I had job or not. It was a very tempestuous time I guess, in my life.
21 I was married at the time.

22 JS: Yes, sir.

23 LB: Anyway, they didn't know whether they were going to fund me. They didn't,
24 they did, they didn't. So I ended up coming back in the office one afternoon and there
25 were three of us recruiters; myself and two other gentleman.

26 JS: Okay.

27 LB: The other gentleman, for some reason, had called Lincoln, Nebraska. You
28 know, from my wildest expectations I never know why he called Lincoln, Nebraska. He
29 said, "Well, two of their recruiters were quitting." He said, "They needed help right away
30 down there." So I call down there and talk to the gentleman and he said, "Well, could you
31 come down for an interview?" I said, "Well, sure." So I drove down to Lincoln and

1 interviewed and my initial reaction was, “This is even a better unit than the Sioux City
2 unit.” Which, the Sioux City unit was a very good unit. I met the commander and I’ll
3 never forget, I had one on the state ties that clip on.

4 JS: Right.

5 LB: I was interviewing with the director of personnel and the commander of the
6 unit walked in and I stood up and that tie fell off. There is no way I’m getting this job.

7 JS: Right.

8 LB: So anyway, I interviewed, and they said their goodbyes and they said they’d
9 contact me in a couple days. So I drove back up to Sioux City and they called that
10 evening and said, “If you want the job, the job is yours.” So I impressed somebody. I
11 don’t know who it was. (Laughs)

12 JS: Right. (Laughs)

13 LB: So anyway, I ended up moving down to Lincoln, Nebraska, and becoming a
14 production recruiter with them.

15 JS: Okay.

16 LB: And then, ultimately became office manager and then when the head recruiter
17 retired, I became what they call the recruiting and retention programs manager.

18 JS: Okay. All right. One thing I meant to ask you a little bit earlier, when you got
19 back in, got into the Air Force, what was your rank when you came in?

20 LB: They at that time were allowed—usually in the Air Force you can recruit
21 anybody up to the rank of E5.

22 JS: Okay.

23 LB: So my Army rank I was a Spec 4, so they transferred me over to an Army E4,
24 which was a sergeant at that time. So I came across as an E4, got promoted to E5 when I
25 was in intel and then, when I became a recruiter, when I went to Lincoln, they promoted
26 me to E6.

27 JS: Okay.

28 LB: That’s kind of how that went.

29 JS: Did you enjoy recruiting?

30 LB: I did. I mean, it has its ups and downs. Don’t get me wrong, it’s a very
31 pressure job. Most jobs in the Air Force are not pressure, but it is a pressure job. You

1 have to continue to produce. In Lincoln—Lincoln was so much different than Sioux City.
2 Recruiting in Sioux City was really tough. I mean, they had no benefits—I'm not saying
3 no benefits, but they had very few benefits. Where when I went to Lincoln, they were
4 offering seventy-five percent tuition if a high school senior or anybody else wanted to go
5 back to college, they would pay seventy-five percent of the tuition.

6 JS: Right.

7 LB: In addition to just being a part-timer. So it was a very lucrative business. We
8 got a lot of quality kids that way because you got kids that wanted to go to college and
9 were probably at least in the top half of the class.

10 JS: All right. So you mostly recruited at the high schools then? Any on the
11 campus there at Nebraska? Or—

12 LB: Yes, we recruited the high schools. We recruited—the university was very
13 good to us. Again, they were a state organization and the Air Guard being a state
14 organization, they kind of had a togetherness or at least kind of worked with each other.

15 JS: All right, given the time period, did you run into any hostility whatsoever?

16 LB: If I remember back, the only hostility I ran into is—when I was in Sioux City,
17 we were recruiting at Morningside College.

18 JS: Okay.

19 LB: There were some—I don't want to call them anti-war, but there were some
20 anti-military people there that would give us sarcastic remarks. Most of the people in
21 Midwest are really pro-military so I never really had any problem except for that one
22 time at Morningside College.

23 JS: Okay. Yes, sir. All right. How long did you do this for, recruit?

24 LB: I recruited for about twenty-three years.

25 JS: Okay. All right. Most of it was done there in Lincoln?

26 LB: Yes, the majority. I recruited a short time in Sioux City. I'm talking maybe a
27 year.

28 JS: Okay.

29 LB: And then, the rest of my recruiting was done in Lincoln, Nebraska.

30 JS: Okay. Did you retire as a recruiter?

1 LB: Yes. Yes, I did. The title is recruiting and retention of programs manager. I
2 worked at the adjutant general's office.

3 JS: Okay.

4 LB: With the headquarters.

5 JS: All right. What year did you retire?

6 LB: 1998.

7 JS: Okay. All right. Well, is there anything else we should cover about that time
8 period before moving on?

9 LB: I can't think of anything off hand. If any questions come up, just give me a
10 holler.

11 JS: All right. Well, what I usually do to wrap the interviews up, I have some
12 broad-based questions about the war. Just to get your opinion on some of the larger
13 issues, if you don't mind.

14 LB: No, not at all.

15 JS: Okay. All right. Well, I touched on some of these issues a little bit, but first of
16 all, looking back on your experience in Vietnam and the way the war turned out, how do
17 you feel about American involvement in Vietnam? Do you think we should have been
18 there? Do you think we should not have been there? And how do you feel about your
19 own service?

20 LB: Boy, that's a very encompassing question because I've probably gone back
21 and forth on that issue a number of times.

22 JS: Okay.

23 LB: A lot of times what we were trying to do there was good. What we actually,
24 in fact, did there I don't think was very good. I got the feeling that the officers used it
25 basically as a steppingstone. In other words, the longer the war went on, the more officers
26 promoted. It was that type of thing. I thought what we were trying to do in Southeast
27 Asia, of starving off communism, I think was good. I just don't think the way we went
28 about it was the correct way. We tried to fight a World War II war against a
29 counterinsurgency, and we could have done that better.

30 JS: Yes, sir.

1 LB: So from that aspect, I have mixed feelings. I thought we should have been
2 there. I don't think it was worth the loss of life that young men from the United States
3 that died for something that today has held in communism. It just wasn't meant to be, I
4 guess. Does that answer most of the question that you had? You had something at the end
5 of that question.

6 JS: The other thing is, how do you feel about your own service?

7 LB: Well, I guess I would have to say I wish I had of tried harder. I wish I'd given
8 more. But again, I look at it as I was a draftee that was forced into it. And so, I had an
9 attitude and I'm not saying that I never tried to fire fire-missions correctly or when I was
10 on guns to fire the guns properly. It's just that I had at the beginning a lackadaisical
11 attitude because I was drafted. Had I enlisted, I think it would have been a completely
12 different story. So I'm not totally proud. I'm proud of what I did, I'm not proud of the
13 fact that I could have done more. Is that comprehensive?

14 JS: Yes, sir. All right. Well, one of the things I wanted to ask you—that brought
15 up a question that I meant to ask you last time. Did you notice any tension between
16 draftees versus those who enlisted? Were you treated any differently because you were
17 drafted?

18 LB: That's an interesting question that I posed to a former commander of the
19 320th of A Battery. He said that he couldn't tell the difference between a draftee and a
20 regular soldier, RA (Regular Army).

21 JS: All right.

22 LB: Now, when I looked at it from my attitude, usually if they were going to
23 promote somebody, they would promote a person that was RA rather than U.S. I got that
24 impression and I believe that to be a truth. I just think they got promoted faster. Which,
25 again, they were in for another year than what we were.

26 JS: Right.

27 LB: My question is, who do you promote? Do you promote lifers and those type
28 of people or do you promote the people that are doing the best job?

29 JS: Right.

30 LB: That seemingly to me is the question. I take it the Army, in most cases,
31 promoted the guy that was going to stay in.

1 JS: Okay. Yes, sir. All right. Another question I want to ask you was,
2 your reaction to the fall of Saigon and the way the war ended?

3 LB: Well, I watched it in my home in Sioux City on TV and I became very
4 emotional. It was like all we did over there wasn't worth a darn. I realized they had to get
5 out of there. I mean, the war had gone on for years and years and years and it was so
6 disheartening to watch those helicopters fly out to those aircraft carriers and then push
7 them all aboard. It was very disheartening. A very emotional time in my life.

8 JS: How do you feel about U.S. policy towards Vietnam today and this
9 developing relationship that we have with Vietnam, with trade and tourism?

10 LB: Well, my personal opinion is we shouldn't. My opinion doesn't mean
11 anything. My personal opinion is that we shouldn't deal with those people until they get
12 rid of communism. That's my personal opinion. I don't think anybody, you know, that is
13 under the strings of communism or so-called socialism, we should do anything for. I
14 don't think we should send them any aid or anything. That's my personal opinion.

15 JS: Okay. All right. How about the side of it of veterans going back over there to
16 see the old battle fields? What do you think about that? And would you ever have any
17 interest in doing so yourself?

18 LB: I have mixed feelings about it. In a way, I don't think we should do it, but I
19 think it may help some of them reestablish themselves. I guess, would I go? I don't know,
20 that's a good question. I'm not saying I wouldn't go, I'm not saying I would go either.

21 JS: Okay.

22 LB: Boy, that's a tough question for me. There's so many other places I want to
23 visit before I got back there. (Chuckles)

24 JS: All right. Have you been to see the Vietnam Wall and if so, what did you
25 think of it?

26 LB: Yes. The first time I got drunk, I got drunk bad, and it was such an emotional
27 event for me. When I went the first time, the statue had not been built.

28 JS: Okay.

29 LB: I think it was the second anniversary of the wall, I think. It's a very moving
30 thing. I've been back a number of times and I've always tried to etch the guys from my
31 hometown that were killed, that their names were on the wall. It's very emotional for me.

1 It's a very sacred place. When they put the statue up, I thought that was even better. I
2 know Maya Lin, the lady who designed the wall was not too happy with it, but I think
3 she's got to look at it from our perspective. I think the place today is very hallowed
4 ground.

5 JS: Yes, sir. Is there anything else you'd like to say, anything else we should
6 cover that we haven't at this point?

7 LB: There's a couple of things that I'd like to talk to you about.

8 JS: Sure.

9 LB: On movements. When I was talking to you yesterday, I finally found my
10 notes after I talked to you of course. As far as our movements, we talked about when we
11 left Los Banos and went down and supplemented the Americal Division.

12 JS: Right. Yes, sir.

13 LB: I want to give you a list of the firebases that we were at. I couldn't think of
14 their names yesterday and I finally found them—after about a day of research, I finally
15 found them. When we were flown down to—I think I said Chu Lai and I think that's
16 inaccurate, it's near Chu Lai.

17 JS: Okay.

18 LB: Anyway, when we were taken out in the field, our first firebase was a place
19 called Professional.

20 JS: Okay.

21 LB: I believe that's where the Special Forces Base Camp was, if I remember
22 right.

23 JS: Okay.

24 LB: Then the next three bases, I think we built those, if I remember right. The
25 first one was a place called Firebase Hustler. The next base was Young, and the last place
26 was Boxer. And that's where I believe I contracted Malaria and those were all three of
27 their base in the north. We came in and we built the base up. There was nothing there
28 before us.

29 JS: Right. Yes, sir.

30 LB: Again, that was mid to late 1969.

31 JS: Okay. All right.

1 LB: Let's see, going back for a minute, just real quickly.

2 JS: Sure.

3 LB: I can't think of anything else off hand. Oh—no, I can't. Nothing else right
4 now. I'll probably think of something after. (Laughs)

5 JS: (Laughs) Well, if there's nothing else then, then I will go ahead and bring the
6 interview to a close.

7 (Interview audio ends)