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**The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Robin Bartlett
Conducted by Jason Stewart
Date: October 15, 2010
Transcribed by Cole Edwards**

**Interview with: Robin Bartlett
Session [1] of [3]
Date: October 15, 2010**

1 Jason Stewart: This is Jason Stewart with the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech
2 University, conducting an oral history interview with Mr. Robin Bartlett. Today is
3 October 15, 2010. I am in Lubbock, Texas, in the Special Collections Library on the
4 campus of Texas Tech and Mr. Bartlett is joining me by phone from New Jersey. Is that
5 correct?

6 Robin Bartlett: That's right.

7 JS: Okay, all right. Why don't we begin with a little bit of biographical
8 information if we could, Robin? If you could tell me a little bit about when and where
9 you were born?

10 RB: Okay. I was born in Sacramento, California, in October, 1945. My father was
11 a career military officer and his father before him. They were both West Pointers. My
12 grandfather was a West Pointer. My father was a West Pointer. My brother was a West
13 Pointer. I was a military brat—born into a military family.

14 JS: Okay.

15 RB: Growing up we lived all over the United States and Europe moving pretty
16 much every two or three years to military bases. My father actually after World War II
17 transferred. The Air Force needed engineers. He was an engineer, civil engineer. The Air
18 Force needed engineers, and the Army was actually going to—he had been promoted to
19 the rank of major. And the Army was going to drop him back down to like captain. The

1 Air Force said, “Well, we really need engineers, so if you come fly with us, we’ll make
2 you a colonel.” That wasn’t a very hard decision to make, so he transferred from the
3 Army to the Air Force. We lived on a lot of Air Force bases. I went to thirteen different
4 elementary schools and six different high schools growing up until I finally decided I
5 wanted to go one place for college.

6 JS: Right, right.

7 RB: So, it was kind of a typical military family story. We answered the telephone
8 at home, “Col. Bartlett’s quarters. May I help you, sir?”

9 JS: Right, all right. Not to jump too far ahead here, but given your family’s
10 history, did you know that as a kid growing up that one day you would serve in the
11 military as well?

12 RB: First of all, I had an appointment to West Point, and I turned it down. I said,
13 “No. There’s been enough military in our family. This is not what I want to do.” I had
14 some kind of grandiose ideas about what I wanted to do as I entered college. But as I
15 entered college, you know, the Vietnam War started to escalate. With the background that
16 I had growing up, it was kind of expected that I would not only serve my obligation but
17 serve it as an officer. Those were sort of things that were expected as a result of my
18 upbringing. So, as I went through college it became pretty clear that the war was heating
19 up. People would be reclassified 1A during the summer. I just went on into the ROTC
20 (Reserve Officers’ Training Corps) program which protected me from the draft. It was
21 second nature to me. I had so much military growing up that I didn’t even have to study
22 to be successful in ROTC. I guess—I don’t know. Does that answer the question that you
23 were—?

24 JS: Yeah, it does.

25 RB: Okay.

26 JS: All right. You said growing up—I know you talked about moving around a
27 lot. You say spent some time overseas as a kid as well?

28 RB: We lived in Paris, France—just outside of Paris, France for four years. My
29 father worked for SHAPE (Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe) Headquarters.

30 JS: Okay.

1 RB: Again, he was an engineer and his expertise was concrete. He would go
2 around, fly around to the various different NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization)
3 airfields and inspect the runways that they were prepared properly for the jet-aircraft to
4 land. That was his area. One of his areas of responsibility was the NATO airfields
5 throughout Europe. The nice thing about that—I was a pretty young kid. I was in like
6 middle school. I was not in high school. It gave me a chance to travel pretty extensively
7 to all of the countries throughout Europe and England and Scotland. For a young boy
8 growing up it was a really wonderful developmental experience. That's one of the good
9 things I think about being a military brat even though you have to pull your roots up
10 every two or three years. You do get to see some parts of the country that, by the time I
11 got in to high school, my friends and colleagues in high school had just no experience
12 with whatsoever. It also helped to shape your personality and your worldliness and your
13 maturity.

14 JS: Right. Given your family's history in the military background, were you
15 paying much attention to what was going on in the world when you were growing up as a
16 kid with the Cold War and what was going on in Europe and also with US foreign policy
17 elsewhere as well?

18 RB: Well, maybe to some extent only because my father was very involved with
19 NATO and the SHAPE headquarters in France. I was perhaps a little more aware of what
20 the United States was doing, but for the most part I really didn't begin to pay much
21 attention to the American political situation until I got into college. That's when the
22 Vietnam War started to escalate and the division which you typically found on every
23 college campus began to—was created. The school I went to which was Claremont
24 McKenna College in Southern California was like all of the other major American
25 colleges and universities in the United States. It was a pretty clear division between the
26 hawks and the doves. My campus happened to have a pretty strong ROTC program, so
27 we had a lot of young men who were enrolled in ROTC. I think there was some concern,
28 but for the most part, the people who were involved tended to side on—to take a stance
29 on the side of the war itself and the support of the war. I don't think we had a tremendous
30 number of anti-war—well, and of course, at the period of time I'm talking about the real
31 strong anti-war movement and draft-card burning and big political rallies had not—they

1 were just beginning. They were just getting started. They were just getting started as a
2 part of that anti-war movement.

3 JS: All right.

4 RB: I guess there hadn't been that many loss of lives by that point in time. I'm
5 talking about '66, '65, and—well, '65, '66, '67.

6 JS: Okay. So, you graduated from high school—it would have been '64?

7 RB: Three, '63.

8 JS: '63, okay.

9 RB: My father retired. His last duty station was at the Presidio of San Francisco
10 and then he went to work for the Boeing Company. Again, his expertise was project
11 management and engineering project management. So, he initially went to work in Great
12 Falls, Montana, necessitating another move. I went to Great Falls High School for a
13 while. First, I went to San Rafael High School in Marin County. That's when he still was
14 in the service and that was his last duty assignment was at the Presidio of San Francisco.
15 Then, we moved to Great Falls, Montana, where he was a project manager on a
16 Minuteman missile silo. What he really wanted to do was get into the lunar mission that
17 Boeing had responsibility for. So, after a while, a position opened up in Seattle working
18 on the Lunar Lander which Boeing had the contract for. This was the LEM (Lunar
19 Excursion Module) that was used by the astronauts to gather moonrocks and to make
20 those first excursions and landings on the moon. He was a design engineer. My father
21 was the person who designed the boom that the astronauts used to haul the rocks up into
22 the LEM.

23 JS: Oh, wow.

24 RB: He also designed a wheel-assembly on the rover which was the vehicle that
25 the astronauts used to drive around the moon's surface. I have two artist's renderings of
26 my father's designs which are really prized possessions. I mean this guy looked at the
27 engineering drawings and then visualized what it might look like before it was even
28 actually constructed. They were struggling with a lack of knowledge about the surface of
29 the moon. They still had to go ahead and do design work. So, my father designed three
30 different landing pods for the legs on the LEM—different designs based upon the depth
31 of the dirt or the dust that they would encounter. Then, they finally sent up probes and

1 they were able to determine that it wasn't deep, thick, dusty soil—that it was harder like
2 an inch or two of dirt on top and then they had fairly hard soil. They used the appropriate
3 design for the legs of the LEM. That's about all I know. I do have these renderings which
4 are kind of family heirlooms now.

5 JS: Oh, sure. How about your mother? What did she do for a living?

6 RB: My mother was a housewife. She was an officer's wife, and her job was to
7 entertain and have teas—a very typical Army wife's role and responsibility to meet with
8 and entertain the other officer's wives in the units that my father belonged to. Growing
9 up, she had teaching credential—went to UC Berkeley which is where she met my father.
10 After they got married, she never really worked after that other than to support his career
11 and to raise my brother and myself—traveled extensively. Before I was born, they served
12 in Bolivia and Nicaragua. My brother growing up spent a lot of time in Nicaragua and
13 Bolivia. My father was actually in a combat engineer battalion at the outset of World War
14 II and was scheduled to go to North Africa and kind of a twist of fate. They needed an
15 officer who spoke fluent Spanish and was a West Point graduate to help the Nicaraguan
16 Army and specifically the Nicaraguan Military Academy. My father happened to fit those
17 criteria. So, shortly before he was due to be shipped out to North Africa, they just
18 plucked him out and said, "You're going to Nicaragua." He ended up being the Second
19 Commandant of the Nicaraguan Military Academy. That's where he spent most of World
20 War II was in Nicaragua at the Nicaraguan Military Academy. They also did a lot of
21 chasing down of Nazi agents and that sort of thing. I don't know too much about what
22 went on at that point in time, but that was the story. Actually, there is a stamp, a
23 Nicaraguan stamp, with the first six commandants of the Nicaraguan Military Academy.
24 My father is on that stamp.

25 JS: Wow.

26 RB: As you can see there is a lot of military in my family and I haven't even
27 touched on my grandfather who was in the Cavalry. By Cavalry, I mean the kind where
28 you wore boots and had a saddle and rode on horses.

29 JS: Right. Would you mind talking about him for a moment—the little bit about
30 what you know about what he did?

31 RB: My grandfather?

1 JS: Yeah.

2 RB: I really don't know too much about him. I can remember as a boy visiting his
3 house in Berkeley, California. My whole family really comes from California, and I am
4 in fact a fourth generation Californian on my mother's side. My father's family came
5 from Texas. I really don't know too much about my grandfather other than he had been in
6 World War I. I could remember with my cousin playing with all the toys he had. He had
7 helmets and he had an old gas mask, World War I gas-mask. We would play Army in the
8 backyard and do stuff like that. Other than the fact that I know he had been in the Cavalry
9 and some very old photos that I've seen, I really don't know too much more about what
10 his military career was like other than—I know my father, just like myself, moved every
11 two or three years—spent a long time in the Philippines which is where my father learned
12 to speak fluent Spanish. Growing up, he lived in the Philippines for an extensive tour of
13 duty. My father also had a brother who did not pursue a military course of life at all—my
14 uncle. My father was the oldest son just as my brother was the oldest son. We always
15 referred to it as the service—not the Army or the Military—we always referred to it in
16 our family as the service that we were in service. That had special meaning to my family,
17 going back three generations. There was a lot of pride and patriotism. Patriotism was a
18 very significant aspect of my boyhood and had very significant meaning in our family—
19 pride in our country and pride in the fact that we served our country with the same level
20 of commitment and dedication that you might find say with a priest. It was really a very
21 significant thing to us and a great deal of pride in being able to serve our country and
22 belief that the work that my family was doing, my parents were doing, was in fact
23 protecting the country and performing a very valuable and important service. I think my
24 own personal feelings about that subject have changed especially after Vietnam. I still
25 can recollect the importance of those words, "Being in service to your country," as being
26 significant in my life growing up and meaningful.

27 JS: Well, I know I asked you when growing up if you thought you would
28 probably have a military career one day. Was it something that was somewhat expected
29 in your family or—?

30 RB: Well, certainly it was expected that I would serve my obligation, and it was
31 expected that I would serve it as an officer. Those were sort of like forgone conclusions.

1 The way I guess it all came about was that when I—the draft had been activated as I went
2 into college. I signed up for ROTC and I can remember the summer of my freshman year.
3 I was reclassified 1A. I contacted the draft board and said, “I’m in ROTC and that
4 automatically gives me a deferment. I should not be reclassified 1A.” They modified that
5 classification. It wasn’t until pretty much my senior year in college when I said, “Oh, I’m
6 going to be graduating from college in June. I need to figure out what I am going to do.
7 At that point in time, I was a distinguished military graduate having done so well in the
8 ROTC program. My major in college was comparative literature which combined the
9 study of French and literature. Of course, the French came from my experience in having
10 lived in France. I became quite fluent in French and then I studied it all through high
11 school. I took four years of French in high school. I took four years of French in college.
12 Half of my major was the French language which was kind of second nature to me and
13 then I loved literature. My college, their areas of specialty were political science and
14 accounting. I can remember the first two years were all devoted to required courses. You
15 really didn’t get into your major subjects when I went to college until your junior year. I
16 was going to be an economics major. I can remember signing up for four economics
17 courses and one literature course. I bought all the books, and I read the first chapter in
18 each book, and I went to the first class in each course. I went to my advisor and said, “I’ll
19 never make it. I don’t like it. I hate the material. It’s not interesting to me. I’m going to
20 fail.” He said, “Well, look at your grades. In French and in literature you’ve gotten A’s
21 and B’s. In your basic courses in economics, you’ve gotten C’s. You need to be a
22 literature major.” I said, “It’s not practical. My father will say, “You’re not following a
23 practical career.”” My advisor said, “It is practical. Graduating from college is a very
24 practical thing.” I can remember having that conversation with my father and saying, “I
25 know that a literature degree doesn’t prepare me for any kind of a practical career, but it’s
26 practical in that I’ll be able to graduate and have good grades. At this point in time, that’s
27 more important than struggling through with subject matter that I just have no interest
28 in.” So, I switched my major over. Going back to my story, here I am a senior in college
29 and not really sure what I am going to do with myself. I came from not a terribly affluent
30 family, but certainly upper-middle class. My father earned a good living with the Boeing
31 Company. He had retired from the service by that point in time. I went to a private

1 college. I sort of sat down with myself as this brilliant twenty-one-year-old and said,
2 “You know what? I have never really done anything in my life that’s been terribly
3 challenging.” I mean I worked during the summers typically in Boy Scout camp because
4 I enjoyed the Boy Scouts and it was a great way to spend the summers. I didn’t have to
5 work. It was a great way to kind of combine my love and my joy of being in the Boy
6 Scouts and being in the woods and outdoors with something to keep me busy and earn a
7 few bucks during the summer. I said, “I’ve never really done anything that’s been very
8 challenging.” With the wisdom of a twenty-one-year-old, I said to myself, “I’m going to
9 choose the most challenging thing that I can think of to do.” So, at the point in time when
10 it became time to choose your branch, and because I was a distinguished military
11 graduate in ROTC program, I could choose any branch. I could go into any branch. I had
12 my first choice of any branch. I volunteered and chose as a first choice to go in to the
13 infantry and Airborne and Ranger and Special Forces. I got everything I volunteered for.
14 As this brilliant twenty-one-year-old, I made this terrific decision to choose the most
15 challenging course of action for my life that I could think of. I knew exactly what that
16 meant in terms of what would happen to me. I got it. I got assigned to the 82nd Airborne
17 Division. Upon graduation—I actually graduated from college and was commissioned as
18 a second lieutenant on the same day. Two days later, I put everything I owned in my car
19 and drove across the United States and reported in to the 82nd Airborne Division as a
20 brand-new second lieutenant. I got assigned to my unit and I spent about three months at
21 Ft. Bragg, North Carolina with the 82nd Airborne Division before there was a slot open
22 for me to go through training. Then, I was transferred to Ft. Benning, Georgia. First, I
23 went through Airborne school then I went through basic officer’s training. And then I
24 went through Ranger school and then I came back to Ft. Bragg, and I went through a
25 Special Forces training. So, I spent pretty much a year going through all of the best
26 training that the military had to offer at that point in time. That was my progression. I
27 went from being a college student and immediately into the military.

28 JS: Okay. During the three months there where you were with 82nd Airborne
29 before training, what types of things were you doing there?

30 RB: I was what they called a “leg”. In other words, everyone at the 82nd Airborne
31 Division at that point in time was Airborne qualified. I was not. I was referred to as a

1 “leg”. Plus, I was a brand-new second lieutenant with ROTC training and green as could
2 be. I got assigned to a company, an infantry company. They knew I was going to be
3 going to training at Ft. Benning, so I got assigned lot of report of survey types of duties.
4 Are you familiar with what a report of survey is?

5 JS: Vaguely, but would you mind—?

6 RB: That’s kind of like where’s there’s been a loss of equipment or loss of
7 material. It often happens when a soldier goes AWOL (Absent Without Leave) or goes
8 on vacation and loses his equipment or something happens or there’s a fire or there’s a
9 loss of equipment. The military requires that an officer conduct a report of survey to
10 determine what happened and if someone was at fault, they charge that soldier with the
11 loss of the equipment. I did a couple of these reports of survey as a brand-new second
12 lieutenant. I can remember taking this job very, very seriously. There was one soldier
13 who—I think he had gone on vacation, and all of his equipment had been stolen or lost or
14 whatever. I went and interviewed the troops who were his friends. I had to take sworn
15 statements and then I typed-up their statements. I tried to justify that this soldier was not
16 at fault because his locker had been locked. Somebody broke into the locker and his
17 equipment had been stolen and blah-blah-blah. I ended up writing like a twenty-page
18 report and attaching all of these certified statements that I took from other soldiers in his
19 unit and turning this document in. You can see as a result of my college training, being a
20 literature major, I did a lot of writing. Having the S-4, who was the officer responsible for
21 equipment within a battalion, call me and have me come to his office. He put this twenty-
22 page document that I had spent weeks on—he threw it in the trash-can. He said, “Just
23 write the soldier up and charge him for the equipment. What makes you think you’re
24 conducting a legal investigation?” Of course, what I had done is I got out the regulations
25 for conducting a report of survey and I took the work very seriously. It was like law and
26 order. I was a detective. I learned a lot, but the S-4 said, “Just write this soldier up and
27 charge him for the loss of the equipment and leave it at that.” It was good learning
28 experience. It was a good learning experience. Then, I got my orders sending me to Ft.
29 Benning, Georgia. Everything I owned fit in my car. So, then I drove from North
30 Carolina to Ft. Benning, Georgia, and started my training.

31 JS: Okay. This initial training here—what was this training.

1 RB: At Ft. Benning?

2 JS: Yeah.

3 RB: Well, the first training I went through was Airborne training. I went to jump
4 school before I even went through basic officer's training. That was four weeks long. All
5 the officers lived in BOQs (Bachelor Officer Quarters). We went through the exact same
6 training as the enlisted soldiers did. It was during the summer months, so it was hotter
7 than blue blazes. The uniform was combat boots, fatigue pants—combat boots shined so
8 that you could shave in them—I mean spit-shined—combat boots, fatigue pants, white t-
9 shirt, and that's it. They got you up at about six o'clock in the morning. You scarfed
10 down some food and you were in formation ready to run at seven. They ran your legs
11 off—tremendous physical training both in terms of running and pull-ups. Those were the
12 key decision factors. If you couldn't run five miles and if you couldn't do twenty-five
13 pull-ups, they bounced you out. I can remember being in pretty good shape. It still was a
14 struggle. Plus, I'm short. I'm only five-foot-seven, five-foot-seven and a half. I had to
15 work a little extra hard in the runs to keep up. I found it was much easier for me to be the
16 cadence caller because the cadence caller didn't have to run in formation. The cadence
17 caller could run outside the unit. So, I would volunteer to be the cadence caller and do the
18 runs. That's really what we did for every morning—a lot of PT, a lot of physical training
19 and inspections to join this very proud group of men with an incredible history before
20 us—for 82nd, 101st, 173rd—all of the various different paratrooper units. They expected a
21 certain level of physical proficiency. A lot of the physical proficiency was accomplished
22 so as when you reach the point of needing to face the expertise of being able to jump out
23 of a plane and to land properly, that kind of drove the fear out of you. You didn't have
24 time to be afraid. They didn't want you to be afraid. They wanted you to be kind of
25 programmed. A lot of the training was very focused on being programmed to jump, be in
26 the proper body position, control your parachute on the way down, handle it safely, and
27 most important, land properly. There were a lot of people who couldn't learn to land
28 properly because it did require a little bit of expertise in terms of whether you were
29 landing going forward or landing going backward and how you would hit and absorb the
30 shock. You needed to learn to do that properly. That required you to have proper landing
31 position but also be able to absorb the shock by rolling, touching down with your toes,

1 and then your calf and thigh and hit and then rolling your body over so that your body
2 absorbed the shock. It wasn't just a matter of coming straight down on your feet. If you
3 did that, you'd break an ankle. You had to learn to do that, and they had some very
4 specific methods. Boy, they worked your butt off to learn to do it well and do it properly,
5 and then there were certain tests along the way. If you didn't pass the test to be able to
6 demonstrate that you could land properly, you were bounced out. We started with a large
7 group.—I guess a couple of hundred. By the time the fourth week came around, which
8 was when you made your practice jumps, we were probably maybe sixty percent. We lost
9 forty percent of the people either from injury, couldn't do the PT, couldn't do the
10 physical runs—and they started us with like maybe one or two miles and the worked up
11 to five. Even five was considered to be, compared with the past, the history—that was a
12 mild run. It was not unusual for paratrooper units to run eight miles and ten miles. But
13 that took too much time, and they needed to—the whole course was only four weeks.
14 They needed to get at the programming part of the training as well. Three weeks of
15 training and then one week of practice jumps. You made either four or five jumps and
16 then you were qualified.

17 JS: Okay.

18 RB: So, that's how I spent that first month in Georgia and had about a weekend
19 off after that. After jump school, obviously I did qualify, and I was successful and got my
20 wings pinned-on which was a very proud moment. Then, I had the weekend off and
21 started basic officer's training like the following Monday—something like that—in a
22 different section of Ft. Benning. That training lasted about—it was either six weeks or
23 eight weeks. It might have been eight weeks. I can't remember for sure. That was more—
24 it was probably about eighty percent classroom and twenty percent fieldwork—mostly a
25 refresher of everything you'd gone through in ROTC. I went through with the graduating
26 class from West Point because I was an infantry officer. So, they put the distinguished
27 military graduates who were in the infantry in with the West Pointers which was good,
28 and which was not so good because the West Pointers had a real clique. They had been
29 going to school together for the past four years and here I am coming in from a college
30 and a bunch of other ROTC guys. In many respects, it was us against them—just in terms
31 of—it wasn't that they were rude or anything. They definitely had their predetermined

1 friendships. These guys had worked together for four years, and they knew one another.
2 They knew strengths and weaknesses. So, there was a bit of a clique. That didn't come in
3 to play until Ranger school. That's when that clique really happened—because Ranger
4 school became extremely competitive. So, basic officer's training—here we got a lot of
5 physical demanding physical training in jump school. I felt like I was in pretty good
6 shape. We didn't get that much in basic officer's training. Everyone knew that Ranger
7 school was coming at the end of basic officer training and I can remember pretty much on
8 a daily basis going out and running every night when it was cooler—running one mile,
9 two miles, three miles just because we knew that Ranger school was going to be, and it
10 was in fact, the most demanding, the most challenging, both physically and mentally,
11 course that we would have to face. That is in fact true. I don't remember too many more
12 details about basic officer's training. It was pretty easy mostly classroom type of work.
13 There was some spit and polish, but nothing as extensive as what we had to do in jump
14 school. It was a little bit easier, I think, for an officer than an enlisted man because you
15 just basically paid somebody to shine your boots for you. I do have one funny story that I
16 will tell you. I can remember—I think it happened on the very first day in basic officer's
17 school. We went to the cafeteria for breakfast and everybody had a tray. You're going
18 down the line and I saw this oatmeal. I said, "Wow, oatmeal. Gee, I haven't had oatmeal
19 in ages. That's great." So, I grab a bowl, and I put the oatmeal in the bowl and I go to the
20 table and I put sugar, a little bit of sugar, on top of the oatmeal and then I poured milk on
21 top of it. All of the other officers who were sitting at the table with me there looking at
22 me and they're looking at what I'm doing. I take a spoonful and it's not oatmeal. It's
23 grits. I'm in the south. I'm in Georgia. I was going, "Oh, yuck. What is this oatmeal?"
24 They said, "That's not oatmeal, you Yankee. That's grits. We've never seen anybody put
25 milk on grits before. That was a first." That was my introduction to the South and to grits.
26 I never ate grits again in my life. That was my first day of officer training. Everybody had
27 a good laugh on me for that one. Here I am twenty-one years old and pretty much on my
28 own and went through the officer's training program. My roommate was also ROTC
29 officer from a different school. I remember him, but I don't remember too much about
30 him. I would basically say it was not terribly demanding. It was kind of a refresher of
31 everything I had done in ROTC. None of the physical aspects were very demanding. We

1 had a night compass course that you had to pass. I remember that being quite demanding.
2 I remember that the night navigation course started about eight o'clock at night and we
3 sat down and before we started the course and we had something to eat, and then we
4 looked at the various different azimuths that we had to follow. We realized that every—
5 it's a two-legged problem. In other words, they told you to go on a certain azimuth so
6 many feet—so, for a certain distance. Then, you made a right turn and then go on a new
7 azimuth, but every turn was a right angle. So, we said, "Hey, A-squared plus B-squared
8 equals C-squared. We can get through this course much easier just by computing the
9 hypotenuse of a right triangle." That's exactly what we did. Instead of taking two legs,
10 we shot a new azimuth, which was the hypotenuse—of course you had to work it all out
11 long-hand and then figure out what the square-root was. There was a little bit of
12 estimating. But we cut the course in half by not having to take two legs and by just
13 calculating what the distance was of the hypotenuse of the right triangle and figuring out
14 what that angle was. You went from point A to point B and you had to identify the sign
15 that was the end point. So, instead of taking until like four or five in the morning, we
16 were done at about two or three in the morning. We showed in at the finish point and
17 turned in our reports. We were the first group to finish. They were looking at our stuff
18 and they said, "How in the hell did you do this?" We told them. We were honest with the
19 whole thing. They said, "Nobody told us that we had to follow the rules exactly and we
20 calculated how to do this by determining the angle and the distance of a right triangle."
21 That took some more explanation because the people we were explaining it to didn't
22 understand the Pythagorean Theorem. Finally, somebody figured it out and nobody told
23 us we couldn't do that. Even though we kind of beat the system it was still acceptable,
24 and we got the right answers. Ultimately, that was what we needed to do. These were just
25 a few little things that kind of jump out of my mind. So, we graduated, you know? We
26 got our basic officer's training program under our belts. That was two courses down. I
27 think it was another like—you got a weekend off and then reported to Ranger school. In
28 Ranger school, you had no insignia. You were no longer an officer. You were in a
29 program. You and the enlisted men were together, were not separated. You had to take all
30 your insignia off your uniforms. You kept one uniform with your insignia for graduation
31 purposes. For all intents and purposes, I was referred to as Ranger Bartlett. That was my

1 title. That was my rank. I had no rank. Again, I went through the Ranger school with
2 other West Pointers. There was a platoon structure, but it was just for the sake of
3 organization. The real structure was you and your Ranger buddy. You were assigned a
4 Ranger buddy and that was the guy that you had to look for, cover his back, and vice
5 versa. Throughout the entire course, throughout the entire program, it was the two of you
6 together. If one failed, you both failed. The whole concept behind the program at that
7 point in time, and I think to some extent from what I have seen, it's still quite similar,
8 was the two of you going at it together which was fine. Then, you had a squad structure
9 and this other soldier and I—he was an ROTC graduate. We were the only ROTC guys in
10 our squad. All the rest of them were West Pointers. The West Pointers stuck together.
11 They really didn't care whether or not you made it or not. It was a very, very competitive
12 environment. It was the most physically demanding and mentally demanding thing I
13 have—well, other than going through Vietnam—I would say even more demanding
14 physically and mentally than Vietnam was for me. It was the hardest thing I had ever
15 done and to this day probably the hardest training. The toughest experience I have ever
16 had in my life was going through that course. Is this what you want to hear by the way?

17 JS: Absolutely.

18 RB: Am I heading along the right directions for you?

19 JS: Sure, absolutely.

20 RB: Okay. The basic concept behind Ranger school and again, I think it's still
21 pretty much the same today, was to break you down, to reduce the amount of food that
22 you had, to make you weak and hungry, to take away all your identity and your morale,
23 to make you just as physically and emotionally miserable as they possibly could, and then
24 when you reach that lowest ebb, that's when they would test you. That's when they
25 would put you to the test. I can say that at least for me, that's exactly what happened.
26 There were several points along the way where you had to pass confidence tests. If you
27 didn't pass those tests, you were out. Furthermore, at any point in time on any day, if you
28 wanted to—this was strictly voluntary. So, if you said, "You know what? I don't want to
29 be in this anymore," they would take you out in a moment's notice. There were a number
30 of times when people said, "Oh, screw it. I've had enough. I want out of this." Boom,
31 they were gone. They only wanted volunteers, people who were totally committed. The

1 first phase was in Ft. Benning, Georgia. That phase was physical training. Again, they got
2 you up at four o'clock in the morning. There wasn't the emphasis on—there was just no
3 way you could have shined boots in that sort of thing. Plus, you were wearing jungle
4 boots at this point in time. They got you up at four o'clock in the morning and they ran
5 us. They ran us at four o'clock in the morning with your rifle. So, you carried your rifle
6 with you everywhere you went with the exception of the mess hall. It got to the point to
7 where you actually had a leather lanyard which was around your neck and tied to your
8 rifle. You were forbidden to take that lanyard off if you were in the field. The only time
9 you could take the lanyard off was when you were sleeping in the barracks. If you were
10 sleeping in the field, you kept the lanyard around your neck or in the mess hall. They ran
11 us for about five miles every morning, rain or shine, cold or warm. It didn't matter. You
12 got up and at four, four-fifteen—I mean you had twenty minutes to get into formation.
13 So, you basically jumped in the shower, or you took a shower. Most people took a
14 shower the night before. You had enough time to shave, put your clothes on, and be in
15 formation. They were on your back. Whoever was the last one in line, oh—you just
16 wanted to make sure you were in-place. You didn't want to be the first and you didn't
17 want to be the last. You got to do push-ups. You got to be very, very proficient at doing
18 push-ups. I know that I could do fifty or sixty push-ups very easily. This was after jump
19 school and being able to do pull-ups and that sort of thing and really being in good
20 condition or thinking that I was in good condition. It's another thing to be running at four
21 o'clock in the morning in formation by the way—in formation. Carrying your rifle—that
22 was a challenge. It was a real challenge. After the run, you went through the obstacle
23 course every morning. The obstacle course had several water pits. You had to jump out,
24 grab a rope, swing to the other side, and if you slipped off, then you fell in the water. You
25 also had to do the low-crawl through underneath barbed-wire—well, it wasn't barbed-
26 wire, but underneath wire. That would get muddy especially if it was raining. You had to
27 go up and over about a sixty-foot wooden—almost like a ladder, but it was made out of
28 wooden spars. The challenge for me is, again, I'm short. I would have to go up holding
29 on to the side because I would stand up on the rung. I could reach the next rung, but it
30 was very difficult to get your leg up and over without being able to use the vertical spar.
31 You know what I'm kind of talking about?

1 JS: I think so, yeah.

2 RB: You weren't supposed to do that. You weren't supposed to use the vertical
3 post for help, but it was the only way, because I was short, that I could get up on to the
4 next rung and get up and over. And every aspect of the obstacle course was a challenge to
5 you either physically or mentally and a lot of challenges to your fear factor. You basically
6 just had to take fear and put it someplace else because if you allowed any thoughts to
7 enter your mind in relationship to fear, you were out. You just could not allow yourself to
8 have any fear whatsoever. For the first—Ranger school, when I went through, was also
9 an accelerated program. It was three weeks in Georgia, three weeks in the mountains, and
10 three weeks in Florida. It was a nine-week course. [Normally Ranger School was a
11 twelve-week program but was shortened due to the need for trained officers to go to
12 Vietnam.] At the end of each three-week period there was a test that you had to pass, a
13 confidence test, as well as a force-march. At the end of the first three weeks in Georgia, it
14 was a twenty-mile force march throughout the night and ending at six o'clock in the
15 morning. Again, that was full-pack, rifle, and it was a really fast force-march. Again,
16 because I was short, what I would have to do is walk out on the side. I couldn't walk in
17 formation because I just couldn't keep up. What I would do is I would walk just as fast as
18 I possibly could and I would drop back, drop back, drop back, and drop back. When I got
19 to the end of the formation, then I would run up to the front of the formation and repeat
20 the process. That's the way I made the force-march. I could keep-up, but my strides just
21 were not long enough to keep-up with the majority of the other soldiers. When you
22 reached the end of the force-march, there was—the first confidence test you had to pass
23 was the—well, I can't remember if it was the rope-drop or the suspension-traverse. It was
24 one of the two. I think it was the rope-drop. For the rope-drop confidence test you had to
25 climb a forty-foot telephone pole and transfer to a horizontal beam that was about six
26 inches wide over water. You walk across this six-inch beam. In the center of the beam,
27 there were three steps that you had to go over. So, you were balanced on this beam. If
28 you fell, you would fall into the water. The beam was about forty or fifty feet long and
29 then you reached a rope, a diagonal-rope. You'd grab on to the diagonal-rope and you'd
30 pull yourself along the diagonal rope to a horizontal-rope. The diagonal rope was about
31 twenty feet and then you went to the horizontal rope, and the horizontal rope was about

1 another thirty feet. You would pull yourself along with your feet like monkey-style with
2 your feet up on the rope. Of course, they were yelling at you the whole time and to go
3 faster or whatever it was. Then, you reached a big giant Ranger tab and what you had to
4 do was to let go with your feet, hang on with both hands, touch the Ranger tab, hold one
5 with one hand, salute the officer at the dock, and say, “Sir, Ranger Bartlett requests
6 permission to negotiate the rope-drop confidence test.” You had to hold the salute and
7 hold on to the rope with one hand until the officer on the dock returned the salute and
8 then he would tell you to drop. When you dropped, you had to yell, “Ranger”. By this
9 point in time, you’re about fifty feet in the air. You had to yell “Ranger” the whole way
10 down. Of course, that meant you entered the water with no air in your lungs. Of course,
11 you went down about ten or fifteen feet into the water. You had to come up and swim to
12 the dock and then get out and that was the test.

13 JS: Okay.

14 RB: Which I passed. I passed the force-march and I passed the first confidence
15 test. Then, there was a buddy rating. The buddy rating was a squad—you rate the other
16 members of your squad as to how you felt they performed. I did not pass the buddy rating
17 because of the—I guess there were about ten people in my squad. Two of us were ROTC
18 and the rest were West Pointers. The West Pointers hung together, and they rated the
19 ROTC guys poorly. So, both my Ranger buddy and I both got poor ratings. That didn’t
20 bounce you out of the school, but if you got another bad buddy rating, they would. So, we
21 both went to the next phase and both of us got past everything, all of the tests and
22 everything, but we both got poor buddy ratings. We went on to the next phase which was
23 in the mountainous Dahlonega, Georgia. Here you learned to do repelling and tie knots
24 and work with ropes and navigate through the woods and a tremendous amount of night
25 navigation. It was at this point in time that they would assign—they would begin to
26 assign patrols. This was when they started to test your leadership skills. If you went out
27 on a patrol then they would put one Ranger in charge of planning, one Ranger in charge
28 of execution, one Ranger in charge of the actual combat, and then you had to walk from
29 the combat back to whatever your rallying point was. Sometimes you would have two
30 phases of the mission. You would plan it and move the unit from where you were to the
31 point of execution and then somebody else would take over and do the execution. There

1 was no uniformity to it. I can remember that the toughest—of course, you had a
2 machinegun that you had to carry, and you had a radio. I hated the machinegun because
3 the damn machinegun—I just could not manage it. It would always catch me right in the
4 thighs. So, I cut a deal with my Ranger buddy that any time he got the radio, I would take
5 it. I didn't mind the radio. The radio was on my back, and I could deal with that. Anytime
6 he got the radio, I'd carry it. Anytime I got the machinegun, he'd carry it. That was a big
7 help because I just could not deal with that damn machinegun. Of course, it rotated
8 throughout the squad. So, things were going okay, not great, but things were going okay.
9 I came down with pneumonia, bronchial pneumonia. I could tell that this adverse buddy
10 reaction was continuing because the West Pointers, you know, they had been through all
11 this stuff especially the planning and the execution and the mission. All that stuff was
12 really second nature to them. The ROTC guys hadn't had that much actual field-work the
13 way the West Pointers had. So, I could tell that things were not going really well for my
14 Ranger buddy and for me. Again, we were sort of isolated from the West Pointers. When
15 I came down with pneumonia, bronchial pneumonia, I went to the medics and they said,
16 "You are really sick." The problem was that I kept coughing. So, when we'd be on these
17 night missions, you'd be doing something, and I'd be hacking my head off. I couldn't
18 participate in the mission because they had to be soundless types of missions. Here I
19 couldn't get through it without coughing. I couldn't participate and that was an additional
20 black mark against me. They said, "Would you like to be recycled?" By this point in
21 time, I was like in the second week, well into the second week, of the three-week
22 mountain phase. I said, "Yes." So, they took me out which simply meant that I would join
23 the next class coming through. I got some medicine, and I had about a week and a half
24 where I basically didn't have to do anything. I ended up going to visit a couple of friends.
25 I didn't have to report in or anything until the next class began. I got rid of my cold. I
26 went to visit some friends, had some food, got everything ready for the next phase, and
27 came back about ten days later and joined the next class. The next class coming through
28 was also a West Point class, but these were the artillery guys. The artillery guys had a
29 much different attitude than the infantry guys in West Point. Because I had gone through
30 a week and a half of mountain training already, I was now the expert. Everybody was
31 coming to me saying, "What can we expect? What's it going to be like?" Even though

1 we'd had certain aspects to the program, they kept changing it on us. There was no
2 uniformity. Although there were certain aspects to the program that you knew. What I
3 learned is when to volunteer and when not to volunteer. I was very good with ropes. I
4 was very good with knots. I knew how to repel. I was very good at that, so I knew how to
5 handle it. I got a new Ranger buddy. My Ranger buddy was an Israeli officer who spoke
6 English but not real well. He needed a lot of help. Let me tell you, but I knew that we had
7 to get through it together. I helped him and I don't think he helped me all that much, but I
8 kept him on the straight and narrow. The second time through was much, much better—
9 much easier. We didn't have the same attitude from the infantry West Pointers and the
10 ones that I was dealing with were actually pretty good guys. I enjoyed being with them
11 and they respected me because I had a little bit of expertise and knowledge. What
12 happened is again you had to be tested. You had to have one test [patrol] where you
13 planned the mission. You had to have one test [patrol] where you moved the unit from
14 the departure point to the point of execution. You had to have one test [patrol] where you
15 actually executed the attack and then you had to have one test [patrol] where they moved
16 you from the attack back to your rallying point. I hadn't had any mission—none, not one.
17 I wasn't going to volunteer, let me tell you. I just said, "Well, that's not my
18 responsibility. That's their responsibility to figure this out." I do remember one other
19 significant thing that happened during this phase, which was a night-repel. They had
20 taught us how to repel. They took us up to the top of a mountain in the pitch-black
21 darkness. That was the other thing. You had these two little fluorescent strips on the back
22 of your hats and man, you needed to make sure you kept your eyes on that hat in front of
23 you because otherwise you couldn't see butkus. You always walked with your hand in
24 front of your face in case there was a branch or something that came out so that you
25 wouldn't catch it right in the face. If you forgot to do that and you caught a branch in the
26 face, it was bad. So, here we were climbing up to the top of this mountain and then they
27 had staff up there, Ranger staff up there, to make sure you're hooked into your repelling
28 equipment properly. They didn't want to have that happen to you. Then, you literally
29 walked off the top of this mountain and there was a free repel of about forty or fifty feet
30 where you weren't even touching the side of the mountain until you got down forty or
31 fifty feet. It was really pretty scary. You didn't know what was happening. You couldn't

1 see anything. Okay, you know how to repel, and you figured it out and you got over the
2 cliff. You went down and then finally you were able to touch the side of the cliff, and you
3 just kept repelling until you got down. You know, there was also mountain climbing
4 which was also very challenging. They wanted you to free-climb. You were still tied-in,
5 but it was challenging. It was always wet and cold. By now, by the way, it's November.
6 So, it's pretty chilly and [there was] frost on the ground. You were constantly cold and
7 having to build fires just to stay warm. On this night repel when we got back, got into our
8 little tents—I think we had tents. Yeah, we had tents. We were sound asleep. It's like two
9 o'clock in the morning. Everybody is just gone, right? They're exhausted. They woke us
10 all up and they made us come out and stand in formation because two of the Rangers had
11 ducked out of the night repel. They had taken your number. You had a number, and they
12 had compared the numbers against the list of—or at least the number of people who went
13 through the training versus the number of people who needed to go through, and two
14 people didn't take the training. They made us stand there from like two o'clock until two-
15 thirty. We were in our underwear freezing our butts off until these two soldiers finally
16 admitted that they had not gone through it. And they were gone. They had to get their
17 gear. They put them on a truck, and they were gone—boom, out. The other thing that
18 happened to me was that I was on a patrol and you know, you were in full-combat gear.
19 We were carrying M-14s and big ammo-pouches on a web belt and your full pack. You
20 didn't carry a sleeping bag. You carried a poncho. We had space-blankets. You wrapped
21 up in a space-blanket. You wanted to go as light as possible. You did not carry a sleeping
22 bag. You carried a poncho and a space-blanket. You had to wrap-up in that and try and
23 stay warm which was fine as long as you didn't sweat out in your clothes. If you sweated-
24 out in your clothes, which of course you did because you were constantly moving and
25 walking and sweating, when you got to some place, you had to take off your t-shirt or
26 you had to take off whatever was next to your skin otherwise you got cold—the constant
27 challenge of trying to find something that was dry to put next to your skin so that you
28 would be warm enough that you could sleep. I remember putting plastic bags around my
29 feet to try and keep my feet warm. So, we were on a patrol. It's like—I don't know—ten,
30 eleven o'clock at night—pitch-black—you're never supposed to walk along a road. So,
31 we were walking along the road which was not my—I just followed—whoever the patrol

1 leader was telling us to do, I followed their instructions. You could cross a road. That
2 would be okay. You never walked along a road. That was a cardinal rule. So, we're
3 walking along this road because there's just literally no place else to walk and we hear a
4 jeep coming. Everybody says, "Scatter." I hit the edge of the road, and I went over and
5 there was nothing underneath me. I mean it was like a drop-off of three or four feet. I
6 came down on my stomach while I had the radio on my back. I came down and the radio
7 came up over my head and I landed on my ammo pouch on my left thigh. I blacked out. I
8 saw stars. I slid down the bottom of the hill. I don't know what happened to me. I hit so
9 hard on this ammo-pouch. I honestly thought I had broken my pelvis. They medevac'd
10 (Medical Evacuation) me which meant I got to sit in a jeep, and they drove me—because
11 we were back in the boonies way in the woods of Dahlonaga, Georgia. Now, it's like two
12 o'clock in the morning and they wake up some civilian doctor who's on call. They do an
13 X-ray and this doctor—the minute he put his hands on me, I went bonkers. I was in such
14 pain. As I said, when I landed, I landed on my gut, on my stomach, and the ammo-pouch
15 with these big M-14 magazines in the ammo-pouch just caught me right on the left side
16 of my groin. Nothing was broken, but tremendous pain. I was in tremendous pain. They
17 brought me back to the aid station. I spelt overnight and then the next morning I was able
18 to take a shower, but now I'm limping. I barely can walk. They present with me the
19 alternative of either going back out to the field and rejoining my unit or being recycled
20 again. I said, "I am not going to be recycled." I said, "But you got to give me something
21 for the pain." They gave me some Darvon pills which is like heavy-duty aspirin. I came
22 back out to the unit. They said, "Boy, we didn't think we'd see you." Now, the problem
23 was that I'm limping. We're going through hill-and-dale through the forests. We're
24 walking. I literally had to get a stick and just gut it out. It was fine as long as I was
25 walking because then I was moving, and my left leg and my left hip would be loosened
26 up a little bit. The minute we'd stop I would get stiff. At nighttime, we'd build a fire. It
27 was cold. I mean it's November now. It was cold outside, so everybody slept around the
28 fire. Of course, that meant your front-side was warm and your back side was freezing.
29 You were constantly shifting front-to-back, front-to-back to try and stay warm. I can just
30 remember that for like three or four days there until finally the pain subsided, I was
31 miserable. That was one of the low points that I had, but again, I didn't get a leadership

1 position. I wasn't called on to plan a mission or execute a mission. I just was a grunt
2 walking through the woods. We came to the end of that phase and there was another
3 confidence test. This was the suspension-traverse confidence test which everyone had to
4 pass. This actually eliminated quite a few people because it was pretty scary. For the
5 suspension-traverse confidence test, you had to climb an eighty-foot telephone pole, and
6 you were not hooked in. It was interesting because I saw a program on TV not too long
7 ago about Ranger school and they showed all of the soldiers wearing like life vests. We
8 didn't have life vests. I think they must have lost some people or had poor swimmers. I
9 don't know. Now, they require them to wear life vests. We didn't wear life vests. We just
10 had our clothes on. You get up to the top of this eighty-foot telephone pole and at the top
11 there's a platform and there are two Ranger staff tied-in. There's a little railing. They're
12 tied-in. They have ropes tied to their waist. You on the other hand, I, am just standing
13 there. They have a snatch block which they hook on to the wire because that was required
14 that they hooked the block to [the wire]. This is—what do they call it—a zip-line, right?
15 You know what a zip-line is?

16 JS: Yeah, I believe so, yeah.

17 RB: So, they hooked that in, and you stand on the edge of this platform with your
18 toes over the edge straight down eighty feet. There is this steel cable overhead that leads
19 about 300 yards to the dock. It's tied into the dock. So, you're going over water. There is
20 an officer at the dock with a bullhorn. You hold on to the block with one hand. You
21 salute the officer on the dock. You scream at the top of your lungs, "Sir,"—you can tell it
22 never has left me, right? "Sir, Ranger Bartlett requests permission to negotiate the
23 suspension-traverse confidence test." He yells through the bullhorn to do a pull-up and
24 clear the platform. You are not tied into this block, the only thing connected is your hands
25 on the handlebars. So, you do a pull-up, and this thing accelerates you to somewhere
26 between sixty—a little around sixty miles an hour. You have to go into the pike position.
27 So, you bring your feet up in front of you so that you're in the pike position. Of course,
28 you have to scream, "Ranger," at the top of your lungs the whole way. You watch the
29 officer at the dock. He's got a flag and when he drops the flag, you let go. Trust me, you
30 let go because otherwise you smash into the dock. Of course, what happens is when you
31 let go, you hydroplane. Your butt hits the water, and you go "splash, splash, splash,

1 splash, splash” and then you sink. You are wearing fatigues, boots, and now you have to
2 swim about—oh, I don’t know. It’s not that far—maybe thirty, forty feet to the dock and
3 then get out. So, that was the second confidence test and then I passed that. I passed the
4 Ranger buddy [rating] test. Then, they transported us down to Florida. Florida was
5 actually the most grueling—the most grueling exercise. The biggest challenge with
6 Florida was that unless you made your objective, you didn’t get fed. Your food was at the
7 next objective. So, if there was an error in planning or negotiating or in your compass
8 work and you didn’t get to your objective, you didn’t get any food. They only fed you
9 once a day. Now, the team—the group of course—you had a very brief encounter with
10 the group just was coming out and they’d say—they’d give you some clues. “Be aware of
11 this. Watch out for that. This is how they did this. This is how. We had eight patrols. We
12 had five patrols. We had six patrols.” Of course, they changed it every time, so any of
13 this intelligence that you got from the previous class was just worthless. What happened
14 to us in the Florida phase was that they took us out. Usually what would happen is they’d
15 take you out for like three or four days and then you’d bring it in, and you could put clean
16 clothes on, take a shower, and then you’d go out again. For the phase that I was in, we
17 were out in the field for three weeks straight. They did not bring us in.

18 JS: Oh, wow.

19 RB: Things progressed, and I still do not have a mission. I do not have—no one
20 has planned a mission—they haven’t asked me to be in a leadership position. So, we’re
21 walking through the swamps one day and I hear this, “Ranger Bartlett to the front,
22 Ranger Bartlett to the front.” I go. I said, “Uh-oh, here it comes.” So, I go up to the front
23 and here’s the Ranger cadre. This guy says to me, “Have you ever heard of Operation
24 Red Dog?” I said, “No, sir, I haven’t, but I know what a Red Dog is.” He goes, “What?
25 What is a Red Dog?” I said, “Well, that’s when you rush the passer. That’s when you
26 rush the passer in football.” He said, “Ah, that’s not what this is. You haven’t had any
27 leadership positions, so you are going to plan and execute the entire mission from soup to
28 nuts.”

29 JS: Okay.

30 RB: It just so happened that I was in pretty good shape that day. I was feeling
31 pretty good, and I had had food. I said, “Okay, this is my chance to shine. I’m very good

1 at planning.” I planned a great mission. I planned an L-ambush. Of course, at the time, I
2 didn’t know I was going to do the whole thing. I thought I would only have to do the
3 planning phase. I did a great job of planning, and I set up this L-shaped ambush and we
4 had flares. I was using the flares, the pyrotechnics, and I had my machineguns on one leg
5 of the L and the rest of the troops on the other leg of the L. It’s textbook L-shaped
6 ambush.

7 JS: Right, right.

8 RB: So, I planned it. I gave the troops all their instructions. Everybody
9 understood. We answered questions. We were to leave at like eight o’clock at night.
10 Everything happened at night by the way. And I expected to be relieved and have
11 somebody come. This was the way they usually did it. They had to point somebody else
12 to do the execution. I went to the officer, and I said, “Well, aren’t you going to appoint
13 somebody else?” They said, “Nope. You’re going to move us from the release-point to
14 the ambush site. I said, “Okay.” So, we did that and that was relatively easy and then you
15 move your troops into the ambush site. The only thing I didn’t do real well was make
16 good use of my platoon sergeant, which was his job to help set up the ambush and to help
17 move the troops into position. We got all set up and everybody in position. We had these
18 clusters, star-clusters. I had never used one before. They had shown us, but I had never
19 used one before. The idea was—it was a tube. Have you ever seen one or you know what
20 they look like?

21 JS: Again, I’m vaguely familiar with them.

22 RB: It’s an aluminum tube. You pull the top off. You stick it on the bottom. You
23 hold it straight up overhead, you whack it on the bottom, and it shoots a star-cluster about
24 200 feet up in the air. We had three of those things. So, it came time because we could—
25 the enemy were starting to come into the zone. You could see them. We were all in
26 position. The signal to launch the ambush was the star-cluster. I couldn’t figure out how
27 to get the damn top off it. It actually had a piece of tape that held the top in place. We
28 actually executed that ambush by shooting the machinegun and of course, we were using
29 blanks and all. As soon as it was over, then everybody moved to the rallying point, and
30 we were getting ready to move on. They said, “No. Go back to your ambush position.
31 There’s another enemy force coming. Do it again.” This time—we moved everybody

1 back into position for the ambush. This time I finally did in fact get the star-clusters ready
2 to go. I shot one, but there was some wind interestingly. The wind blew the star-cluster
3 back into the forest behind us and it was November. There were leaves all over the
4 ground. It started a fire.

5 JS: Oh, no.

6 RB: Not a big fire, but everybody had to go run and put out the fire and stamp out
7 the fire. Then, they reassembled, and we moved off to—we had to move probably about
8 eight to ten miles, something like that, to a final point. We ended up coming out into this
9 big, giant open area. I mean by this time I had had the whole operation. It was about six
10 o'clock in the morning. You always have one guy helping you with the azimuth and
11 keeping count how far you had gone.

12 JS: Right.

13 RB: The guy who was keeping count wasn't really sure that we had come the
14 right distance, but he thought we were very close. I couldn't see anything around us
15 which looks like the final place where we were to—I can't remember what they called
16 it—wherever the rallying point or wherever we were supposed to end up in. So, we
17 stopped and the Ranger—you know, totally being judged at everything I did. He [Ranger
18 Cadre] comes over to me and he said, "Do you know where you are?" I said, "Yes, sir."
19 We weren't using maps. We were using aerial photographs which are very hard to read.
20 He says, "Well, show me where you are." I said, "I think I'm right here." He said, "Yes,
21 you are. How far are you on the count?" I said, "Well, the man who was keeping close to
22 a count says we're where we need to be." He said, "Well, you're not. See if you can
23 figure out where you are." There was this big hump, a big hill. He said, "Go climb up on
24 top of that hump." I climbed up on top of the hump and he says, "Now, do a 360-degree
25 turn." I did a 360 degree turn and as I turned, I saw smoke coming up from a forest area
26 about 200 meters away. I said, "I know where I am." So, I passed. Not only did I pass,
27 but I passed all of the leadership in one fell swoop. I got my critique, and I think I got a
28 score of like eighty-five or something. I said, "That's great," because I knew I had
29 passed. They said, "Okay, go get some rest." I had just climbed in to my—you know, I
30 was so exhausted because I had been up the entire night, planned everything, nobody—if
31 you were a grunt, then there were times when you could kind of take a quick snooze or

1 something like that. You got some sleep, or you got some rest. I didn't get any. So, I was
2 asleep in the space of about two and a half minutes. The next thing I know, somebody is
3 shaking the hell out of me and said, "Come on, we got to go on patrol." I said, "What are
4 you talking about? I've been up all night." He said, "Yeah, but there are a couple guys
5 that still need to get their—they're giving them a second chance, and we have to go with
6 them." This particular day was warm and sunny. They conducted a whole series of short
7 patrols to try and help those soldiers who were on the verge, on the edge, had had bad
8 patrols—they tried to give them another opportunity. What would happen is that you'd go
9 out and the bad guys would start shooting at you and you had to do fire and maneuver. I
10 am just totally exhausted. I'm just doing my best just to stay up. I can remember it was
11 quite warm. Here we're doing fire and maneuver for like 300 meters. We got caught out
12 in the middle of the open which was a very poorly planned execution. We should have
13 gone around the tree line. We got caught out in the open, so you have to do fire and
14 maneuver for 300 meters which was exhausting. You know, you do the ones and twos. I
15 was a two. The ones run and then the twos run. The ones would run and then the twos
16 run. You're supposed to shoot. I can remember hitting the ground and waiting for them to
17 say, "Okay, twos, go!" We did that a couple of times. I hit the ground, and I kept
18 listening for two, listening for two, and I fell asleep. I fell asleep while we were doing fire
19 and maneuver out in the middle of this field. The next thing I know there is a Ranger staff
20 officer who's kicking me in the foot. I realized what had happened to me. I picked up my
21 rifle and I put it up to my shoulder and he said, "Ranger, what are you doing?" I said,
22 "I'm waiting for them to call my number, sir." "What's your number?" "I'm a two, sir.
23 They haven't called two. I'm waiting for them to call two." He said, "Look around." Of
24 course, I played it to the hilt. I just kind of quickly stuck my head up real quick and I
25 said, "Yes, sir. I'm waiting for the—." He said, "Get up. He made me do about forty
26 push-ups and then to run to catch up with the rest of the unit, but I was so exhausted I
27 literally hit the ground and fell asleep right on—it's funny how you remember certain
28 these things.

29 JS: Sure.

30 RB: So, the final test for the Florida phase was a twenty-mile force march—you
31 and your Ranger buddy. You started at eight o'clock at night and they started you on the

1 edge of a swamp. What they wanted you to do was go straight through the swamp to the
2 other side and you had to be to the finish line by six o'clock in the morning—you and
3 your Ranger buddy. If you didn't cross the finish line by six o'clock in the morning, you
4 failed. If you and your Ranger buddy didn't cross together, you failed. Even if it meant
5 carrying your Ranger buddy, you had to go. You had to get to the finish line by six.
6 Those who were smart enough figured it out. If you went through the swamp, you would
7 never make it. I mean we're talking about a swamp that's up to your chest. They had like
8 referees positioned along the way. If they caught you trying to go along the edges, then
9 they'd make you go back into the swamp. The trick was to go into the swamp a ways,
10 figure out where the umpires were, skirt them, and then come back to the edge and go
11 around the edge of the swamp where you could, you know. Although you had to walk a
12 little bit further, the walking was so much easier than trying to go through a swamp. I
13 remember making it with my Ranger buddy. We got there. I don't know. We crossed the
14 finish line at about five—something like that—plenty of time. You're just hanging out
15 and encouraging those who were not so fortunate. A couple of people had fallen and
16 sprained ankles. There were people carrying other people and linking up carrying guys
17 who couldn't make it. There were a few who didn't make it in time. They qualified as
18 Rangers, but they didn't get to wear the tab. There was nothing worse to think about the
19 possibility of completing the course, but not being able to wear the tab. So, these
20 confidence tests—you had to pass those, and you had to pass the buddy rating. I
21 remember being loaded into trucks being brought back to the headquarters. This was after
22 three weeks in the field. The clothes we had on were just unbelievable—taking those off.
23 They told us to take a shower and put on our one clean uniform which still had our
24 insignia on it. I remember taking a shower and looking down at my hip from where I
25 had—I had this rectangular bruise on my groin where I had landed on the ammo-pouch
26 that was full of fluid—full of fluid. I had really taken a severe blow. The fluid ultimately
27 went away, but it was a pretty damn severe injury. I put my uniform on, and I literally
28 had to take two handfuls on either side of my pants. I had lost so much weight that I had
29 to take tucks in the pants and strap my belt around in order to hold the pants up. I went
30 from about 160 pounds, maybe 155 pounds, to 135 pounds—when I graduated and I got
31 on the scale, that's what I weighed, 135 pounds. Like I said, they brought us back. We

1 took our showers. We put on our uniforms. We got into formation and at two o'clock that
2 afternoon they came through and they pinned the Ranger tabs on us. Our platoon sergeant
3 pinned that tab on my shoulder. It was one of the proudest moments of my life. It really
4 choked you up because it was, as I said, the most challenging, the most rigorous thing I'd
5 ever done in my life. It held me in really good stead because there was never once in
6 Vietnam as a combat infantry platoon leader when I felt that I hadn't had it worse
7 physically or mentally—where it had been more demanding. The only difference was
8 they were using live ammo in Vietnam. Never once did I feel physically or mentally that
9 I couldn't cope with the situation. It was the confidence that came from going through
10 that Ranger school. Instead of going through for nine weeks, I ended up going through
11 twelve weeks of Ranger school. I had a little extra dose, I guess. Then, after we
12 graduated, they had food for us. They had a barbecue. They had so much food. They had
13 soda and beer and fried chicken and corn on the cob. I can remember just eating and
14 eating and eating and getting to the point where I said, "Oh, my God. I cannot eat
15 anymore." Literally, you would only get one to two hours of sleep per night—if that
16 much. You would catch little cat-naps throughout the day. We'd go back to our tents, and
17 they let us sleep from about eight o'clock at night until the next morning. I can
18 remember—this is a funny part—I can remember at about two in the morning having to
19 go to the bathroom and I did not want to get out of that bed. I wanted to sleep in the worst
20 way. But I drank so much that I had to go to the bathroom. It's funny how those certain
21 little things you remember. Of course, I went from about 135 pounds back up to 150
22 pounds. Once Ranger school was over, I got in my car, put everything back in my car,
23 and drove back from Ft. Benning, Georgia, to Bragg, North Carolina, rejoined the 82nd
24 Airborne Division, and I was with the 82nd from probably about—I think I finished
25 Ranger school in December. I was with them until May—from January through May. I
26 went through Special Forces training during that period of time which was just classwork.
27 It was a much different program than it is today. They counted the Ranger training—you
28 had to be Ranger qualified to go through Special Forces. They counted the Ranger
29 training part as part of the physical programming as part of Special Forces at that point in
30 time. As I said, it was a much difference course then. It was just getting started to be
31 honest with you. We're supposed to go until when? At one o'clock?

1 JS: Well, a few minutes before then if that's okay. Yeah, we can stop here.

2 RB: Yeah, I'm not going to be able to get through everything I don't think. We
3 may have to set up another time.

4 JS: Okay. Did you want to go ahead and stop now, or did you want to talk a little
5 bit?

6 RB: Just one last piece of information. What happened was that when I came in to
7 my battalion, I met the battalion commander. Officers were getting rotated in and out just
8 every day. There was a tremendous demand for officers in Vietnam. Many of the
9 officers—many of the people that I had worked with when I had been with the 82nd, they
10 were gone.

11 JS: Right.

12 RB: As I came in to my battalion and met the battalion commander, the S1, the
13 personnel officer, said, "Do you have any special skills or talents?" I said, "Well, yes. I'm
14 a very good writer." He said, "Well, do you think you could be the S1?" I said, "Well,
15 what does the S1 do?" He said, "I'm the S1, but I'm on orders to go to Vietnam. You're
16 the personnel officer. You also do all the correspondents for the battalion commander.
17 You organize all the parties for the officers. Those are your general areas of
18 responsibility." I said, "Sure, I can do that." I got assigned to an infantry company and I
19 was with them for probably about four or five weeks. And then one day out of the blue I
20 get this phone call to report to battalion headquarters. I go in to see the battalion
21 commander and he says, "I understand you can write." I said, "Yes, sir. I can write." He
22 said, "Okay, pick that pad of paper right there. Here's a letter. Here's what I want to say
23 back to this on this letter. "Blah, blah, blah, blah," and I made a bunch of notes. He said,
24 "Go type it up." So, I went outside, put a piece of paper in the typewriter, wrote the letter,
25 and came back into the battalion commander. I gave it to him, and he said, "Okay, you're
26 now my S1." So, I finished out my tour of duty with the 82nd Airborne as the personnel
27 officer which actually turned out to be a great assignment. I got to organize all the parties
28 and all of the functions for all of the officers. I remember in like late April of that year—
29 every month there would be a phone call, and they would give me the names of the
30 officers who had received orders for Vietnam. One day in late April [March] of '68, they
31 were reading off the names, and I'm copying them down as quickly as I could, and they

1 read off, “Robin Bartlett, Lt. Robin Bartlett.” I stopped and I had to make the guy—he
2 went on to a bunch of other names. I said, “Hold it. You have to go back.” He said,
3 “What’s the matter?” I said, “Well, you just read my name.” Then, I got orders
4 transferring me to the 101st Airborne Division in Vietnam. I got orders for the 101st. They
5 wanted to keep the Airborne officers in Airborne units.

6 JS: Right.

7 RB: So, I took some vacation, packed everything in my car, went home, drove
8 home, drove back to California—my parents were living in California at the time. I spent
9 about twenty days on vacation before going to Vietnam. Every day I would put my boots
10 on, go for a three- or four-mile run, and kept my exercise going as best I could. Finally, I
11 ended up linking up with a Ranger buddy of mine and we drove up the coast. We spent
12 some time in San Francisco and ended up at Travis Air Force Base. My parents came to
13 see me off and got on an airplane and flew to Hawaii. We refueled in Hawaii. That was
14 my one and only time I had ever been to Hawaii—for two hours from two o’clock in the
15 morning until four o’clock in the morning. I landed in Bien Hoa Air Force Base outside
16 of Saigon. I think that’s probably a good stopping point.

17 JS: Yeah, yeah. That certainly would be a good place—.

18 RB: I came into Vietnam at the ripe age of twenty-one [two] years old and a
19 second lieutenant.

20 JS: All right.

21 RB: Am I giving what you—?

22 JS: Absolutely, yeah, absolutely.

23 RB: Okay.

24 JS: All right. Let me go ahead and stop the recording for today.

Interview with Robin Bartlett

Session [2] of [3]

Date: October 22, 2010

1 JS: This is Jason Stewart with the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University,
2 continuing an oral history interview with Mr. Robin Bartlett. Today is October 22, 2010,
3 and this is interview session number two. Okay, last time when we left off you had just
4 arrived in Vietnam.

5 RB: I couldn't believe I talked for two hours and only got myself into country. It's
6 kind of an amazing thing. Do you want me to just continue doing what I have been doing,
7 sort of telling the story of the experiences that I had?

8 JS: Sure.

9 RB: Are there any other specific topics or subjects that you want me to touch on?

10 JS: We could explore that as we go along. I will have some questions for you, I'm
11 sure, but if you'd like, you can just continue with the narrative, continue with the story.
12 I'm sure I'll have some questions as we go along.

13 RB: If I touch on something or you want more detail you'll ask me, right?

14 JS: Mm-hmm, sure.

15 RB: Okay. One of the things in thinking about the last interview that I wanted to
16 just kind of emphasize because I think it's significant is that I went through really the best
17 training that the Army had to offer at the time which was Airborne, Ranger, Special
18 Forces, and basic officer's training. And when I got into Vietnam I really—and I kind of
19 alluded to this the last time—I really felt that I was extremely well prepared both
20 physically and mentally to handle the challenges that I would face. Up to this point in
21 time we didn't use real bullets and that makes a pretty significant difference. But the
22 training really did prepare me to lead a platoon and to do it very well. Despite the fact
23 that I did get into a significant number of contacts with the enemy, I felt that there was
24 never really one time when I didn't feel prepared, when I didn't feel confident with my
25 own leadership, and with the outcome. I'll talk about some of those experiences. The
26 thing that this training did for me was to instill confidence, tremendous confidence, self-
27 confidence, and to dispel personal fear. My wife tells me to this day my greatest strength
28 is that I'm not afraid. I'm just not a fearful person. My greatest weakness is I'm not a

1 fearful person. In the civilian world there are times when you need to be. You can also
2 interpret that as saying, “You’re pig-headed or you’re stubborn.” I really was
3 exceptionally well-trained. It may be right or it may be wrong, but what they trained us to
4 do as a small-unit leader was to analyze the situation and to take action viciously—not
5 aggressively, but viciously, so that right or wrong, the action you took—even if you were
6 in a compromising position, the action you took, if you took it viciously enough and
7 aggressively enough, you could still overcome an adverse situation. I just wanted to kind
8 of preface that because in looking back over my Vietnam experience, I really do feel that
9 there were a number of times where that training and that attitude saved the day for me.
10 So, I go into Vietnam in May of ’69 [‘68] and I was on orders to the 101st Airborne
11 Division. I had been in the 82nd Airborne Division. They wanted to keep Airborne
12 officers in Airborne units. It was just after the Tet Offensive and I was in the Bien Hoa
13 replacement depot, and they just said, “All orders are canceled. We’ve had so many
14 casualties, so many officer casualties, that we have to make reassignments.” I was there
15 for probably a much longer period of time I think than, under normal circumstances, I
16 would have been there because I got reassigned to the 1st Cav Division. That turned out
17 frankly to be one of the most fortuitous things that happened to me from just a very
18 practical point of view. I have buddies who were in the Marines and buddies who were in
19 the 1st Infantry and 173rd and 101st. They had to carry twice as much stuff on their
20 backs—twice as much ammunition, twice as much water. It was very common for them
21 to be humping a sixty, sixty-five-pound pack. They endured the same heat that I did. The
22 most oppressive thing about Vietnam was the heat. I only had to carry thirty-five pounds
23 to forty pounds on my back. I only had to carry two bandoliers of ammunition, not four
24 bandoliers of ammunition, because we had more helicopters in that division in terms of
25 helicopter support than they had in all of Vietnam. They literally could pick up that entire
26 division, theoretically anyway, and move it lock, stock, and barrel. In fact, we did after
27 about seven months up in I Corps. We did move back down to near Saigon to Phuoc Vinh
28 in III Corps. They moved us by air. We had tremendous air assets that we were able to
29 work with. I spent, I don’t remember how exactly how many days in the replacement
30 depot, but I finally received orders transferring me to the 1st Cav Division. That
31 necessitated a flight from III Corps up to An Khe which was our division rear in II Corps.

1 Then, I spent—again, I don't remember exactly the number of days, but it was about four
2 or five days in An Khe. That's where we drew weapons and uniforms and got all our gear
3 together and just kind of hung around really. I can remember the routine was you had to
4 report each morning. Sometimes they wanted you to sight-in your rifles, so we did that,
5 but then we were released. It was mostly especially a matter of getting adjusted to the
6 heat. The average temperature was 100 to 105. And it just completely wiped you out. I
7 remember the first days in the replacement depot just going down and taking showers two
8 and three times a day just to try and cool-off and not being able to sleep at night because
9 it was so hot. It really took three weeks before we could get adjusted to the heat. I was in
10 An Khe for maybe a week or so—five, seven days—something like that. And then we
11 took another flight up to Camp Evans which was our division forward up in I Corps. That
12 was near the Gulf of Tonkin. It was inland a bit right along the demilitarized zone. That
13 was the 1st Cav's area of operation. It was to patrol the area along the demilitarized zone
14 from the Gulf of Tonkin on the east coast all the way up to the Laotian border. The
15 interesting thing about that area of operations was that as you—you could be in any—
16 because we were supported by incredible helicopter support, one day you could be in
17 sand on the beach with absolutely no overhead cover and looking at the water of the Gulf
18 of Tonkin and then moving inland to kind of like rolling hills with a lot of scrub-brush
19 and then moving further inland to three-canopy jungle and then even further inland to the
20 border of Laos where you had mountains. One day you could be in the mountains and the
21 next day you could be in the sand. It was just an amazing—of course, that had a lot to do
22 with the temperature and how tough it was to move and maneuver through the areas and
23 also the tactics that you employed.

24 JS: Okay.

25 RB: Okay. I spent another couple weeks at Camp Evans getting adjusted to the
26 temperature and going through the division training program which was more of a
27 acclimatization program. That required again a lot of lectures. They showed you how a
28 dust-off worked and officers had to become familiar with how to call-in a dust-off and
29 how to work a jungle penetrator. We got an opportunity to work with forward observers
30 and to refresh our memories on how to call-in artillery and adjust artillery—both 105 and
31 eight inch and 155-millimeter artillery and also 81-millimeter mortar which of course was

1 the—you carried one 81-millimeter mortar with the company. And I can remember that
2 even after all this acclimatization, the group we were with, this replacement group, and
3 there was a fairly large group of both officers and soldiers—at the end of the period,
4 maybe ten days of training, we took a five-mile force march just around the outskirts of
5 the basecamp. And we lost about thirty percent of our people from heat exhaustion. Heat
6 was really a very, very significant factor for us. Then, I got assigned to the 1st Battalion
7 5th Cav. I don't remember exactly how I got there. Part of it was on a helicopter. I got to
8 the battalion rear, battalion basecamp, and I arrived, I don't remember, at about maybe
9 six o'clock in the evening. I was scheduled to meet with the battalion commander at eight
10 o'clock that night. I can remember having this incredibly huge duffel-bag of equipment, a
11 pack, my rifle, ammunition—I had so much stuff. It was just unbelievable and really a
12 challenge just to carry it all and to get from point A to point B because I had all this stuff.
13 I didn't have that much that was personal. My father had actually given me a reel-to-reel
14 tape-recorder. These were the little three-inch reel tape-recorders. I had it in like a brief
15 case that had foam cut-outs so that it would protect this battery-operated reel-to-reel tape-
16 recorder. The idea was that I would in addition to writing home—I would periodically
17 make a tape. Obviously, I couldn't carry that out in the field, but if I was in the rear, I was
18 frequently able to make some tapes. I did send home about—oh, I don't know—eight to
19 ten tapes before. When I would go out to the field I would leave the tape-recorder in the
20 case inside a waterproof bag with some of my other personal stuff at the company rear. I
21 sent home, I don't know, eight to ten tapes before somebody discovered it and
22 confiscated it—stole it, took it. That was about, I don't know, a month or so in to the—
23 month or two—more like two or three months into my tour of duty. I came back to the
24 company rear and the tape-recorder was gone. I can remember being assigned to my
25 company that evening that I joined my battalion working my way down to—going in to
26 see the battalion commander that evening at about eight o'clock. Actually, it was later
27 than that. It was more like ten o'clock at night before we finally got in to see him. There
28 were four officers who were new replacements to the battalion. I remember going in to
29 see this battalion commander and he was just absolutely exhausted. I mean the guy was
30 dragging. He had just come off some pretty severe battles. The S-1 was there. There were
31 four officers. I was the first one—was I first? I was the second one in through the door.

1 The battalion commander gave us about a two-minute speech, and he said to the S-1,
2 “Where do we need replacements?” The S-1 said, “Well, we two in A, one in B, and one
3 in C.” He said, “Okay. You and you go to A Company.” The third guy went to B
4 Company, and the fourth guy went to C Company. That was how you got assigned to
5 your company. If I had been the third one in line, I would have gone to B Company if
6 you know what I’m saying. It was just kind of the luck of the draw. So, there were two of
7 us who went to A Company which meant that the two previous platoon leaders in A
8 Company had been killed in the Tet Offensive of ‘68. I remember finally joining up with
9 my company late that night with all this equipment. The personal equipment I left behind,
10 but I still had this incredible pack, pack-frame, ammunition, uniforms—all this stuff
11 which I could just barely maneuver. I mean it was just—I must have had sixty, seventy
12 pounds worth of stuff. We met with the company commander late at night and we were
13 supposed to go out the next morning. He said, “You can’t carry that stuff. Get with your
14 platoon sergeant and have him square you away.” I got assigned actually at that point in
15 time as the mortar platoon leader rather than a line platoon leader. He said, “The first
16 platoon leader is going to be rotating to a staff position in about a month. This will give
17 you a chance to kind of get settled and acclimatized. You’ll be the mortar platoon leader.
18 They only carried one mortar in the field, so it wasn’t like you had a tremendous amount
19 of equipment to support the company.

20 JS: Okay.

21 RB: The fortunate thing that happened to me is that I had a really good platoon
22 sergeant who knew what he was doing. He went through all my equipment and reduced
23 this incredible load from about sixty pounds down to about thirty-five pounds. I looked at
24 all the stuff. He said, “You don’t need this. You don’t need this. You don’t need this.” I
25 made a few adjustments like the extra pair of socks and a couple of plastic bags that I
26 knew I was going to need based on my experience in Ranger school. It came down to you
27 only wore the clothes that were on your back. All the other uniforms got turned into the
28 company supply. They sent you new uniforms every—well, it depended on how long you
29 were out in the field. You might go for a couple of weeks. You might go for a month
30 before you got a clean uniform. You just wore it. That’s all. By the time you got a clean
31 uniform it probably would stand on its own. You didn’t wear underwear. I had a couple

1 of pairs of socks simply because I knew how important it was to have clean socks. I had
2 my toothbrush and toothpaste. I had my glasses, eyeglasses, which frankly always stayed
3 in my pack. I don't think I ever took them out. It was impossible to wear them. I carried
4 two bandoliers of ammunition. I carried a bladder which was a one-gallon bladder of
5 water on a strap around my waste—obviously the bandoliers were strapped around my
6 middle. I carried this one-gallon bladder of water, and I carried two one-quart canteens,
7 one in the pack and one in my thigh-pocket. I had a map in a map-case in my other thigh
8 pocket. I carried two hand-grenades, two white-phosphorus grenades, two smoke, and
9 three star-clusters. I had a jungle-blanket, a jungle-poncho—I carried my poncho and my
10 jungle-blanket. They were wrapped—basically, you took all your stuff, and you wrapped
11 it in the middle of the poncho and the jungle blanket and just rolled that up and tied it to
12 the back of your pack-frame. You got rid of the pack and then along the base of the pack-
13 frame, you had more ammo and my extra canteen of water. I had a camera. It was one of
14 the first Kodak instamatic cameras which I bought before I left the United States so that it
15 was kind of point-and-shoot. It was a very early version of the point-and-shoot cameras
16 that they have, right now—film-based. So, I was able to take some pictures. It was inside
17 a plastic bag, and it lasted about eight weeks, nine weeks, until I forgot to take it out of
18 the pack and I went through a swamp. The water got in and that was the end of the
19 camera. I did send home some—what I would do is package-up—you know, I would
20 shoot some pictures and then I'd mail it home. My parents would process the pictures. I
21 was the mortar platoon leader for about three to four weeks. The day-to-day routine
22 would be, you know, the mortar platoon would walk with the company commander—
23 would be adjacent to the company commander. You'd have a lead platoon out in front
24 taking the point. The other two platoons would be in reserve. Whatever the mission was
25 typically moving from point A to point B often combat assaulting into an LZ (Landing
26 Zone)—they would rotate the responsibility of being the lead platoon on the combat
27 assault. You would do this for about anywhere from two to four weeks in the field in an
28 area of operation. It would not be unusual to be moved two or three times a week. They'd
29 come in with helicopters, pick up the entire company, and move you. 1st Cav Division
30 had a quick reaction force that was a platoon that was fully equipped and packed. They
31 were at the airfield with helicopters ready. They could have a full combat platoon with a

1 company ready to go within fifteen minutes—basically, the length of time it took to get
2 the helicopters warmed up and ready to run, ready to fly, with the rest of the company to
3 follow immediately thereafter. It was also not unusual to have orders come through to
4 move to an LZ. This is when you were actually in the field—to move to an LZ and get
5 ready for pick-up and to be combat assaulted into an area, a suspected enemy area. So,
6 during the course of the time I was in Vietnam I made—you earned an air medal for
7 every thirty combat assaults and I earned two air medals. So, I had in excess of seventy
8 combat assaults where you assaulted an LZ, a landing-zone, with artillery preparation,
9 and aerial-rocket prep prior to landing. It didn't mean I was always the lead platoon in.
10 That was done on a rotational basis. When it was my turn, my platoon's turn to be the
11 lead platoon, I rode in the first bird in along with my radio operator, M-79 grenade-
12 launcher, machine-gunner, and riflemen. So, I would be the lead bird to land after the
13 artillery prep and ARA, aerial-rocket artillery, prep. I would land on the landing-zone,
14 take up defensive positions, listen to see if you had any incoming fire, and then radio the
15 battalion commander that the LZ was green or occasionally, if you did take fire, that the
16 LZ was hot. That would determine how many more birds would be brought into the LZ.
17 Fortunately, I was only on a couple of missions where we landed on hot LZs. It was more
18 like fleeting gunfire—not significant enemy contact. We performed a really wide variety
19 of different kinds of missions. We would be a blocking force on a few missions. We
20 would be a driving force to a blocking force. We did that in more open terrain and terrain
21 that was near or surrounding villages. We did do a number of village—search-and-clear
22 to villages but my role on those operations was always in more of a blocking capacity. I
23 was not involved in the actual village searching. Other platoons were in fact involved in
24 that activity. It just so turned out that I was in a blocking capacity which meant you just,
25 you know—if you watched what was going on and you sat there and tried to stay out of
26 the sun—it was pretty boring for a lot of those types of activity. In fact, I would say that
27 was very indicative of a lot of the kind of time you spent in Vietnam. It was just day-to-
28 day, very routine, and very boring types of activity, searching trying to locate the enemy.
29 When we did find enemy soldiers, it was pretty much in small groups with only one or
30 two exceptions. And again, we were patrolling the demilitarized zone. So, one day you
31 might be out walking through the incredible heat and the next day you would be up in

1 three-canopy jungle. So, I wanted to talk a little bit about a couple of specific contacts
2 that I thought might be of interest to the storyline. There were probably three really
3 significant contacts that I was involved in. We were in very thick jungle, mountainous
4 jungle, up near the Laotian border. Again, you were in a company formation, so you had
5 three platoons. A platoon consisted of about twenty-eight men—three squads. You took
6 your machineguns, and you put one machinegun with each squad. Each squad had an M-
7 79 grenade launcher, one machinegun, and the rest were riflemen. Each rifleman was
8 essentially equipped more or less with the same equipment that I ran down for you earlier
9 in terms of the amount of ammunition that you carried. Everybody carried at least two
10 bandoliers of ammunition, at least two hand-grenades—you could carry more, but that
11 was a minimum requirement—and two smoke-grenades. You had to have lots of smoke
12 because you never knew when you would need to call-in helicopters. You had to pop the
13 smoke to assist them in the landing procedure.

14 JS: Okay.

15 RB: We were in very, very thick dense jungle. When you were in that kind of
16 environment or that kind of an area of operation, helicopters could not land. When they
17 brought in resupply, which you got pretty much every evening, they would fly overhead,
18 and you would cut down trees with machetes—you'd cut down enough trees so that they
19 could hover over you at about twenty or thirty feet and then they would kick out your
20 rations and kick out water to you. The water was in containers that they put—these were
21 eight-inch gun containers that they put powder in. They would wash them out and they
22 were waterproof. Once they were washed out you filled them with water. They could kick
23 those out to you. You put a thermite grenade in them after you used them or after you
24 filled your canteens and destroyed them in place. They would kick out C-rations to you.

25 JS: All right.

26 RB: On this one particular occasion I was assigned the responsibility of taking a
27 patrol, about half a platoon. The company commander brought me in and showed me
28 where he wanted me to patrol, and he had three different patrols out. My patrol was down
29 a creek-bed and through an area that they wanted investigated. It was probably about,
30 overall, an eight-mile walk and very, very thick jungle. So, we started out probably at
31 about ten o'clock in the morning—something like that. Even though we were in thick

1 jungle, it was still incredibly hot. I never wore—I kept my shirt in my pack. Of course, I
2 left my pack and equipment behind. We were traveling light on this patrol. We didn't
3 have our full equipment with us. We just had ammunition, water, and smoke—you know,
4 the essentials that you needed if you were on a patrol. You didn't carry the rest of your
5 equipment with you. You left that behind at the company CP (Command Post). We
6 walked from about ten until noon. We took a break, ate some food, and we were spread
7 out single-file. It's the only way to maneuver through areas like that.

8 JS: Okay.

9 RB: I always walked at the front of the line and in this particular case, I had one
10 reinforced squad with me. We had about twelve people. I would always walk third or
11 fourth and I would alternate with my radio operator. Sometimes he'd walk in front.
12 Sometimes he'd walk behind. I had my machine-gunner. I always had him either next or
13 in front and the M-79 grenade-launcher. They would also alternate. Those were the
14 weapons that I had the greatest firepower to work with—M-79 grenade-launchers. In
15 thick jungle you didn't carry high-explosive rounds. You carried flechette rounds. The
16 M-79 grenade-launcher would have flechette rounds loaded in his weapon. I had a point-
17 man out in front and a cover-man behind the point-man. Basically, it was point-man,
18 cover-man, then the machine-gunner or the M-79 grenade-launcher, myself, radio
19 operator, and then the M-79 grenade launcher, and then the rest of the squad who were
20 riflemen. We started out from after lunch, and we got an alert from the point-man that he
21 had seen movement up ahead. So, I was starting to move up to move up even with the
22 point-man and we took fire. Of course, the minute you take fire everybody hits the
23 ground. You couldn't return fire because you couldn't see more than about thirty feet,
24 forty feet in front of you. It was that dense jungle, so I didn't have visual contact with the
25 rest of my men. So, we were low-crawling up to move up and the word came back that
26 the point-man had been shot. He was shot. The initial report was a sucking chest wound
27 which is a very, very serious wound. It necessitated immediate medevac. I called for an
28 immediate medevac and also that a doctor be on board the flight. There were certain
29 conditions under which you could ask for a doctor. Sucking chest wound was one of
30 them. So, finally with the medic we were able to pull this soldier, who actually turned out
31 to be the squad leader, back to an area. I was able to consolidate the rest of my reinforced

1 squad in kind of a semi-circle facing the enemy contact. We were able to return fire.
2 Again, where I was, in kind of a small little clearing, was probably fifty to seventy-five
3 feet from where my men were placed and I couldn't see them. There were bullets going
4 both directions. The enemy would shoot and then we'd shoot. We'd return fire and the
5 enemy would shoot. We'd return fire. It was not a significant contact in terms of the
6 number of enemy. There were only one or two of them. We knew we had a helicopter
7 medevac, a dust-off, coming out to us. We were in this little clearing but looking up we
8 knew that it was going to have to be a jungle-penetrator extraction. I knew that it was
9 going to have to be a jungle-penetrator extraction. And in order to provide more room,
10 we had to cut down about twelve trees with a machete. I had a couple of men start
11 working on that. These weren't big trees. These were anywhere from three inches to six
12 inches in diameter, but you had to cut them down in order to open a hole in the canopy. It
13 was three-canopy jungle. The uppermost trees were sixty, seventy feet up. If you just
14 popped smoke, the smoke would just go up and hang in the canopy of the trees and
15 nobody would ever see you. So, we did that and continued to try and direct the fire and
16 communicate with the helicopter who was now in the area and trying also to
17 communicate with my company commander. The company commander was smart
18 enough to realize that I had a lot to do. We were just maintaining the contact. We weren't
19 trying to assault the contact. We were just maintaining a defensive posture. It turned out
20 this man who was shot was not—it was not a sucking chest wound. It was actually—he
21 was shot through the throat which was equally severe because you can't put a bandage
22 around somebody's throat. He's coughing up blood and we're having to clear the airway
23 in order to help him breathe. He's got to keep just holding the bandage in place. He's
24 losing a lot of blood. This was the first time that I had ever used a jungle penetrator
25 before. I was not entirely—I mean I had seen it demonstrated, but seeing it demonstrated
26 versus actually doing it yourself are two entirely different things. The helicopters in the
27 area and he says, "Well, I'm in the area. Pop smoke." I said, "You'll never see my
28 smoke. I'm going to shoot up a star-cluster." Where we had the wounded man and myself
29 was in a protected area behind some rocks. The clearing that we had made was not. As I
30 went out the bullets were going overhead, so I had to low crawl out to the clearing. Why I
31 only carried one star-cluster with me I don't know. It's just a factor. I got out to the

1 middle of the clearing, and I told the—we were talking to the helicopter on the radio, and
2 I said, “Okay, watch for my star-cluster.” These are little aluminum tubes that have a top
3 and you take the top off, put it on the bottom, and you smack it on the bottom. It shoots a
4 star-cluster up in the air about 200 feet. So, I low-crawl out, get the star-cluster lined-up,
5 smack it on the bottom, and it fires, and it goes up and it hangs up in the tree. Then, I
6 low-crawled back—it was about thirty feet or so, forty feet. I get on the radio and say,
7 “Well, the first one didn’t go. Stand by. I’m going to shoot the second one.” I had three
8 by the way. I only had three of these star-clusters. I low-crawled back out to the hole,
9 take the top off, put it on the bottom, smack it on the bottom, it goes up through the hole,
10 and it bursts, but the helicopter was pointed in a different direction and didn’t see it. I got
11 one left. So, I low-crawl out, get the third one ready to go, and just as I’m about to smack
12 it, in the midst of this melee—you know, because I’ve got bullets going both directions—
13 there is a little flock of butterflies. That goes flying by in the midst of all this stuff.
14 Butterflies have always been kind of a significant thing in my life. So, for a moment I
15 looked at the butterflies and took a deep breath and kind of relaxed and fired the star-
16 cluster. It went up. The helicopter saw it, came over, and dropped a stretcher. They were
17 able to locate us then with smoke because they knew where we were and got the
18 wounded man tied into the stretcher. They came over again a second pass, dropped the
19 jungle penetrator, we hooked the guy up, and took him out. It was a successful extraction
20 without any problems with the helicopter. The only issue was I got feedback later on that
21 they were pissed that the doctor was on board and was called to be on board when it
22 wasn’t a life-threatening wound. Okay, at the time we thought it was a very serious
23 wound and followed the proper procedure. My men appreciated the fact that—first of all,
24 we had a small force. We didn’t have a large force to attack the enemy even though the
25 enemy was only probably a couple three people. They appreciated the fact that I devoted
26 my attention to saving this man’s life and getting him out as opposed to aggressively
27 attacking the enemy position which was a strong position. Finally, after we got the man
28 out and we were able to move back into—I was able to retake control over the situation.
29 The enemy had departed, so we cautiously moved into the area where the enemy had
30 been and discovered a couple of bunkers and interestingly kind of a hooch. In the hooch
31 was a tremendous number of medical supplies. It looked like it was an aid station. We

1 had bandages and we had food, rice. We had medical supplies—mostly bandages. I can't
2 remember everything else, but we put it all together and called in a report of what we had
3 found in this area and to the company. There was a box made out of like balsa wood. It
4 was kind of sturdy, but it was a wooden box. The box was about twelve inches long and
5 about six inches high. The top slid back and inside the box were three light-blue bras.
6 That's what we thought too. Clearly, there had been a nurse, and this was her little stash
7 of bras. The funny thing was when I called in my report, and it was detailing all of the
8 materials that we had found. We had actually found a bag, a gunny sack, which had rice
9 in it. It was an American bag of rice that had come over as a donation to Montagnards or
10 to poor people. It had been confiscated by the Viet Cong. That's who we had encountered
11 were Viet Cong. This was an American bag of rice. It had American markings on it and
12 the American name, product name—I don't remember what it was. That was one
13 interesting thing. They wanted to know all the details about this gunny sack of rice that
14 we had discovered because it was an American bag of rice. I gave them the news that we
15 found three light-blue bras in a little wooden box. That information was revealed at the—
16 I got the feedback later on that that information went all the way up to the division
17 briefing that night to the division commander to tell him that the first platoon leader had
18 discovered three light-blue female bras.

19 JS: Right.

20 RB: After that, we were instructed to move because it was not uncommon for the
21 enemy, once we left, for the enemy to come back into an area where we had been. We
22 moved adjacent to where this bunker complex was, and we set up in an ambush position.
23 We laid there for about two hours. All I remember is that I was so exhausted after all this
24 activity that the minute I got my people positioned in the ambush location I just fell dead
25 asleep. I was just drained—totally, totally drained from this activity. After about two
26 hours we got word to pack it up and to destroy the bunkers. So, we set everything on fire.
27 We brought the bag back by the way, the blue bras, and—it's too bad. I would have loved
28 to have confiscated one of those blue bras. I should have put it in my pack, but I didn't.
29 We burned everything and started to make our way back to the company CP. On the way
30 we're walking up—the CP was on the top of a mountain or a hill—pretty high hill. We

1 came through a very, very thick jungle. So, we're walking single file just following like
2 animal trails. Sometimes you have to actually chop away at the underbrush.

3 JS: Right.

4 RB: Hold on just a second.

5 JS: Sure.

6 RB: So, we're climbing up this very—this is all on the same day. It's like a
7 power-packed day. We're climbing up this pretty steep hill single-file ten or fifteen feet
8 between people and my point-man alerts again. I go, "Holy shit. What now?" He's
9 halfway up the hill. I work my way up and it's tough. It's a steep, steep hill. I come up
10 even with the point-man and I go, "What's up? What is it?" He says, "Take a look."
11 There in front of him was one of these Daisy-Cutter bombs. It's like a 500-pound bomb.
12 It's huge—that had been unexploded. They had dropped it out of an—you know what the
13 Daisy-Cutter bomb is?

14 JS: Mm-hmm, yes, sir.

15 RB: You heard of those before?

16 JS: Right, yeah.

17 RB: It's huge—a great big giant bomb. It's lying on the side of this mountain. It's
18 got like—not ropes, but clearly the Viet Cong had discovered it, and they were trying to
19 haul it. Whatever they were using to haul it with, because it has a big loop on it, it
20 wouldn't hold up. We marked it obviously. It was not booby-trapped fortunately. We
21 marked it, we reported it, and we made our way back to the company CP. After I guess it
22 was about a day or so later, they brought out a group of EOD (Explosive Ordinance
23 Disposal), explosive engineers, and we escorted them back down to where this bomb
24 was. They blew it. They blew it in place. It was huge. I mean this thing would blow the
25 top of a mountain off. That's what they used them for was to create a landing zone.
26 Usually, they would just lower it on a cable to the top of a mountain on a timed fuse type
27 of thing. They would blow it, and it would make enough of an area that they could bring
28 in engineers and they could clear it, and they could bring in like a bulldozer and what-not
29 and create—they'd blow the top of a mountain off so that they could create a landing-
30 zone. That was one of my more interesting contacts. I have a couple of other stories that I
31 will relate. While I was the mortar platoon and before I became the first platoon leader—

1 the mortar platoon didn't have a lot to do and so I came up with this grandiose idea that
2 we were in a particular area and you could see a long way off had terrific observation
3 over—we were in open-country obviously. There was a natural saddle through which if
4 any enemy were going to come, they would come through this saddle because it had a big
5 hill on one side and some other sort of formation on the other side. If any enemy was
6 going to approach this area and the trail would run right through this saddle. I convinced
7 the company commander to allow me to go out to this saddle and to plant some trip-
8 flares. The idea was we would sight-in the mortar, the .81-millimeter mortar, on this area
9 and we would plant the trip-flares. If anybody came through during the night, they would
10 hit the trip-flares and then we would drop mortars on their heads. I remember going out
11 there and getting set-up to call in mortar rounds to make sure that we were positioned
12 properly. I called in the first mortar rounds, and I heard them go. I suddenly got a little bit
13 nervous as to how close I was to where these mortar rounds were supposed to land. Of
14 course, you never really had total confidence of where those rounds were going to land
15 until they actually landed. We turned around and ran about two or three hundred yards
16 just to make sure we had plenty of safe distance which we did. We adjusted fire and made
17 sure that these rounds were all positioned exactly where we wanted them to be. We called
18 cease-fire, went back, and we planted out trip-lines. That night we had all of our mortar
19 rounds ready to go. Each mortar round has a safety on it, metal safety. You have to pull
20 that safety off. It actually has a safety on the fins as well as a safety on the front of the
21 mortar round to prevent it from going down the tube until you pulled the safety. So, we
22 had one man, you know, we had on a rotational basis watching the area with a pair of
23 binoculars all night long. At about two o'clock in the morning, one of the trip-flares went.
24 Of course, everybody jumps up and we grab the mortar rounds and drop it in the tube. Of
25 course, they forgot to pull the safety, and it got hung up in the tube. It wouldn't go down
26 the tube. Fortunately, the platoon sergeant knew what he was doing, and he goes over. He
27 pulls the safety out of the way. The first two or three rounds fire. Well, they had forgotten
28 to pull the safeties off the rear of the mortar rounds. The first two or three rounds just
29 landed and didn't explode. Finally, we figured out what we were doing wrong. It's two
30 o'clock, three o'clock in the morning. Now, all the trip-flares are going off and we finally
31 dropped four or five, six rounds on the area. The next morning. Of course, we had to go

1 out and investigate the area. What we discovered were three dead gazelles and three
2 rounds stuck in the mud. Nobody wanted to touch those of course because they had been
3 fired. We had to call in the engineers to come out and explode those rounds because
4 otherwise the enemy would have taken them and turned them into booby traps. It turned
5 out to be kind of a—the company commander was not happy because he had to call in the
6 engineers to come and explode these rounds. I have two other contacts that I wanted to
7 talk about. These were much more significant contacts. The first one—we did a lot of
8 ambushing. Literally every night you would send out each platoon. You'd have a
9 company CP surrounded by the company. Each platoon would send out an ambush, so
10 you would have three ambushes out. Each ambush would be—you had a forward
11 observer with your company. The forward observer would pre-position artillery in front
12 of each ambush location. You felt pretty confident that you had good fire-support. You'd
13 recon the ambush during the day. You'd actually recon four or five different ambush
14 locations because we knew that the enemy was always looking at us, was always
15 watching us. You'd recon three or four different ambush locations so they wouldn't know
16 which one you would go to and then you would use a different route to go to your
17 ambush location. Those were all sort of like best practices that we followed. On this one
18 evening I took a reinforces squad of about—well, actually I took the whole platoon out. I
19 took the whole platoon. We had twenty-eight men that was moving into this ambush
20 position. To get to the ambush position, we had to cross an open rice-paddy. The
21 procedure to follow to go through an open area like that was that you sent two men
22 across, they explored the other side, and then they would give you a quick light flash with
23 a red filter on their flashlights to say it was okay—double-click. We were following. Like
24 I said, we had to ambush. We had recon and several different ambush locations during
25 the day. We had chosen a different route to get to the ambush location. We followed
26 proper procedure. The enemy clearly had figured it out that we had to cross this rice-
27 paddy and they had it zeroed-in. So, they waited. We got the double-click that the two
28 men on the other said, "All is clear." I sent the platoon across, and they waited until the
29 platoon was fully exposed in the rice-paddy, which was about 200 meters long, along a
30 rice-paddy dike. They opened up on us with machinegun fire and mortars. Fortunately,
31 we had this rice-paddy dike, which was as hard as concrete to lie behind, but then the

1 mortars started coming right down on top of us. I called in artillery immediately and I
2 called in artillery in the enemy position. The first rounds came over. I put my left arm up
3 on top of the rice-paddy dike so that as the rounds landed I could see them and adjust
4 them. And just as I put my left arm up on top of the rice-paddy dike to pull myself up, a
5 mortar round went off on the other side of the dike and shrapnel caught me in my left arm
6 and kicked me like in a somersault. I lost my helmet. The shrapnel didn't hurt all that
7 much, but it hit me really hard like somebody had pushed me. When I hit the ground, I
8 rolled. So, then I got up on my knees and I'm kind of in a little bit of a daze. I look and
9 there's all these tracers coming from my back away from me. I'm going, "Why are all
10 these tracers going away from me?" What it was is I had my back to the contact. They
11 were shooting at us with tracers. I was a little bit of a fog and then another mortar round
12 went off in front of me. This one caught me in the groin and kicked me back the other
13 way. This time I hit my head, without my helmet, on the rice-paddy dike and it knocked
14 me cold. Essentially what happened is out of the twenty-eight men, eight were killed
15 and—eight survived without any injury. I had eight wounded, and the rest were killed.
16 Our medic, Sp5c Hagemeister, was the one who singlehandedly pulled the dead and the
17 wounded back to the starting point where we had left to go out to the rice-paddy dike,
18 took all the men who were still capable of returning fire, got them in to firing positions to
19 return fire, returned fire on the enemy, and then individually made trip after trip after trip
20 to pull the wounded and the dead back to safety. I had blood all over my chest from the
21 wound that I got in my left arm and all over my groin and I was out cold. They thought I
22 was dead. They put me in the dead pile. Meanwhile, the medic is attending to the
23 wounded and trying to direct fire. Of course, the enemy proceeded to try to overcome our
24 position. We fortunately were able to bring the rest of the company up, consolidate the
25 position, and return fire. But we could not bring in any helicopters because the fire was so
26 intense. What we ultimately figured out we had run in to was a reinforced NVA (North
27 Vietnamese Army) company. The NVA company brought even more men up. I don't
28 think it was a full battalion, but we were probably facing a couple of companies. Because
29 of the intensity of the fight, we were not able to bring in any helicopters until the next
30 morning.

31 JS: All right.

1 RB: This all occurred starting at about eight o'clock at night. Everything
2 happened at night by the way—rarely during the day. So, I woke up and the fight was
3 going on, I came to, and I sat up. By this point in time, I had lost so much blood that I
4 fainted, and nobody saw me. So, I laid there again until I came to again. The second time
5 I rolled over and I moaned. Somebody said, "Hey, he's not dead." Finally, they came
6 over and they put some pressure bandages, and they controlled the bleeding, but I lay
7 there on the ground from about ten o'clock at night and really was totally out of
8 commission. There was nothing I could do and plus, as I continue to lose blood, I became
9 less and less coherent. We had no blood expanders or anything that could be done other
10 than just to keep pressure on the wounds. We finally got in helicopters the next morning
11 and I was medevac'd and was taken out to a ship on the Gulf of Tonkin and spent about
12 three or four days. My wounds were really quite minor. I was on light duty for about a
13 week. I wrote up the medic, my medic, and the other people who had performed heroic
14 acts. I wrote up the medic for the Silver Star and I did such a good job that battalion
15 commander decided to upgrade this to Congressional Medal of Honor.

16 JS: Wow.

17 RB: Sp5c Hagemeister received the Medal of Honor for his actions that night.

18 JS: Oh, wow.

19 RB: I wrote the certificate. That was my little claim to fame. What time do we got
20 here? We got twelve-thirty, right?

21 JS: Mm-hmm.

22 RB: You're eleven-thirty. What time do you have wind-it-up by?

23 JS: We can go about thirty more minutes if that's okay.

24 RB: Okay. So, that was my second most significant contact. The third—these
25 were all small unit contacts with the exception of that one. Every contact I had was small
26 unit contacts. For example, our point-men always walked point with a round in the
27 chamber and their weapon on full-automatic. The weapon pointed in their hands pointed
28 ahead. I can't tell you the number of times that we killed enemy on trails in thick jungle
29 walking single file—the number of times we killed enemy because they were walking
30 down the trail not expecting to run in to us and they had their weapons slung over their
31 shoulder. We just killed them. We just killed them. That would be in ones and twos and

1 threes. It was not uncommon. Again, these were mostly Viet Cong. I only can remember
2 once or twice actually facing regular troops. We were battling Viet Cong, irregulars,
3 guerrilla troops. We were in areas, with a few exceptions, when we were down closer to
4 the gulf where there were villages that if we encountered anyone, you killed them
5 because they were not supposed to be there. But they were all small unit contacts. Our
6 ambushes would produce one, two, three kills, five kills—something like that. Our ability
7 to conduct ambushes was really exceptional because of the claymore mine. We had
8 claymores and we would put them out in front of us. That was just an incredibly
9 devastating weapon firing 500 steel balls, and if you had like two or three of them lined
10 up in front of your ambush position, that's how you would trigger the ambush by firing
11 the claymore mine. It just killed everything. It just killed everything from six inches off
12 the ground to six feet in the air out 300 meters in a cone. It was a very, very effective
13 ambush weapon. We would conduct ambushes almost on a nightly basis. It was common
14 for us to be out two and three weeks and then come in to the battalion basecamp or
15 possibly the brigade basecamp and pull basecamp security for a week. You'd typically be
16 out two or three weeks. The longest period I was ever out for was four weeks. At the
17 halfway point, everybody was so grody that they brought us clean uniforms. I was
18 wearing a medium sized uniform. By the time I got to the uniforms, there was only one
19 pair of pants left and it was a small. So, I had to squeeze in to a pair—a small. As I
20 mentioned, you didn't wear any underwear over there. It was just too hot to wear
21 underwear. As we proceeded through the day's activity, I stepped over a log and ripped
22 out the crotch in these pants. I asked the medic for a safety-pin so I kind of held it
23 together with a safety-pin. After about a week or so, my platoon was chosen to pull
24 basecamp security around a .105 millimeter artillery position. The battalion commander
25 was there. It was an advance basecamp, advance LZ. So, I can remember going in and
26 reporting to the battalion commander with my crotch all ripped out and having him say,
27 "How about I give you a new pair of pants." I said, "Sir, that would be just really great."

28 JS: Right.

29 RB: Well, you know, you had to do what you had to do. There was one other
30 contact that I wanted to mention. We were practicing a technique called saturation
31 ambushing. The idea here was you would set up about eight ambushes. The company

1 would set up eight ambushes along a trail network. Each ambush would be maybe eight
2 to twelve people with claymore mines and machinegun and M-79 grenade-launcher. You
3 would just stay in the ambush location all day and all night. The idea was that if an
4 enemy force came walking along this trail network, you would let them go past the first
5 ambush, the second ambush, and then trigger them with the third ambush. Whichever
6 way they ran, you'd get them with the rest of the ambushes. So, we had actually killed a
7 couple of enemy soldiers, so we knew that there were enemy in the area. This was great
8 duty in one respect because they gave you LRP (Long Range Patrol) rations which were
9 much more enjoyable to eat than C-rations. You didn't have to walk. You weren't
10 moving from point A to point B during the day so you weren't sweating your brains out.
11 On this one particular evening—the ambushes are about maybe three, four-hundred
12 meters apart. So, there is some distance in between each ambush. I was the third ambush
13 in. We got a radio signal from the first ambush that there was one lone enemy soldier.
14 Well, it was not unusual to have one lone enemy soldier be kind of like the point-man
15 with a larger force to follow. So, the company commander said, "Don't shoot him. Let it
16 go. Let's see what develops." Then, this lone enemy soldier goes past the second ambush.
17 The second ambush reports that the soldier had gone by. The company commander says
18 to me, "I want you to take him out. Take out this one soldier silently because we still
19 don't know if there are more enemy troops that are coming." I said, "What do you mean
20 take him out silently?" He said, "Knife him." So, this was probably the most challenging
21 thing that I had to do the whole time I was in Vietnam. I had my radio-operator who had
22 a pistol. I stood next to the trail network behind a tree and the radio-operator was very
23 close to me. This was pitch-black night and he's there with his pistol guarding me and
24 protecting me. This lone enemy soldier with his rifle on his shoulder came walking down
25 the trail network. Of course, I couldn't really ask any of my troops to do this. I essentially
26 grabbed the guy and put my hand over his mouth and with my knife I rammed it up in to
27 his guts and killed him. That was about as—I know that I was responsible for a lot of
28 contacts [kills]. We had a lot of ambushes. We had significant body-count—not large
29 body-counts, but enough of them. They were all distant whether you shot them with your
30 rifle or you called in artillery and dropped artillery on them. There was distance between
31 you and the enemy. This one instance was the most—it really was horrific. That incident

1 has certainly stayed with me to this day. I remember it vividly and in great detail.
2 Obviously, I'm not telling in great detail, but you get the gist of it. My platoon consisted,
3 for the most part, of about twenty-eight men. I never really had more than about twenty-
4 eight even though I was supposed to have like about thirty-eight. I only had three squads,
5 three machineguns—I always had some men who were on R&R (Rest and Recuperation).
6 And an officer only spent six to seven months in the field and then they got a staff job. A
7 soldier had to spend a year in the field. Our typical scenario was that the troops would
8 wait until they had been in Vietnam ten months plus and then they'd take their R&R.
9 when they came back, they really weren't worth much because they were getting to be
10 really short-timed. They tried wherever possible to put the short-timers in the rear and
11 give them some sort of a job so that they weren't out in the field. They would ride the
12 helicopters out and bring the food out. Because we were air-mobile, we would get
13 resupplied almost on a daily basis as long as the helicopters could get in to us. It was nice
14 because if the helicopters could get in to us, they would come out and serve us a hot meal
15 in the afternoon. You might have your breakfast meal in the afternoon or you might have
16 dinner—whatever they could get out to you. I remember they would bring—you got one
17 beer and one soda a day and they would put these in waterproof bags and put ice in to the
18 waterproof bags. Of course, it all melted by the time it came out to you. You would have
19 a beer and you would have a soda pretty much on a daily basis. You never got hard
20 liquor. So, my father said, "What can I get you? What can I send you?" You did get mail
21 and you did get packages. I said, "Send me beef-jerky and is there any way you could
22 send me some booze? Send me some bourbon." My father would go down and buy some
23 plastic flasks and fill them with bourbon and wrap them all up and tape them shut and
24 mail them to me. The flasks cost like a dollar-twenty-five. My father was a very
25 economical person, so he wanted to find a more economical way to send the booze. He
26 finally discovered that he could buy plastic baby bottles for twenty-five cents. He filled
27 the plastic baby bottles and he'd send me like two or three of these in a little cardboard
28 box. You'd get your mail, you know, and there'd be this box. The beef-jerky I kept for
29 myself, but everybody got a couple of swallows of booze in their canteen cup because
30 you shared it. I became infamous for receiving care-packages of little plastic baby bottles.
31 I was also very cautious with my troops. They were for the most part draftees. They

1 didn't want an officer who was exceptionally gung-ho. By the way, I went over as a
2 second lieutenant. At one year in grade, I was promoted to first lieutenant. Just by
3 comparison, it took my father like eight years to go from second lieutenant to first
4 lieutenant. It took my brother four years to go from second lieutenant to first lieutenant. It
5 took me one year. So, I was promoted to first lieutenant and I was a first lieutenant the
6 whole time I was in Vietnam. I made it a policy to let my troops know that we had to
7 accomplish the mission. If we had to move from point A to point B we were in fact going
8 to move from point A to point B. We were going to do it cautiously. We were going to do
9 it intelligently. I loved artillery. I figured if we were going to be moving through an area
10 that was suspect of enemy fire that I would find a way to do that as safely as possible. It
11 was very, very common for me to call in reconnaissance by fire. My troops really
12 appreciated that because even though we might face an enemy, we knew that we had
13 dropped artillery on their heads before we moved in to a particular area. I shot so much
14 artillery that the artillery units that supported us got to know my call-sign very well. After
15 a while, they actually put a budget on me. When I called in reconnaissance by fire, the
16 most I could shoot was twenty-five rounds at one time which was enough. That was
17 enough. That gave the troops enough confidence to feel comfortable that at least the area
18 we were walking through, if there were enemy troops there, we had caused them to put
19 their heads down. Plus, we knew that we had them sighted in. We knew exactly the area.
20 We already had preprogrammed artillery positions already set. On one particular occasion
21 we were walking through a very [densely] jungle area and we came across this incredibly
22 awful smell. What it turned out to be was an enemy latrine and what that smells like. Of
23 course, the platoon alerted and we're moving very, very cautiously. We're in very deep
24 jungle terrain. We walked in to a deserted, fortunately, battalion-sized basecamp with
25 bunkers and underground caves. What made it very interesting is that they had cut timber.
26 It wasn't just trees that they had cut down to support the ceilings of these bunkers. They
27 actually had cut timbers. It really turned out to be quite a find. I don't remember exactly
28 how many bunkers we found but we found plenty of them—and a big underground cave
29 network. That got reported up. We got word that they wanted Gen. Westmoreland to fly
30 out to see it. We had to hang out in this battalion-sized basecamp waiting until the next
31 day when they could fly the division commander out who was Gen. Westmoreland. As it

1 turned out, he didn't come, but he sent Gen. Abrams who ultimately took his position.
2 We had a company securing the area. Because my platoon had found the basecamp, I was
3 the one to escort Gen. Abrams through the area. I can remember everybody trying to look
4 as presentable as possible, but I mean you had been out in the boonies for two or three
5 weeks and were pretty ripe. Everybody put on their shirt. We took up our defensive
6 positions and bloused our boots. This helicopter flies in and this three-star general gets
7 off and walks over to me. I give him a big salute. You never saluted anybody when you
8 were out in the field. It was verboten. I said, "Well, damned if I'm not going to salute a
9 three-star general." He just stuck out his hand and shook my hand. I escorted him through
10 the bunkers. We went in to one bunker and it was black as pitch in there. Fortunately, I
11 had a flashlight in my pocket and grabbed it and turned it on. We sat inside the bunker
12 and shot the shit for a little while. He asked me how things were going. It was very
13 interesting to have this guy. His boots were all clean and spit-shined and his uniform was
14 starched and pressed. He had all his insignia. Here I am, no insignia—you never wore
15 insignia in the field. The only way you knew I was an officer was by my call-sign which
16 was 1-6. The first platoon leader, six is the leader. On my helmet, on the band that held
17 the helmet-liner in, the camouflage cover in place, was—I had written Lt. Bartlett. That
18 was the only way. If you looked at that band that held my camouflage cover in place and
19 you read the words, "Lt. Bartlett", that was the only way you knew I was an officer. I had
20 nothing else other than my call-sign. That was done very much on purpose. You were
21 enough of a target just because you were always walking with the radio-operator. You
22 were the one who had the map. You were the one who was giving directions. You were
23 always a target. So, those were some of the more significant contacts. I actually have a
24 number of—a couple of kind of funny stories that I would like to tell. I don't know how
25 much more time we have. How much more time do you have?

26 JS: We could probably get through those. We have a little time.

27 RB: Well, I have two humorous stories—one in particular. When you were at a
28 basecamp, they built latrines. These latrines were made out of wood. They typically built
29 a two-holer. They built it up off the ground. They would take a fifty-five gallon drum and
30 cut it in half and stick the fifty-five gallon drum under each hole. The latrine would

1 accommodate two men. Once a day, whoever the FNG (Fucking New Guy) was—do you
2 know that term?

3 JS: Yeah, yeah, I do.

4 RB: The FNG got the job of burning the shit. Have you heard this story before?

5 JS: I've probably heard similar stories before.

6 RB: Well, long story short, you explain to the FNG what it is he's supposed to do.
7 He's to go over and take a new can, pull out the old can, put in the new can, pull the old
8 can a good distance away from the latrine, and take diesel fuel in a .155 millimeter shell,
9 metal, shell, fill it with diesel fuel, pour it in to the can, and burn it. It sounds simple
10 enough, but if you don't do it quite right—you don't pull the can far enough away—and
11 when you go to the bladder, the bladder that has gasoline in it looks the same as the
12 bladder that has diesel fuel in it. It's very easy to make a mistake and fill the canister with
13 gasoline. When you put gasoline in and you light a match and you toss it, it doesn't burn.
14 It explodes. Not only did the shit-can explode, it splashed burning gasoline on to—he
15 didn't pull it far enough away so it splashed burning gasoline on to the latrine. It also
16 burned down the latrine. This poor soldier really caught hell from—I mean he burned
17 down the latrine, blew-up the shit. There was shit flying all over the place because he
18 used the wrong fuel.

19 JS: Right. I've heard those stories, but not one like that.

20 RB: There were two men in the latrine when it blew up. Of course, the people
21 who were watching this, the tears were just rolling down your cheek. It was so funny. We
22 talked about for weeks after the fact.

23 JS: Sure.

24 RB: The other story is a true story of one of my men whose name was Simmons. I
25 call this the story of hard-luck Simmons. Simmons was an older man in my platoon. He
26 was twenty-eight years old. He was actually the oldest man in the platoon. I was twenty-
27 two years old and I was the second oldest man in my platoon. Everyone else was
28 seventeen, eighteen, nineteen, and twenty. Even my platoon sergeant was an instant NCO
29 (Non-commissioned Officer) and he was only eighteen years old. He had gone through
30 instant NCO school (Also known as Noncommissioned Officer Candidate Course or
31 "Shake n' Bakes"). Typically, you have an older platoon sergeant as your number two in

1 the platoon. In this case, we had an instant NCO. Simmons joined our unit. He was
2 twenty-eight years old. My first real contact with him—an officer for the most part—at
3 least I never got to know my troops intimately. I didn't want to. You knew who they were
4 and you knew their name, but you didn't get to know them very closely. Now, I did get to
5 know the platoon sergeant and I did get to know the radio-operator. I did get to know the
6 squad leaders [and medic]. That's as close as it came because you had to give orders to
7 these men. Sometimes the orders were dangerous. You never wanted to get a close
8 association with them—at least I didn't. I never did because sometimes I had to give an
9 order that would cause somebody to take a lot of risk. Anyway, Simmons—my first
10 interaction with him was we were pulling battalion basecamp security which actually was
11 good duty because the only thing you had to do was—during the course of the day, you'd
12 send out a patrol with the engineers to see if anybody planted mines on the road network
13 leading in. So, you'd scan for mines. You had to send a patrol out with the engineers. A
14 lot of times you could go down to—there would be a pond or lake nearby and you could
15 send a group down there and everybody could jump in the water and get swimming. You
16 got clean clothes. You got hot food once or twice a day. You were up most of the night
17 pulling perimeter security on a rotating basis. So, you could sleep during the day. You
18 could write letters. You could take a shower like maybe every other day or something
19 like that. You had plenty of water to drink. You played cards because there was nothing
20 else to do. Each man received an allotment of script. The troops had to be paid. When
21 you came in to Vietnam, you designated how much money you wanted to receive in the
22 field. There was nothing to spend it on. There were no post-exchanges. You were out in
23 the field. You still had to pay—there was a legal requirement to pay the troops. Most of
24 the troops, myself included, would get like fifty bucks. The rest of the money was sent
25 home or however you designated the rest of the money to be handled. Fifty bucks was
26 your gambling money. We played poker and we played blackjack. It was all one-dollar
27 bills. That's how you passed the time. I can remember playing blackjack and it was about
28 seven-thirty, eight o'clock at night and it was at that point in time that you had to break
29 up the game and go out, send your troops out, get them on the bunkers, and get them
30 prepared to pull perimeter security. I would walk the line to make sure that every bunker
31 was secure and that you had one man on alert, armed and ready to go and the rest of the

1 men on a schedule so that after an hour, hour and a half, whatever the time schedule was,
2 he would be relieved and be replaced. That would take you through the night. My job was
3 once or twice a night with my platoon sergeant to inspect the line and make sure that—
4 they knew what the password was. We were in a big battalion-sized basecamp. We were
5 not going to be attacked. We had so much firepower and artillery and everything else.
6 There was no way they were going to attack us. It was kind of pro forma activity, but you
7 still did it. We just ended the blackjack game and one of my squad leaders says, “Well,
8 Simmons wants to talk to you, sir.” I said, “Okay, send him in.” He said, “Well, he’s been
9 drinking and he’s pretty drunk, but he wants to talk to you.” I said, “Okay, but I don’t
10 want him pulling security if he’s drunk.” They said, “We’ll take care of it.” Simmons
11 comes in to me and he is slurring his speech. He’s not completely bombed but he’s in the
12 bag. Simmons tells me—he tells me his sob story that he shouldn’t have been drafted.
13 He’s a sole-surviving son which would have precluded him from being drafted. He’s
14 married. His wife is pregnant which would also preclude him from being drafted. He just
15 got a letter from her. Apparently her father was very, very affluent—a millionaire. Before
16 he was drafted and came over to Vietnam they had gotten an apartment and bought all
17 this furniture and then couldn’t pay for it. The creditors were hounding for money and his
18 allotment had gotten screwed up. She wasn’t getting any money and her father didn’t
19 approve of the marriage. He wasn’t helping out and she wanted a divorce. After about ten
20 minutes of this foggy, drunken story, that was the gist of what Simmons was telling me.
21 Hold on a second.

22 JS: Sure.

23 RB: I said, “Well, Simmons, you are obviously—you are intoxicated and there’s
24 nothing we can do about this tonight. I don’t want you on the line. I want you in the rear.
25 I don’t want an intoxicated man trying to pull duty. We’ll talk about this tomorrow once
26 you’ve sobered up. I’ll see what I can do for you.” He said, “Thank you very much.” He
27 walked outside the hooch that I was in, the bunker, and I heard this commotion. By this
28 time, it’s like seven-thirty, eight o’clock at night. It’s dark. I heard this commotion and I
29 didn’t think too much of it. The next thing I know my medic is screaming, “Simmons has
30 fallen down. He’s not breathing.” We go rushing out, we get a hold of him, and he had
31 tripped. He had fallen on his face and he had false-teeth. His teeth were broken and his

1 mouth is full of blood and broken teeth. The medic is trying to get him—I mean he was
2 breathing, but initially they thought he wasn't breathing. He had blood all over the place.
3 He had a big gash on his leg from where he had tripped and cut himself. I called the
4 company commander and the company commander comes over in a jeep. As the
5 company commander comes down the hill, he trips, falls, and puts a big gash in his leg.
6 They evacuate Simmons and they take him to the battalion aid station. They sew up his
7 leg. The battalion commander wants to give him an article fifteen because he's drunk.
8 They had to pump his stomach. He was so boozed up. The poor guy was just really out of
9 it. The company commander wants to give him an article fifteen and I said, "No, no, no.
10 He's got all these personal problems." So, we're going back out to the field. Simmons
11 can't go because he's got this big gash in his leg and plus, his teeth are broken. There's a
12 military regulation that says you can't send a troop out in the field unless he has false
13 teeth, unless he's able to chew his food. So, Simmons stays behind. The one thing I'm
14 able to do before we go back out to the field is I go over to the chaplain and I tell him the
15 story about Simmons. The chaplain says he'll go visit Simmons in the hospital and see
16 what he can do. That's the most I can do. So, Simmons is in the rear and Simmons has to
17 go back to division rear in order to get attention to his broken teeth and have new
18 dentures made.

19 JS: Okay.

20 RB: This is like a two-week period of time at least—more like three—plus the
21 gash in his leg. He's gone for a good two, three weeks. He comes back and we're still in
22 the field. He comes out on a supply helicopter and we're given food. It's actually raining.
23 We had hot food in the rain which is really miserable because you're trying to eat a
24 paper-plate full of food in the pouring rain. Everybody's giving Simmons a really hard
25 time. Simmons says, "Well, I want to walk point. I want to prove to these men that I'm
26 just as good as they are." So, I said, "okay, Simmons. You can walk point." We finish our
27 food and the helicopter—everything's packed up and we're moving on down the hill. It's
28 pouring rain and we're going down a very steep, slick incline. Somebody up above
29 dislodges a rock and when you do that, you yell, "Rock!" What you're supposed to do is
30 turn your back to the person who yells, "Rock," so that if it hits you, it hits you in the
31 shoulder or the back and not in the front. Simmons, who is walking point, is at the bottom

1 of the hill. Instead of turning his back, he turns his face. The rock hits him in the leg, in
2 the ankle, and breaks his ankle. The medic is down there. He said, “Yep, he’s got a
3 broken ankle.” Yours truly carries this guy piggy-back style all the way back up to the
4 top of the hill. We call in a medevac and the medevac comes. The medevac lands and the
5 rest of the platoon is down at the bottom of the hill. I have a squad protecting me waiting
6 for the medevac to come in. The medevac comes in and I said, “Okay, Simmons. Get up
7 on my back piggy-back style and I’ll take you over to the helicopter.” So, we’ve got one
8 man carrying his rifle and his equipment. Simmons jumps on my back. You know how
9 you typically do—you kind of shift the guy to get him up a little bit higher on your back
10 and you’re holding on to his legs piggy-back style. I’m wearing my steel helmet and as I
11 shift him to get him higher on my back, my head goes back, his mouth comes forward,
12 and he breaks his teeth on my steel helmet. Now, he’s got a broken foot and his dentures
13 are broken again. He has to go back to the rear, new dentures to be made, and he’s in a
14 walking-cast. Every month you have to pay the troops. I was designated as the officer to
15 pay the troops. That’s good duty because you could go back to the rear, go all the way
16 back to An Khe, you draw cash, you solve whatever financial issues or personnel issues
17 that each troop has, you find what there are and you make notes, and you work with the
18 soldier who’s assigned to your unit to resolve personal problems. You draw the cash. You
19 come out to the field. You pay the troops the script and then you do an accounting. Then,
20 you go back and turn [the money] it in. It’s good for a good three or four days by the time
21 it’s over. You get a chance to get clean clothes and hot food, go to the officer’s club, have
22 a couple of drinks, and watch movies. I’m on way down to An Khe to be the pay officer
23 and it’s eleven o’clock at night. I’m in the company rear in a tent. The battalion executive
24 officer comes in and he says, “I need a man to be a guard for a truckload of beer and soda
25 that we’re bringing up from An Khe. Have you got anybody?” I said, “Well, I got
26 Simmons. He’s got a walking cast, but he could certainly guard the beer and soda.” He
27 says, “He’ll be fine.” So, I get a hold of Simmons and he has to be at the helicopter pad at
28 six o’clock in the morning. I tell him what he’s supposed to be and supposed to and to
29 guard this truckload of beer and soda. It’ll take a week for the truck to come up—a big
30 tractor-trailer load full of beer and soda for the whole battalion. Every man contributed
31 money so that we could have one beer and one soda a day. So, Simmons is off the next

1 morning and I go back to bed. I completely forgot that I assigned Simmons to pull this
2 guard duty. Well, he's gone for like two weeks, three weeks and they're going to declare
3 him AWOL (Absent Without Leave). What had happened is that the truck broke down
4 and Simmons stayed with the truck. His job was to guard the truck, to guard that beer and
5 [soda]. While they're waiting for the replacement parts, Simmons is hanging out there
6 wherever they had the truck waiting for the repair parts. Finally when the truck is
7 repaired, he comes in to the battalion. They want to declare him AWOL. I finally
8 remembered that I did in fact assign him to this duty. The cast comes off and he's got his
9 new teeth. Now, he's been in Vietnam about two or three months. So far, he's never been
10 in the field. So, he comes out, joins us in the field, and the same thing. Everybody's
11 giving him a hard time. He's a strap-hanger. He doesn't do anything. He says, "Sir, I
12 want to walk point." I said, "Okay, Simmons. You can walk point." It's another of these
13 situations where—this time, they're bringing us hot food. Everybody's balancing paper
14 plates on their laps and drinking Kool-Aid. We had beer and soda. We were trying to eat
15 off a paper-plate and drink your soda and find a place to sit, you know. This time we're
16 not in a jungleous area. We're kind of in a rolling-hills type terrain. We're looking for
17 places to sit and everybody's just finding their own little spot, sitting down, and eating
18 their food. Simmons is doing the same thing. Simmons proceeds to sit down on top of a
19 thistle and he rams a three-inch thistle in to his ass.

20 JS: Oh, no.

21 RB: The medic can't get it out.

22 JS: Oh, gosh.

23 RB: So, we have to medevac him and he's got to go back to have this thistle
24 removed from his ass. It becomes infected. After they removed the thistle, the area
25 becomes—because these are—I don't know what kind of thistles they were but they were
26 poisonous and his whole rear-end becomes infected. He has to have antibiotics and of
27 course he can't come out to the field.

28 JS: Right.

29 RB: By this point in time, I have served seven months in the field and it's time for
30 me to go on R&R.

31 JS: Right.

1 RB: I take my R&R to Japan, I come back, and I start my staff job. I'm in my
2 staff job for about, I don't know, two or three weeks. My radio-operator comes out—he
3 takes his R&R. He comes by to see me. We're sitting there having a soda because now
4 I'm in the rear. We actually have a little tiny refrigerator with beer and soda. We have a
5 television set where we can get the one station. We sleep on cots and it's pretty good duty
6 as a staff officer. The radio operator comes by and he says, "You will never believe what
7 happened to Simmons." I said, "Tell me." He said, "Well, he came out to the field, he
8 walked point, he was doing a good job, he was in the field for about three or four days,
9 and everybody was starting to lay off him because he was being a good soldier. And low
10 and behold, his story about being illegally drafted was true. The chaplain did in fact
11 investigate the situation. He was illegally drafted. He was a sole-surviving son. He was
12 married. Once the Army discovered its error, they reached out after him serving like three
13 days in the field, and they plucked him out. They put him on a helicopter. They flew him
14 back and he was discharged from the Army. His wife's father, who was in fact a multi-
15 millionaire, welcomed the hero back from Vietnam and said, "All is forgiven." He paid
16 off all his bills. The guy was living a wonderful life.

17 JS: Wow.

18 RB: You know, that's such an unusual story that you know you can't make that
19 up.

20 JS: Right, right.

21 RB: So, look. I'm going to have to quit. I have got some other things I have to do
22 right now, so I'm hoping that maybe we could schedule one more session. I could
23 probably get through everything else in just one more session.

24 JS: Okay. Let me go ahead and stop the recording.

Interview with Robin Bartlett

Session [3] of [3]

Date: October 29, 2010

1 JS: This is Jason Stewart with the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University,
2 continuing an oral history interview with Mr. Robin Bartlett. Today is October 29, 2010,
3 and this is interview session number three. Okay, last time when we left off we were still
4 discussing the first part of your tour out in the field. Was there anything else we needed
5 to cover on that time?

6 RB: Yeah, there were two points that I thought about that I wanted to touch-on
7 and emphasize that I think are significant and important. The first one has to do with the
8 aggressiveness of the troops I commanded and of troops in general within my company,
9 my battalion. I can't speak for anything other than that. We're talking about 1968 and
10 '69, which was more or less the height of the Vietnam War after the Tet Offensive.
11 Generally speaking I would say that the troops that I commanded and worked with were
12 willing to do their job and to carry out the orders and whatever the missions were that
13 were assigned to us and to be aggressive. At the same time, there was a general
14 consensus—this is—I don't have any documentary evidence of this—I'm just expressing
15 my opinion, but there was a general consensus that there was no real point in this war of
16 sticking your neck out. Everyone came in to Vietnam with the idea of, "I have to serve
17 365 days." In fact, everybody carried a short-timer calendar. Do you know what one of
18 those looks like?

19 JS: Mm-hmm. Would you mind describing one?

20 RB: Hold on one second. Hold on one second.

21 JS: Sure, absolutely.

22 RB: A short-timer calendar is a photograph or is a drawing of a nude woman
23 divided in to 365 squares—well, sections. Every day you would color in—they're all
24 numbered. It's like paint by numbers. Every day you would color in one more day. From
25 day one upon arrival in Vietnam you started a countdown. With that kind of philosophy
26 and that kind of mentality, the troops, and this would extend to officers as well because
27 officers only served about six to seven months in the field and then they went to a staff
28 job—the staff job was significantly safer than a field job. With that kind of attitude of all
29 the troops that I was familiar with—again, they were willing to carry out the mission.

1 They were willing to carry out the orders. They were willing to do whatever it was their
2 commanders asked them to do. There was a general consensus of keeping your head
3 down, being very safe, not taking excessive chances, and there was a general suspicion of
4 any officer who was quote, “Gung-ho.” If you were an officer and you were gung-ho and
5 you wanted to attack and kill the enemy and be very aggressive, you would find yourself
6 out at the front with nobody behind you backing you up. Similarly, in any contact that
7 you got in, your troops would immediately look to the leader to see what your priorities
8 were. Were your priorities to help the wounded, to save lives, to attack the position but
9 do it in a very intelligent way, or were you charged the machinegun nest. Damn the
10 bullets just kill the enemy. In the one case they supported you. In the other case they did
11 not. So, I thought that was a fairly significant thing. It was something that was never
12 really spoken about, but it certainly was a major part of the attitude that I experienced in
13 Vietnam both from my commanders, my company commander, my battalion commander,
14 the other platoon leaders, and all of the troops that I commanded. The second thing that I
15 wanted to touch on was the fact that—I mentioned that my platoon had been ambushed. I
16 had eight wounded and eight killed in that ambush out of twenty-eight men. I was one of
17 the ones that was wounded. That was the most horrific and significant contact that I had.
18 It was a night contact. It started at about eight o’clock at night and it lasted until six
19 o’clock the next morning. We couldn’t get any medevacs in because of the extensiveness
20 of the contact. The contact escalated in to a battalion-size engagement. While my wounds
21 were not overly severe—I was wounded in the shoulder and in the groin. I did lose a lot
22 of blood. So, what happened to me is I was lying on the ground from about eight o’clock,
23 nine o’clock at night until six o’clock the next morning at first-light when they were
24 finally able to get helicopters in safely. That was a real game-changing moment for me. I
25 had a long talk with myself during that period of time. It was cold. I had lost a lot of
26 blood. I was scared. I couldn’t do anything. There was a tremendous contact going on
27 around me. All I could do basically was just kind of lie there hope that I didn’t bleed to
28 death. The only help I had was that I had a pressure-bandage on my wounds, but we had
29 no blood-expanders. We had no plasma, et cetera. It was during that period of time that I
30 really had a very long talk with myself and evaluated what I was doing. I came to the
31 realization that if I should die at that point in time, I really didn’t feel that my

1 contribution to the war effort, to my country, was a very significant one. It really affected
2 me. It really had a tremendous impact on my attitude and my morale after that point in
3 time because I just said to myself, “You know what, if I should die right now,”—it was
4 very hard for me to see how my death would make any difference or had made any
5 difference. So, it was a very significant moment for me. As I say, once I got evacuated
6 and took the shrapnel out and got a couple of quarts of blood put in to me, I was fine. I
7 was only on light duty for about eight to ten days and then was writing up citations for
8 those soldiers who had done such a great job. That was the other point I wanted to make.
9 I was in the field for about six and a half, almost seven months. I knew I was getting
10 short because an officer only serves six months in the field. My specialty was the
11 adjutant, the S-1 in the division. I was basically told that I was going to be the next S-1. I
12 went ahead and took my R&R. I went to Tokyo for whatever the length of time was. I
13 think it was about ten days and two days before the R&R, I had done like a little bit of
14 on-the-job training at the battalion forward which is where the S-1 shop was. I had about
15 two days or so of training just getting kind of familiar with what the responsibilities were
16 going to be. When I came back from my R&R I was going to take over as the battalion S-
17 1 which is a pretty responsible position. So, I’m all set. I come back from my R&R and
18 I’m all set to start doing this and the existing S-1 is still there. He comes up to me and he
19 says, “I just got orders for you to report to the division forward at Camp Evans and
20 you’re supposed to have an interview with the 14th MHD (Military History Detachment).
21 I go, “Okay. What is the 14th MHD?” He says, “I haven’t got a clue.” Nobody knew.

22 JS: Right.

23 RB: I got on a helicopter and I flew to Camp Evans from the battalion forward
24 and Camp Evans was our division forward. Our division rear was still in An Khe. Camp
25 Evans is in I Corps. An Khe is in III Corps. This division was really spread out. I landed
26 and I started asking people, “Have you ever heard of the 14th MHD?” Finally, somebody
27 said, “Well, I think it’s down that path, that road right there. Follow that road and it’s
28 down about a half a mile.” I have no clue where I’m going other than I’m supposed to
29 report to the 14th MHD for an interview. I’m walking down the road, walking down the
30 road, and I come to a tent. There’s a sign that says, “14th Military History Detachment.
31 You fight it, we write it.” I go in and I meet this captain who is an artillery captain. He

1 tells me that he went through the 201 files of every officer in the division looking for
2 someone who had writing skills. My major in college was comparative literature. He
3 interviews me for this job. The job was essentially to attend the division briefing every
4 night with the commanding general and be alert and aware of the activities of the
5 division. If there was a significant contact that really seemed as if it had some lessons
6 learned or there were some unusual aspects to it, to go out and interview the commanding
7 officer and the troops in the field and reconstruct the battle, draw maps, take photographs,
8 visit the scene of the battle, and reconstruct what happened. Often, as you can well
9 imagine, especially these night contacts, there's a tremendous amount of stuff that's
10 going on without very much awareness of exactly who's moving from point A to point B
11 and what the enemy is doing. So, reconstructing a battle, especially a big battle, is a very
12 complex thing. In addition, on a quarterly basis, we had to furnish the division report of
13 lessons learned and field expediencies. I'm sitting in this large tent surrounded by
14 sandbags, and they have a refrigerator with cold soda. I'm offered a cold soda. There are
15 typewriters. I'm going, "You know what, spending about four to five more months in this
16 location is not such a bad idea." They have fans much better than a battalion forward. So,
17 I took the job. It turned out to be a very interesting assignment. I did in fact go out on a
18 couple of inquiries. I interviewed people who were still in the battalion aid station. We
19 interviewed the commanding officers. We interviewed platoon leaders. We interviewed
20 the troops themselves. I had an artist who went with me and a photographer. We took
21 pictures and we drew maps. We reconstructed a couple of interesting battles and wrote
22 them up. We got to put a name on them. The battles were submitted to a laundry-list of
23 different military installations as well as West Point and military—the U.S. Army
24 Military History—wherever the hell that was—located in Washington D.C. We also
25 wrote up these quarterly reports and I can remember a lot of pretty interesting field
26 expediencies. I can't remember what they were right now, but I just remember remarking
27 about—each battalion was responsible to send in a report. Our job was to follow-up with
28 them to make sure that they did send something in and then read their reports and take the
29 best stuff out of their reports and submit it as the division's quarterly field expedience
30 report. About three months into that job, they packed up the entire division and moved us
31 from I Corps down to III Corps outside a town called Phuoc Vinh which was north of

1 Bien Hoa and north of Saigon. The entire division packed up. We had a conex container.
2 We put all our stuff in there—all of our reports and papers and typewriters and stuff. We
3 had a jeep. The detachment consisted of one captain, one lieutenant, one sergeant, two-
4 Sp4c. It was like 5 of us. We moved down to Phuoc Vinh and now we were in a Quonset
5 hut. We spent most of the next three- or four-weeks putting sandbags around the Quonset
6 hut and building a bunker immediately adjacent to our Quonset hut. We cut a hole
7 through the Quonset hut so that you could go directly into the bunker in the event there
8 was a rocket attack. Hold on one second.

9 JS: Sure.

10 RB: The captain who was responsible for my unit had an emergency situation
11 with his family. All of a sudden, he had to leave and go back to the United States. I was
12 in command of this unit for the better part of about two months. I finally got a captain
13 assigned to the unit who was actually JAG (Judge Advocate General), JAG officer. I
14 guess they didn't know what to do with him, so they gave him to me. So, I began to teach
15 him. Now, I'm starting to get kind of short. I'm within about two months of going back to
16 the United States. I had to teach this captain what to do. We finally got a lieutenant
17 assigned and had to teach him, orient him as to all the responsibilities of the detachment.
18 One of the other interesting things that happened during the move that I talked about was
19 that the public information office was in a tent that was like directly across from our tent.
20 This was at Camp Evans in I Corps. I knew some of the people over there and I was
21 walking past their tent one day. I saw this big pile of photographs. I walked over and I
22 started looking at them. They were pictures of helicopters and units in the field. I asked
23 them, "What in the world is this?" They said, "Well, that's the slush pile. We're going to
24 burn it. We're not taking those photos." Maybe they were a little out of focus or they
25 didn't like the shot or whatever it was. I said, "If you're going to burn them, can I help
26 myself?" They said, "Sure. Take whatever you want." I'm going through and I picked up
27 about fifty photographs, eight-by-ten black and whites as well as some five-by-sevens. At
28 the bottom of the pile I come across a binder and this binder was like a watercolor, a
29 series of watercolors that had been drawn by an artist. It was a book proposal for a book
30 about soldiers in Vietnam. The whole subject of this book was men—it was to recognize
31 and honor men who had been killed. The book proposal had gotten turned down when it

1 was submitted because it was just too dark a subject. They just didn't want to have to talk
2 about troops who had been killed. In addition to the photographs, I took this book
3 proposal with me. I brought all that back with me to the United States. About thirty days
4 before my time was up in Vietnam, I should have been receiving orders assigning me to a
5 new duty station. I filled out what they call a dream-sheet which was a form to tell the
6 Army where you would like to be assigned. I asked to be assigned to the West Coast of
7 the United States. That typically meant either Ft. Ord—Ft. Lewis, Washington or Ft. Ord,
8 California. Those are the two big military bases, Army bases, on the West Coast. I didn't
9 get orders, and I didn't get orders. Finally, I said to my commanding officer, "Look, I'm
10 within thirty days of leaving Vietnam. I have no orders. We need some art supplies
11 anyway. Let the sergeant and me go to Saigon." We were about seventy miles or so north
12 of Saigon. "Let us go to Saigon and buy some art supplies." The artist we had had
13 nothing to work with. He had no paints—very few paints and just a couple of brushes. He
14 was desperate for some supplies. I put in a request, and I got about 300, 400 dollars in
15 piasters in Vietnamese money. We joined a convoy, and we drove to Saigon. I stayed in
16 the officer's hotel, and he stayed in the enlisted hotel. We had a very nice time for two
17 days enjoying ourselves, seeing the sights, going to the officers' club I went to the
18 officers' club. Finally, on the third day, we said, "We better buy these art supplies, and I
19 needed to find out about my orders." On the third day, we took a ride over to MACV
20 (Military Assistance Command Vietnam) Headquarters. I kept asking people where to go,
21 where to go, and finally directed to this one big building. I went in and I said—I
22 explained my situation. I was looking to get copies of my orders because they hadn't
23 reached me. They escorted me into this big room which was a gymnasium—the size of a
24 giant gymnasium. In fact, it had basketball hoops that had been pulled up. On the floor of
25 the gymnasium were these trays. In the trays were—this was all at the very early days of
26 computers and there were punch cards. Each card represented a soldier in Vietnam. There
27 were thousands and thousands and thousands of these trays and cards all laid out
28 alphabetically. We went through the As to the Bs to the BA to the BAR to the BART to
29 the—and finally got to Bartlett. They're working through the Bartletts and then they
30 came to my card. They pulled it out and it said, "Oh, you're going to APO Seattle.
31 You're going to Seattle, Washington." I said, "Oh, Ft. Lewis." They said, "No. It says

1 here Ft. Wainwright.” We didn’t even know where Ft. Wainwright was. We had to go to
2 another room to a directory, and they looked up Ft. Wainwright in the directory. It’s APO
3 Seattle and Ft. Wainwright is located in Fairbanks, Alaska, which is the West Coast,
4 right? I got what I asked for. I got assigned to the West Coast. That certainly was a shock.

5 JS: Sure.

6 RB: We got back in the jeep, and we drove to an area that we had been directed
7 to. We walked into an art supply store and here I am with a .45 on my hip and the
8 sergeant has an M-16 on his shoulder. We walk in and we start taking boxes. There
9 would be like ten boxes of paint. He’d take nine. The shop owner thought that we were
10 just going to take all this stuff. They were getting very upset and very concerned because
11 obviously we’re armed. I said, “Do you speak English?” They said, “No.” In French, I
12 said, “Do you speak French?” They did speak French. I said, “Don’t worry.” I reached
13 into my pocket, and I pulled out this plastic bag full of money. I said, “We’re going to
14 pay you for all this stuff.” Suddenly, we became their best friends. The sergeant got all
15 the art supplies. We had to go into the backroom and have tea with them and a little
16 something to eat. It was the biggest sell probably that they had ever made in their lives.
17 We boxed all this stuff up, put it in the jeep, and we had missed our convoy to go back.
18 So, we just drove. We drove unescorted all the way back which was pretty hairy because
19 we were really taking a pretty significant risk. That was my big experience of going to
20 Saigon and finding out that I was to be shipped to Ft. Wainwright, Alaska. About a week
21 before my termination date, which actually happened to be May 9th—I came to Vietnam
22 on May 9, 1968. My official DEROS (Date of Expected Return From Overseas) date was
23 May 9, 1969. About a week before they said, “Why don’t you go ahead and go. Get on a
24 plane. Go to Bien Hoa. Maybe you can get out early.” At that point in time there was a
25 great concern over the number of troops that they had in Vietnam because there was a
26 limit of whatever that magic number was. I can’t remember. They weren’t supposed to be
27 going over—I’m going to say it’s the 500,000-limit number. And they were over that
28 number. They were sending a lot of troops back early. I hung around Bien Hoa going to
29 the officer’s club and the PX (Post Exchange) and watching movies and just hanging out
30 until suddenly somebody came and got me and said, “You’re scheduled for a flight out
31 tomorrow afternoon at a certain time—like four o’clock in the afternoon. Be ready to go.”

1 I literally had just a small handbag. I had my uniform, my khaki uniform, toilet-kit—
2 everything I owned fit in a little handbag. I went to the airfield, was bused over to the
3 airfield, and the new guys got off the plane and we got on the plane. I can remember that
4 that plane was absolutely silent. You could have heard a pin drop. They got going and
5 took off. The moment the wheels were up, there was a cheer. It was the greatest cheer
6 you ever heard in your life. We flew directly to—we may have refueled in Alaska. I can't
7 remember to be honest with you. It was a long flight. I do remember that. We ultimately
8 landed at Travis Air Force Base. I had let my parents know by letter the approximate time
9 frame when I expected to land there. There was no way I could tell them what day, what
10 flight—anything. We ended up landing at about ten or eleven o'clock at night. I can
11 remember looking out the window over at the—the plane pulled up and they rolled up
12 this—a metal stairs to the doors. I was sitting by the window, and I looked out across the
13 field to where we were going in. There were lights to this building, and I saw two people
14 standing there on the other side of the fence. I said, "Damn if that doesn't look like my
15 mother and father." I got off the plane, got down on the ground, kissed the ground, and I
16 started walking to the building. Low and behold on the other side of the fence were my
17 mother and father and my dog. They had been meeting, because my father was retired
18 military—they had stayed in the officer's quarters, and they had been meeting literally
19 every flight arriving from Vietnam for the last two or three days. I walked up to my
20 mother, and I kissed her through the fence. She didn't recognize me until I got about two
21 feet in front of her. Everybody is wearing uniforms. We all look the same. We had to
22 process through because everybody else was going in buses down to Oakland Army
23 Base. I had my orders, and I went to the officer in charge. I said, "Look, my parents are
24 here. I have my orders. I know where I'm supposed to go. Do I need to go to the Oakland
25 Army Terminal?" He said, "No, you're free to go." So, we spent the next day or two—
26 maybe it was just a day or so—at Travis Air Force Base. We drove to our home which at
27 that point in time was down in Monterey. I had about maybe a week or so before starting
28 north to go to my next duty station in Fairbanks, Alaska. I remember packing everything
29 in my car. Everything I owned fit in my car. I had orders to ship my car from Seattle,
30 Washington up to Anchorage. The car had to be winterized. They had to have a battery-
31 heater put in and a circulating water heater and a dipstick-heater. Unfortunately, it was

1 during the summertime. All of these preparations had to be made before you could ship
2 your car because they didn't want cars to come up there that weren't protected from the
3 extreme cold. I drove the car to Seattle and turned it in to be shipped to Anchorage. I got
4 on an airplane and flew to Fairbanks and ultimately joined the 171st Light Infantry
5 Brigade. I came in as a first lieutenant having served just shy of two years in the Army. I
6 reported to the brigade commander, and he said, "Well, I see here that you're due to be
7 promoted to captain in one week. I don't want to send you down to your battalion as a
8 first lieutenant. I'm promoting you right now." They had to go scramble to find
9 somebody who had captain's bars because I was actually the first officer of that grade
10 level to come to that unit in over three years. All of the lieutenants had been assigned to
11 Vietnam. No captains were available. So, I was the first one to come back from Vietnam
12 to be assigned to that unit in over three years. They sent me down to my battalion. I was
13 assigned as the headquarters company commander. At that point in time, we were a
14 mechanized unit. The entire battalion had armored personnel carriers, and I had all the
15 two-and-a-half ton trucks and the ambulances and armored personnel recovery vehicles
16 and the motor pool. All of that was mine. I had about 250 million dollars' worth of
17 material and equipment. All of this mechanized equipment was old. It was World War II
18 vintage. My troops would spend eighty percent, sometimes ninety percent, of their time
19 trying to get these vehicles to run. We couldn't get parts. Most of the vehicles were
20 broken and it was very demoralizing because you had spent all this time trying to get the
21 vehicles to run and not be able to get parts. I remember one of the first things I did is to
22 have a layout display of all of the men—like two men per vehicle. You'd walk down the
23 line, and you'd see all these red tags on the vehicles. You'd say, "Why is this vehicle red-
24 tagged?" I can remember—here I am, a brand-new captain with two years under my belt.
25 It took my father eight years to become a captain. It took my brother four years to
26 become a captain. Here I am a captain after two years. I wasn't a captain. I was a captain
27 in rank only if you know what I mean. I'm walking down the line, and I come to this
28 ambulance. It's got a big red tag in front of it. There are these two African American
29 soldiers standing in front. I go, "Why is there a red tag on your vehicle?" One of the
30 soldiers said, "De hone, sir." I said, "Pardon me?" He said, "It's de hone, sir." I said,
31 "What?" "De hone, sir, De hone." I said, "Show me." He looks at me strangely, walks

1 around, opens the door, gets up in the driver seat, and he says, “De hone, sir, de hone.”
2 He pushes on the horn. The horn does not work and that red-tagged the vehicle. That was
3 my introduction to the motor-pool—that the horn did not work.

4 JS: Right.

5 RB: So, I was a company commander in this unit for about a better part of seven
6 months and then they brought me up as the adjutant, S-1—back into my specialty. I lived
7 through some very cold winters going out into the field. After about six months—I mean
8 we would go on maneuvers and half of our vehicles wouldn’t make it beyond five miles.
9 You’d see the vehicles pulled over the side of the road, smoke coming out of the engine,
10 and it just became an abysmal situation to try and keep these vehicles working. Because
11 they just were old and dilapidated. The supply lines were horrendous, and it wouldn’t
12 work. Finally, after about six months, eight months, they had us pack up all the vehicles
13 and put them onto railroad-cars and they shipped them back to the United States and
14 turned them over to some National Guard unit. And we were converted to a light infantry
15 guerrilla warfare unit. Our mission—again—hold on one second.

16 JS: Sure.

17 RB: Sorry about that.

18 JS: That’s all right.

19 RB: We converted to being a light infantry unit and we turned in all these
20 vehicles. Everybody was issued snowshoes and skis. I can remember doing a twenty-mile
21 force march. Being the S-1, my job was to go out and lay out the location for the battalion
22 and set up all the tents and get the mess hall going and meet the troops coming in from
23 this twenty-mile force march and have hot food for them ready to go when they arrived.
24 We [conducted] a lot of field activities and a lot of those types of things for—throughout
25 the summer months and also into the winter. Winter was a different situation because it
26 got to be really cold and went through the northern warfare operations training course so
27 that all the troops learned how to ski and snowshoe and take care of themselves under
28 really adverse conditions. We had a brigade of two battalions. Our job was—the first line
29 of defense in the event the Russians ever came across the Bering Sea. That defense would
30 have been fire one shot and run like hell. I don’t know how effective a force we were.
31 That was our mission. At that point in time, I was really pretty ambivalent about whether

1 or not I was going to continue with the military. I came back from Vietnam with a really
2 negative opinion of my experience in Vietnam and what I had done there. The fact that
3 we had two battalions in Fairbanks, Alaska—it was a lot like the Boy Scouts to be honest
4 with you. I didn't feel that our mission was very significant. It was very hard to justify
5 the work that we did, especially when we were a mechanized unit and nothing worked.
6 We couldn't get replacement parts. It made sense to convert it to a light infantry unit.
7 Realistically, we weren't going to be attacked by the Russians. They weren't going to
8 come across the Bering Sea. It was just very, very hard to see any practical value to our
9 activities and to our mission. I did learn a lot about living and existing in a very cold
10 weather climate. I enjoyed hunting and fishing. So, the experience in Alaska was
11 personally very enjoyable. I was a bachelor, so I didn't have a whole lot of
12 responsibilities. Finally, after sixteen months in Alaska, I got orders transferring me to
13 attend the career course in Ft. Benning, Georgia. I got on a plane and flew to visit a
14 classmate of mine in New Jersey and bought a new car. I decided that on my way to
15 Georgia to attend the career course I would stop in at the Office of Personnel Operations
16 and see how I was doing. So, that's what I did. I went to the Office of Personnel
17 Operations, and I was to be counseled by a major. This major was an armor officer. I
18 said, "This is strange. Why am I, an infantry officer, being counseled by an officer who is
19 an armor officer? He doesn't know anything about the infantry." I don't really honestly
20 know why that happened. I got this one officer, and he looked at my records and he said,
21 "Oh, Capt. Bartlett, you've had a fantastic career. You've done so well. You're in the top
22 five percent of your class. We're sending you to the career course actually early in
23 advance of your peers. We plan to have you go through the career course and then to the
24 Monterey Language Institute where we're going to have you learn to speak Vietnamese
25 and then we're going to send you back to Vietnam for your second tour as a Vietnamese
26 unit adviser." Needless to say, that was a pretty big shock. That was not what I was
27 expecting to hear. I told this officer that that was not what I had in mind. What I really
28 wanted to do was to become a military attaché and go to Germany and serve as a military
29 attaché or serve with an Army unit in Germany. That would be a duty station that would
30 be very attractive to me. Going back to Vietnam as a unit adviser, a Vietnamese unit
31 adviser was certainly not very attractive to me. In fact, that was one of the worst

1 assignments you could have. He said, “Well, that’s what we have you programmed for.” I
2 didn’t appreciate that at all. I said, “Well, that’s not really what I would like to do. I know
3 that the career course is voluntary, so if I have no choice in this matter, then I’d like to
4 un-volunteer to going to the career course.” They said, “Well, if you un-volunteer, you
5 have accepted orders transferring you from Alaska to Georgia.” At this point, I had little
6 over three years in and at four years I would have completed my obligation. They said,
7 “Well, you accepted orders transferring you from Alaska to Georgia. Therefore, you’re
8 obligated for an additional year—catch 22. If you don’t go to the career course, then we
9 have no recourse but to reassign you to Vietnam right now. Take the weekend and think
10 it over.” Here I went from being relatively enthusiastic about the Army and thinking,
11 “Well, maybe I will go ahead and serve as a career officer and put in twenty years to
12 suddenly having the bottom fall out on my plans and my goals,” and being told, “We
13 have you programmed for a second tour in Vietnam and you can either go to the career
14 course or you can go to Vietnam right now. You’ve been back in the United States for
15 more than twelve months therefore you are eligible for reassignment. Take the weekend
16 and think it over.” That was a rough weekend. I actually ended up calling my father and I
17 said, “You know, this is not the way I want to be treated. This is not the way I want my
18 life to be determined. I know you have to take the assignments that come your way, but
19 there is just no way that I want to go back to Vietnam as a unit adviser. This is just
20 ridiculous the way it’s been handled.” So, I went back on Monday. I took the weekend, I
21 thought it over, went back, saw this major, and I said, “OK, you go ahead and reassign
22 me to Vietnam, but I want my resignation on file for 365 days from today’s date. I will
23 not be programmed.” I figured, “Well, let’s see, I’ve got thirty days of vacation. That
24 means I only have to spend eleven months in Vietnam. It’ll take them two or three weeks
25 to get me over there, so by the time I get to Vietnam, I’ll only have to serve ten months. I
26 can finagle it.” Well, this major goes and huddles with two other majors. He comes back
27 and he says, “Well, let’s not be hasty. Here the Army has spent all this money to move
28 you and your family from Alaska to Georgia.” I knew right then that this guy had not
29 looked at my records very carefully because I was a bachelor. Everything I owned fit in
30 my car, but I did one of the smartest things I’ve ever done, and I just kept my mouth shut.
31 He said, “We’re going to go ahead and send you on down to Georgia to Ft. Benning and

1 you can be an instructor or something. They'll find a job for you. If you change your
2 mind, we'll reprogram you for the career course." And I said, "Okay." So, then I
3 proceeded on down to Ft. Benning, Georgia and I actually got assigned to the leadership
4 department of the infantry school. That turned out to be a really excellent final
5 assignment for me. I was an operations officer and after about a month or two, they put
6 me to a special task force that was tasked with the responsibility of developing a new
7 course of instruction that was to be implemented Army-wide. That course of instruction
8 was called—initially we called it enlightened leadership which was subsequently
9 renamed to leadership for professionals. It was a radical course because every officer and
10 every NCO in the Army had to take this course. It was an Army-wide requirement. We
11 developed all the course materials, and they brought in one officer and one NCO from
12 every military installation in the world. We trained all the trainers to implement this
13 course nationwide. What was radical about it is we brought officers and non-
14 commissioned officers into the same room. We made them take off their insignia and we
15 made them talk with one another. It was actually a very satisfying final assignment. After
16 about six months, I went and had some interviews and ended up finally deciding that I
17 would go in to publishing, book publishing, especially based upon the experience I had in
18 developing this course of instruction with the Army. That fit in very, very nicely. They
19 told me I was obligated for a year. I believed them, but I decided after six months that,
20 "Well, maybe I better find out what the provisions are to resign my commission and get
21 out of the Army." So, I got the regulations, and I started reading them and they had this
22 thing called an early out. You could be released early, letter A, if you were a soul-
23 surviving son—no—letter B, if you were a farmer and you needed to go back and plant
24 crops—no—letter C, if you were a student and you wanted to go back and start school—
25 no—and then there was letter D—other. I said, "Hmm, that's interesting—other." So, I
26 typed out my resignation. I requested early-out and the reason was letter D, other. It was
27 approved, approved, approved right on up the chain of command. Two weeks later—you
28 know, I signed the paperwork resigning my commission. I was sworn-in as a reserve
29 officer and I was out of the Army—boom, boom, boom.

30 JS: Wow.

31 RB: I found out I could have done that day one, but of course, I didn't know.

1 JS: Right.

2 RB: I was recognized for my contributions to this special course. I got a Bronze
3 Star and a big handshake from the colonel who was in charge of the leadership
4 department. I did have one very interesting experience there because I did speak French
5 and read French. They had a couple of Nigerian generals come in and the department
6 head who was this colonel told gave me the department briefing, thirty-five pages, and
7 said, “Translate this into French and be prepared to give the department briefing to these
8 Nigerian officers because they don’t speak English. They only speak French.” The
9 smartest thing I did there was to go see the French liaison officer and have him help me
10 not only translate it but practice it. I was very good. I have a very good French accent—at
11 least I did at the time. Because I started early, he was willing to help me do it. Of course,
12 then all the other departments suddenly started to come to him for the same thing. I was
13 one of the first briefings. I’m in the room and it was very elaborate. It was the
14 commanding general’s briefing room. You could control the lights from the podium. That
15 was the day when you still had these overhead transparencies. I had two sergeants in the
16 back who were flipping the transparencies. They didn’t speak French, but they had a copy
17 of my script, so they knew from little dots that they put on the script when they were to
18 flip the slides. I had rehearsed and practiced so many times that the language was just
19 rolling off my tongue. The deputy commander of the leadership department was in the
20 room. He didn’t speak any French. There was a translator from the Department of Army
21 in the room. He heard me and said, “This guy is so good. I can go out in the hall and have
22 a cigarette.” He left the room. We got to the end of the briefing and of course the end of
23 the briefing says, “Do you have any questions?” These were two African American
24 Nigerian generals, and they wanted to know about—this was at the height of the race-
25 riots in America, and they wanted to know about the impact of the racial situation on
26 black soldiers in the Army which was a very sensitive subject at the time. They asked me
27 a question along those lines. I was able to translate the question to my deputy commander
28 and then he began to respond. That’s when I lost it. I couldn’t translate it back. We had to
29 go get the liaison officer, the translator, to translate the answer. My great performance
30 was blown. That was one of the highlights in addition to working on this course which I
31 took a lot of pride in. That was one of the highlights of my last days I guess in the Army

1 and at the leadership school. As I say, I drove back to California. I had a job working for
2 Prentice Hall Publishing Company as a textbook sales representative calling on college
3 professors and marketing the various different textbooks and finding out if these
4 professors were interested in writing books for the company. I spent the next fifteen years
5 working for Prentice Hall Publishing Company. That was my first job out of the Army,
6 and I had a great experience there. That kind of concludes the story with the exception of
7 this article that I wrote for *Army Digest Magazine* called *The Trail*. I actually wrote that
8 while I was in Vietnam. What I wanted to do was to try to capture the experience and the
9 feelings and the emotions which I had and which my troops had in walking point.
10 Everybody—that was the most dangerous thing that you could do. It was single file. It
11 was rare that you weren't walking single-file five meters or so between men. If somebody
12 was going to get zapped, it was the point-man or the cover-man. It was a very dangerous
13 and hazardous activity and that's why I wrote this article called *The Trail* to try and
14 capture that. As a concluding thing, I'd really like to have that article included with this
15 history if that's possible.

16 JS: Sure, absolutely.

17 RB: I mean I could actually read it if you wanted me to read it. I've got in front of
18 me, or it could be transcribed—whatever is the best way to do it.

19 JS: If you don't mind, you can read it if you don't mind doing so.

20 RB: Okay. This is an article that I wrote for *Army Digest Magazine* in April 1969.
21 I was in Vietnam at the time. I was a first lieutenant with the 1st Cav Division
22 Headquarters Company Airmobile. "*The Trail*. The trail is only a meter wide, and it
23 weaves its way through thick green and brown underbrush so overgrown that even a
24 jackrabbit would have trouble threading its way. Large thorny limbs form a matted
25 barrier as you strain, push, shove, and bleed to get through. Wait-a-minute vines seem to
26 take special pleasure in tripping you, spraining your ankle causing you to swear. With
27 each conquering, a new thicket presents itself as if to say, "You made it through that one,
28 now try me." As the trail wears on, your sore muscles, aching feet, and back cry out for a
29 relief from a forty-pound pack filled with C-rations, ammunition, canteens, and combat
30 equipment. Ten-minute breaks ease the pain for a short while and then you're numb
31 again. Rest is a beautiful dream. You must conserve water, so you sip sweet mouthfuls

1 allowing it to run down your cotton-dry throat. If you stop sweating, the dirt cakes on
2 your arms and face and you can't spare the water to wash it off. It's time to push on
3 waddling like a pregnant woman. The trail is a struggle between mind and body. The two
4 fight every step, clawing a troth, your brain forcing you on. Your mind is filled with
5 thoughts—home, cool beer, women, but ever alert for a noise, any false movement,
6 anything out of the ordinary along the trail. There are so many things to remember—keep
7 alert, stay alive, you must kill him first, you must pull the trigger first, and you must be
8 fast, but the trail pulls you down. Eyes droop, sweats drip into them, the salt burning and
9 stinging. Dirty hands rub the tears away and nails bitten to the quick scratch the
10 mosquito-bites from the night before. "Alert, alert. Keep your head up. Breathe deep.
11 Don't think about home. Don't think about anything except staying alive. Forget the pain,
12 the aching muscles, the tired feet. Clear your mind. Protect your life. Don't let the trail
13 win." The perspiration runs in big, dirty drops off the stock of your M-16 rifle. Your
14 hands push the thorns aside. You work your body through but your pack catches. You
15 pull. Thorns cut across your shoulder. "Damn!" but keep following that little green trail.
16 Keep pushing, keep pushing. Feet obeying a harsh command. Listen, Alert. The jungle is
17 quiet and only an occasional monkey screams out making you jump and duck. You
18 follow the trail by feel toes pointing forward searching for vines and roots. Your eyes
19 scan to the front searching for movement. Ears strain out like radar listening for the click
20 of a safety being released. Their weapons sound like popcorn exploding. Listen for
21 popcorn. Your knees are bent, limp, ready to drop face-flat in a split second as you walk
22 the trail. The trail is life. Pain, frustration, wishes, agony, and death. You get to know it
23 well and you learn quickly what life means and how precious it is and how much you
24 took it for granted before. The trail changes many lives. It ends some too." That's the
25 end.

26 JS: Yes, sir, wonderful. Would you also mind talking a little bit about how the
27 DVD came about?

28 RB: Yeah. The DVD came about because I had—in my professional work I got to
29 know an agency, a small agency, nearby and got to be close friends with one of the
30 people there. We were just talking one day, and I let them know that I was a Vietnam
31 veteran and I talked about the experience of working in the 14th Military History

1 Detachment. “You fight it, we write it.” I talked about these pictures. I talked about the
2 artwork. This guy said, “Well, I’d love to see it.” I said, “Okay, next time we get together
3 I’ll show it to you.” I brought it in, and he looked through the photographs and he looked
4 through the artwork that I had for this book proposal that I talked about. He said, “We’ve
5 got to do something to preserve this, to make this something. This is really great stuff.” I
6 showed him the article I had written, *The Trail*, and this friend of mine said, “I want to
7 produce this as a DVD.” One of his hobbies is a radio station. He plays music on a radio
8 station. We had access to a radio station and all the recording equipment. I found a young
9 guy. They call him the voice, right—the person who is the narrator. He wanted a young
10 voice, appropriately young, to read the trail. We got some music, and we went into the
11 studio. Actually, we ended up recording it twice. The first time I wasn’t satisfied. We had
12 to go back in and do it a second time because the fellow who recorded it didn’t put the
13 emphasis on some of the words the way I wanted it. So, we ended up doing it twice.
14 Because I was there the second time, they said, “Why don’t you talk about how you came
15 to salvage these photographs and the artwork from the burn-pile?” That was also put on.
16 That interview with me also became a part of the DVD that we produced. Once we had
17 produced the DVD and we had it all recorded and the music in place, we thought it would
18 be appropriate to kind of promote it and have a little bit of a ceremony. I actually went to
19 my local chapter of the 1st Cav Division, the New York-New Jersey Chapter, and I got on
20 their agenda to present it. I presented it to about seventy members of the 1st Cav Division.
21 I used a PowerPoint and computer to play it. When it was over, I stood up and I turned
22 around. I faced these guys and the whole room was just totally silent. I went, “Oh, my
23 God. What’s wrong?” Finally, one of them said, “I haven’t heard some of those terms in
24 twenty, twenty-five years, thirty years.” They were just in awe of the impact that story
25 had upon them. Many of them had walked point, so they knew exactly—they felt the
26 emotion that I brought across in the article. One of them told me about the New Jersey
27 Vietnam Veterans’ Memorial and Education Center which is in Holmdel, New Jersey,
28 and put me in touch with that group. It’s a museum as well as the New Jersey Vietnam
29 Veterans’ Memorial where all of the soldiers who were killed from the State of New
30 Jersey are memorialized. It looks a little bit like the, you know, the National Vietnam
31 Veterans’ Memorial—black granite slabs although it’s laid out differently than the

1 National Memorial. So, they invited me to come down and present *The Trail* and play it
2 and answer questions. My goal was to have about forty people attend. They let you come
3 down several weeks in advance and set up a display. I brought in my combat boots and
4 various different memorabilia. I had a couple of posters. I brought my whole family. We
5 had a wonderful time. We had a lovely reception after it. I had seventy people there. I'm
6 driving down the Garden State Parkway en-route to Holmdel. As I'm getting close to the
7 Vietnam Veterans' Memorial, here on the side of the road was a great big 1st Cav patch.
8 The soldiers who were in my chapter of the 1st Cav Division had placed these big posters
9 of the 1st Cav patch on the side of the road. They showed up. These people didn't know
10 who I was. I wasn't in the same unit as they were. It's like brothers in arms, right? They
11 showed up and they were there to support me. We had a very nice reception afterward.
12 Then, the final story about *The Trail* is that I was driving with my wife out to—one of the
13 people who had actually put me in touch with the education center there, the Vietnam
14 Veterans' Education Center in New Jersey had said in looking through the artwork—it
15 was signed artwork. He said, "You know, I think I know this guy. I think I'm familiar
16 with him. He lives down in Virginia and he is a veteran. He's a wounded veteran. He's
17 semi-paralyzed. I'll let him know." I didn't think too much about that. About a month or
18 so later, maybe a little longer, I'm driving out to my son's college to pick him up and
19 bring him home from school or bring him home for the weekend—whatever it was. My
20 wife and I are driving. My cellphone goes off and it's this soldier from West Virginia. He
21 says, "I understand you used some of my artwork in your presentation." By that point in
22 time, I had actually created a website, and I had the trail up on my website. He said, "I'd
23 really like to see it." So, I pulled over the side of the road and I gave him the website. He
24 went to the website. We interrupted the call while he played it. He came back on-line and
25 here I'm a little bit nervous because I thought, "Well, the DVD does not recognize any of
26 the contributors because the combat photographers weren't recognized. The artists were
27 not known to me. We just gave a credit unknown artists and photographers of the 1st Cav
28 Division who served there in '68, '69. This soldier calls me back and he said that he was
29 in fact a combat veteran who had been wounded in Vietnam and had been out with a
30 young guy who cuts his grass. The fellow was taking a break, and the soldier had his
31 Vietnam Veterans' cap on. The young man who was cutting his grass said to the soldier,

1 “Were you in Vietnam?” He said, “Yes, I was.” He stood up and shook his hand and he
2 said, “Well, welcome home.” The soldier said to me, “I’m so pleased and so proud to
3 have you include my artwork in your presentation. Thank you for doing that and
4 welcome home.” To be honest with you, that was one of the first times that anyone had
5 ever said to me, “Welcome home.” That’s code with Vietnam vets. People who say,
6 “Thank you for your service,” you know, that’s a throwaway. If you ever want to say to a
7 Vietnam Veteran that significantly means, “Thank you for your service,” you say,
8 “Welcome home.” We were never welcomed home, and it was very meaningful to me. It
9 made me feel like the work I had done on that DVD and written for *The Trail* was
10 memorable and useful and valuable and meaningful to the people who read it and read it.
11 It made me feel good that I did something worthwhile. That’s kind of the history behind
12 it.

13 JS: All right. Before completely wrapping things up, if you don’t mind, I have
14 some kind of broad questions to ask you to get your opinion on some of the larger aspects
15 of the war.

16 RB: Okay.

17 JS: First of all—you kind of touched on some of these issues a little bit. Looking
18 back on your experience and your service, how do you feel about your service in Vietnam
19 and also putting it into the larger perspective, how do you feel about American
20 involvement in Vietnam?

21 RB: Yeah, I would say that I had 180 degree turn on my opinion and my
22 commitment to the Vietnam War. I went over as a twenty-one year old coming from a
23 committed military family—an officer who had received the very best training that the
24 Army had to offer and one who felt that what I was doing in Vietnam, leading troops was
25 something that was important, worthwhile, made a difference, and had a significant
26 purpose in resolving the conflict to becoming someone who felt pretty much the
27 opposite—that my service didn’t mean anything, that my troops and my fellow officers
28 didn’t care about the commitment we had undertaken, that this 365 day endurance
29 philosophy that everyone had certainly impacted our philosophy and our beliefs and our
30 willingness to take risk—and also the fact that I was wounded and felt that I came pretty
31 close to death and that I lost a lot of my men. I put a lot of people in body bags. Well, we

1 didn't have body-bags. We used ponchos but same idea. It was the officer's responsibility
2 to fill out the form and attach it to the soldier's boot and to search the pockets to make
3 sure that there was nothing there that would be considered offensive and search for the
4 equipment. I put a lot of men in to wrapped ponchos, and I filled out a lot of death
5 certificates of my own men. I also know that I was responsible for overseeing the deaths
6 of a lot of enemy soldiers whether it was from calling in artillery or firing claymore
7 mines or shooting them in ambushes or killing them with my own hands. As I look back
8 on it today, forty years ago, and I really cannot see the value of my efforts. I really have a
9 very, very difficult time believing that what I did there was important, was necessary,
10 especially in light of all of the history that's come out about the Vietnam War. I certainly
11 felt the repercussions of the American public when I came back from Vietnam. My
12 service has never been respected even to this day. I don't want to take anything away
13 from the soldiers who are serving in Iraq and Afghanistan. They're risking their lives as
14 much if not more so than I did. Their service is respected. I think the country in some
15 respects feels really bad about the way they treated Vietnam veterans returning. Many
16 people are going out of their way to quote support the troops, put up banners, welcome
17 them when they get off airplanes in airports—I've seen them. I've seen the greeters
18 shaking the hands and clapping. I don't feel bad about that. I feel actually wonderful that
19 Americans are taking the time to thank the troops. But as far as my own service and my
20 own feelings about the Vietnam War, I really feel that it was a waste. It was a waste of
21 men and material and money and that my service really counted for little, almost nothing.
22 It was a big mistake. I don't know if that answers your question, but that's kind of how I
23 feel.

24 JS: It does. What was your reaction to April 30, 1975, and the way things came to
25 an end?

26 RB: Well, it almost seemed fitting. It was such an abortion of withdrawal and
27 retreat and leaving Vietnamese who had been supportive of American efforts leaving
28 them on the tarmac. The images of helicopters being pushed in to the sea because there
29 was no more room for them and the last soldiers loading on to helicopters with hundreds
30 and hundreds of Vietnamese begging to be evacuated. Those images stick in your mind.
31 The images of Americans who fostered children with Vietnamese women and those

1 orphans being castigated because they were partially American, partially Caucasian. In
2 some respects, it's just a fitting conclusion to an awful situation. I'm pleased that it was
3 finally brought to a conclusion. It's really a shame that it didn't happen a whole lot
4 sooner. It's really a shame that we didn't recognize that we shouldn't be there. This peace
5 with honor bullshit was something that we really were serious about because we were
6 not. We should have just gotten our POWs (Prisoner of War) out of North Vietnam and
7 negotiated a settlement. We could have done that in 1969 or 1970, 1971. It could have
8 been done then and should've been done then. The peace would have been to say, "You
9 know what, America has no business being there. Get the hell out. Withdraw the troops."
10 You know, you made such a tremendous investment, and you couldn't lose face. God
11 forbid that America should lose face and recognize that it was the first war we've ever
12 lost, but it's true. We did. We lost that war. There are 58,000 names on a black wall. In
13 some respects, I'm pleased that the flag that recognizes the Vietnam conflict is black. I go
14 to the Vietnam National Memorial all the time and I'm pleased that it's black. I'm
15 pleased that it's in the shape of a chevron. It brings back all the memories of being in a
16 foxhole, especially if you go at night, which I always do, and you walk down below the
17 level of the ground and you feel the coolness of the air below ground. It brings back all of
18 those feelings. I'm pleased that it's black and I'm pleased that we ended up
19 memorializing the 58,000 men who died, who gave up their lives. At the same time, I
20 say, "Why? What was accomplished?" The general consensus of the American public is
21 we lost and we did. We did lose. We wasted so many lives and so much money and
22 material. We accomplished nothing. We accomplished nothing. I wouldn't say I'm bitter.
23 I was bitter for a long time, but I've gotten over that. Now, I'm just really pleased to
24 participate in this program and have my work and what I did there, at least to some
25 extent, captured, memorialized. I hope someday somebody will listen to this and read it
26 perhaps or use it in some way to help people understand what we did there or what we
27 didn't do there—what we failed to do. I don't know if that answers your question, but
28 those are my feelings today.

29 JS: Just a couple more if you don't mind. I know you've touched on the issue of
30 the 365-day tour system. Do you think it was a mistake to do it that way? Would a point-
31 system like what they did in World War II had been better?

1 RB: They certainly have changed that philosophy for the troops who are serving
2 in Afghanistan and Iraq. They bring them home on a regular basis for R&R or stateside
3 refresher. There's no statement going over as to how long those troops will serve. I think
4 that if you know you're only going to be in this horrendous situation for 365 days in
5 advance of arriving and if you're an officer, you know you're only going to serve six
6 months or seven months in the field if you're an infantry officer as I was. Then, you're
7 going to get a staff job. It's even easier. You just say, "Hey, I only have to survive for six
8 months. If I get an R&R, it's one month less. I can squeeze out some vacation time here."
9 All of those things are taken into consideration in terms of your willingness and ability to
10 fight and accomplish the mission. Certainly, that philosophy had a significant impact
11 upon the troops that I commanded and the other officers and my commanders. No one
12 wanted to see Americans risk their lives. That translated into tactics which were very
13 conservative—always very conservative. You don't see that quite the same way with the
14 troops in Afghanistan and Iraq. That's my sense anyway.

15 JS: Okay, all right.

16 RB: You have to remember that I was a small-unit leader. I didn't make large
17 strategic decisions. By the time that the order got to me, it was move from point A to
18 point B and be there by such and such a time and be aware and be alert that there are
19 enemy in the area. That was our typical operations order. "This is where you are on the
20 map. This is where we want you to go to. Lead you platoon from point A to point B and
21 be alert to enemy activity in the area." If we even got that—that level of intelligence—so,
22 I didn't have any influence on any kind of a larger strategic initiative.

23 JS: Right. What's your feelings about modern Vietnam or Vietnam today rather
24 and the relationship that the United States is building with Vietnam through trade and
25 through tourism—veterans going back to Vietnam? What's your opinion on that?

26 RB: That's something I would really like to do. I have explored several of these
27 tourist groups that take soldiers back to their AOs (Area of Operation) and get as close as
28 you can to the areas where you were. Of course, most of the areas where I was were so
29 far out in the boonies that I haven't even got a clue where I was even if I had a map. I
30 would be interested and have a goal at some point in time perhaps if I can to go back.
31 I'm really very pleased to see the reconstruction efforts that have been made to take

1 troops back, to rebuild villages, and to more or less account for some of the tremendous
2 destruction that we brought on that country through bombing and by eliminating so many
3 young men from—I mean we lost 58,000, but they lost millions—the North Vietnam as
4 well. I'm personally very pleased to see that we've reestablished ourselves in some
5 respects doing something to make amends for the way we treated both the South
6 Vietnamese and the North Vietnamese. I'm also aware of the program that takes
7 daughters and sisters—they used to take mothers, but I think for the most part, most of
8 the mothers are now too old to travel. They have a number of programs where on a
9 voluntary basis troops who were in various units—the call it the Gold Star Program, I
10 think. Are you familiar with this program at all?

11 JS: Just vaguely.

12 RB: Well, they basically take daughters and sisters and female relatives of
13 soldiers who were killed in Vietnam, and they try to match them up with [volunteer]
14 soldiers who were in that same unit. The soldiers pay a fee to go back with these women,
15 and they go back in a group of twenty to thirty people. They'll have anywhere from ten to
16 fifteen women. They try to get as close as possible to the point where that serviceman
17 died, the relative died, and that woman is escorted by another soldier who was at least in
18 the same unit and they try and get somebody who may have even been in the same
19 platoon or the same company. The entire group goes from location to location where that
20 soldier and where that soldier was killed. They do know the coordinates of death because
21 that was one of the requirements that an officer had to certify when a soldier was killed is
22 to put down the exact coordinates where that soldier was killed. They have a ceremony
23 for this entire group for each of the women. They really get to know one another because
24 they're traveling together. This is about a two-week experience. It's a really wonderful
25 catharsis not only for the women to go back and try to achieve closure for the loss of their
26 loved one, but also for the soldiers themselves who are accompanying these women.
27 They finally go to Cam Ranh Bay, and they have a final dinner and ceremony. They lay
28 wreathes in the ocean. Of course, Cam Ranh Bay was the big R&R center for American
29 troops. The local Vietnamese have become aware of what they are doing, and they will
30 come and join in this memorial service, the final memorial service for all of the soldiers
31 who were a part of this Gold Star program.

1 JS: Oh, wow.

2 RB: I'm very pleased that on somewhat of a limited scale that that program is
3 ongoing.

4 JS: All right. Well, is there anything else that we should cover that we haven't? Is
5 there anything else you would like to say before wrapping up the interview?

6 RB: No. I think I have certainly talked about all of the things that I had wanted to
7 talk about and relate all of the information. I'm actually looking forward to receiving—
8 you indicated that I would get a copy of the audio. Is that correct?

9 JS: Right, that's correct.

10 RB: There would be a transcription eventually?

11 JS: Mm-hmm, yeah.

12 RB: I would have a chance what, to edit that or just make corrections to it or
13 what?

14 JS: Right, yeah.

15 RB: That may take a while?

16 JS: Yeah, let me go ahead and bring the interview to a close.

17 RB: Okay.

18 JS: Let me stop the recording.