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**The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Carl Vogel
Conducted by Jason Stewart
Date: 28 January 2011
Transcribed by Emilie Meadors**

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

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1 Jason Stewart: This is Jason Stewart with the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech
2 University conducting an Oral History Interview with Mr. Carl Vogel. Today is January
3 28, 2011. I am in Lubbock, Texas, in the Special Collections Library on the campus of
4 Texas Tech and Mr. Vogel is joining me by phone from Massachusetts. Is that correct,
5 sir?

6 Carl Vogel: That is correct.

7 JS: Alright, why don't we begin, if we could, if you could tell me a little bit of
8 biographical information about yourself? First of all, when and where were you born?

9 CV: I was born in Boston, Massachusetts on January 20, 1946.

10 JS: Okay, could you tell me a little bit about your parents? What were their names
11 and what did they do for a living?

12 CV: George, he was a portable hoisting engineer, and my mother was a
13 housewife, homemaker, if you will.

14 JS: Yes, sir. Did you grow up there in Boston?

15 CV: No, Denham, which is a suburb.

16 JS: Okay, alright. Well, if you wouldn't mind, if you could talk a little bit about
17 what growing up was like for you, what you do as a kid.

18 CV: Well, growing up for me was terrible, that's why I went in the military.

1 JS: Okay.

2 CV: I had a bad home life. My dad was a big drinker and verbally abusive to
3 everyone. So, I got out as soon as I could. I went out and I joined the Army the day I
4 graduated from high school or the day after.

5 JS: Well, when did you graduate?

6 CV: June 14th, 1963.

7 JS: 1963, okay. Now as a kid growing up, did you have any interest in the military
8 prior to that point?

9 CV: I didn't know, when I got into high school, I didn't really know what I
10 wanted to do. I was a cut up, if you will, in high school and my grades weren't great or
11 anything else. First off, financially I couldn't go to college. I didn't know what I wanted
12 to do. I knew I wanted to get into aviation, and I saw, although I explored other services.
13 The Army gave me the best deal, if you will. They gave me a thing where the guaranteed
14 me aviation school as long as I passed the school, they guaranteed me aviation. If I had
15 flunked the school, I could have ended up being a cook or whatever. I ended up in
16 aviation which is what I wanted.

17 JS: Well, had you had any relatives that served prior to you?

18 CV: Yeah, my father was in the Army and my uncle, I think his brother was the
19 biggest catalyst because he was a lifer in the Army and he kind of kept pushing me in that
20 direction because I was thinking of the Air Force or Marines. I don't know, you don't
21 want that. He arranged a battery of tests for me while I was still in high school. That was
22 on the QT (Qualification Test). You know, just to see if I would qualify for this aviation
23 program because he said I'd get the same tests when I signed up. So, I had already taken
24 the test and more or less, faced them. I knew I was good to go so that's what I did.

25 JS: Well, again, as a kid growing up prior to joining the military, did you pay any
26 attention to what was going on in the world with the Cold War and the U.S. Foreign
27 Policy type things?

28 CV: Well, I think the thing that really pushed me into going into the military was
29 October '62, which was the Cuban Missile Crisis. I said, "I want to go into the military."
30 That might have been the thing that, you know, the final straw, if you will, as to if I was
31 going to join the work force or go into the military. At the time, everyone had the draft

1 hanging over their head until they were 26 years old. I was seventeen so I figured I'll go
2 in when I'm seventeen and I'll be out when I'm twenty. Then I'd have a background and
3 training and what have you so that's what I did.

4 JS: Alright, well if you don't mind me asking, what memories did you have of the
5 Cuban Missile Crisis?

6 CV: Just that we could have been on the brink of a nuclear war with Russia. That
7 was kind of scary at the time, but the Russians backed down quickly so that's about all.
8 We didn't have a television or anything so everything I heard was by radio. The
9 television probably wasn't that good anyway at the time.

10 JS: So, you joined up pretty much the day after graduating from high school,
11 right?

12 CV: Yeah, but in order to get to aviation school, after they got the test results, I
13 had to wait until September to go in so that I could complete basic training within a
14 couple days of the starting date for the aviation school. So, I joined in June and then I
15 guess they called it a deferred enlistment because of the starting date. So, I didn't go in
16 until September 30th.

17 JS: Alright, what did you do in the meantime?

18 CV: Oh, I was a workaholic, mostly to stay out of the house. I worked. Christ, if I
19 could go to work 24 hours a day, I did. I did a little bit of everything, you name it, I did it.

20 JS: Alright, what was the process like of actually joining? Did you just go down
21 to a recruiting station?

22 CV: Yeah, and then I told them what I wanted. They had a program called Choice
23 Not Champs, where you were guaranteed, as long as you were able to pass the school.
24 They just explained that in detail and then I had to go for a physical. I passed the
25 physical. They said, "Okay, this is the date you report to the Boston Army Base." So, I
26 reported to the Boston Army Base, got sworn in and then decided right then and there I
27 didn't want to be in the Army or anywhere else, I want to go home.

28 JS: Right.

29 CV: And basic training that was just nothing within sixteen weeks of torture, but I
30 had never been away from home, overnight or anything else.

31 JS: Okay.

1 CV: And I was seventeen years old. Most everybody else in basic training were
2 draftees and were quite a bit older than me. I didn't have a tough time. Physically I was in
3 excellent shape, but the harassment. I was used to a little bit of harassment, but not like
4 you've got in basic training.

5 JS: Did you have to have a special waiver to go in at 17?

6 CV: Yeah, I had to get parental consent which my mother didn't want to sign the
7 papers, but my father wanted me to get the hell out. He wanted me out of the house
8 anyway because I was arguing with him all the time and he was going at my mother, and
9 I'd go at him. He just wanted me out anyway. Actually, I moved out a couple of weeks—
10 I went to move in with a neighbor a couple weeks before I finally left.

11 JS: Alright, where did you go do your basic?

12 CV: At Ft. Dix, New Jersey.

13 JS: Okay, could you talk a little bit more about what it was like in a typical day, if
14 you wouldn't mind, talking about that for a few minutes.

15 CV: What, basic training?

16 JS: Yes, sir.

17 CV: Up at like 5 AM, cleaned the barracks. They used to come in, I think it was at
18 like 5 AM. They used to give us great big metal trash barrel and throw it down through
19 the middle of the squad base and they used to call, "Drop your cocks and grab your
20 socks, get your ass in gear." If you didn't get out of the bunk, they'd tip the thing over
21 and it was wicked. And then you'd stand outside in the freezing cold, and they didn't care
22 if you weren't fully dressed, you'd go out the way you were. Some guys were naked,
23 some guys in their underwear, some with one sock on, some with one boot, whatever.
24 You were outside at 6 AM, period. It was up until I guess probably about halfway
25 through before either you got used to the harassment or it lessened, I don't know. What
26 they did is they mentally and physically broke everybody down until you weren't a
27 person anymore. Then they built you all back up so that you were a unit. The first time I
28 had a weekend pass, I couldn't wait to get back. I missed the structure. Until this very
29 day, my life was pretty well structured, and I thank the military for that.

30 JS: Were you in basic when Kennedy was assassinated?

1 CV: Yeah, that was November '63, yeah. I happened to be on guard duty that
2 night and they gave us real bullets when before they gave us blanks when you were on
3 guard duty. So, they came out and they said that the president had been assassinated and
4 they went on some type of alert status or something and they gave everyone who was on
5 duty live ammunition. So, they didn't know, I guess, whether this was a—they knew that
6 he got assassinated. It wasn't something that could have been the Russians invading the
7 country, who the hell knows. I don't know what they were thinking, they never told us
8 anything.

9 JS: Right.

10 CV: They just told you what to do. You just do it, you don't ask questions, you
11 just do what you're told. That was the military.

12 JS: Well, if you don't mind me asking, being a guy from Boston, from
13 Massachusetts, what was your reaction to the Kennedy Assassination?

14 CV: Well, I guess I liked him. He definitely had charisma. I don't know if he was
15 the best president we've have, but I was definitely upset that he got assassinated. I mean,
16 I personally, I can't stand Obama, but I don't want anybody to put a bullet in his head.
17 You know, it was just Kennedy was a real likable person. As far as his presidency, I don't
18 know. I didn't start getting involved with politics or watching politics until I got a bit
19 older. Now I'm old and senile and I just hate politics completely.

20 JS: Right.

21 CV: I don't know, it didn't really affect me one way or another, I guess.

22 JS: Okay, well getting back to basic for a moment, could you talk a little bit more
23 about your thoughts on the drill instructors? Were these guys Korean War vets or
24 anything like that?

25 CV: The one that I had at the start of basic training, his name was Mitnul, M-I-
26 TA-N-U-L, he was a great big black guy. He looked like an oak tree with arms. I mean,
27 he was the nastiest, rottenest son of a bitch that walked the face of the earth. But then
28 again, too, I was in the 4th platoon. There were five platoons and every other one of the
29 drill instructors was, if you will, a carbon copy. I mean, they treated everybody like
30 absolute dirt. Like I say, as the training progressed, as the days and the weeks went by,
31 either the harassment slowed down, you got used to it, or everybody was working as a

1 team, and it didn't seem like everything they used to pit the platoons against each other.
2 Then you get a half an hour off or something, whatever. They made soldiers out of us.
3 You know, when I got out of the Army, I really missed it. To this day forty years later I
4 still miss it. It was the best experience of my entire life.

5 JS: So then did you feel that basic was a good introduction to the Army?

6 CV: Well, it was a good introduction to what the [Army] was really about. You
7 know, even you. I don't know your background or anything, but once you get out of high
8 school and get away from mommy and daddy it's a big, cruel world out there. I learned
9 that at seventeen and not at 25 or 26. So, it was good for me. I think it should be
10 mandatory for everybody, I don't care, men or women. (Phone ringing in the
11 background) So that's a sore spot with me that they got rid of the draft.

12 JS: Okay, well how about the weapons training? Were you training on the M-14
13 at that time?

14 CV: Yup, they had a thing called train fire at the time. Which they had two
15 trainings, one was called KD, Known Distance, where you fired at targets at a known
16 distance, an X number of yards. I had at Fort Dix, what they called Trained Fire which
17 was pop-up targets. That's what I did was Trained Fire. Most everybody else was doing
18 KD that I had talked to from other basic training units.

19 JS: Alright. Well, before moving beyond basic, any other memorable moments or
20 even funny moments or anything like that that stick out in your mind?

21 CV: Well, there were a lot of things that could be construed as funny, but if you
22 laugh, you get in trouble. A lot of guys that I was with got killed. A drill instructor got
23 killed along with them at a hand grenade range. You were supposed to pull the pin, he'd
24 tell you—there was a pit right in front of you. You were in a sandbag bunker with like a
25 six-foot hole in front of you inside the bunker. The drill instructor would say, "Pull pin,
26 assume position, and then throw." As soon as threw, you hit the ground because these
27 were live grenades. This one guy got in there and he pulled the pin and then he dropped
28 the grenade.

29 JS: Oh no.

30 CV: The drill instructor tried to kick it into the pit, but the guy was in his way and
31 he both got blown up. So, that was pretty bad. This drill instructor was, you know, they

1 had different instructors for each portion of, you know, not only a platoon sergeant, but
2 everything else was a different instructor. Your platoon sergeant was always there, but
3 that was pretty bad. The only other thing that stands out in my mind is people who have
4 sticky fingers and are used to steal things. They'd come right out and tell you, "We have
5 a barracks thief, and I don't want to see this guy until he's in the hospital." They did find
6 out who it was through process of elimination and find out who it was and throw a
7 blanket over their head and throw them off the flight of stairs and push them off a
8 balcony or something. You know, that was a pretty good deterrent. I mean, that went on
9 all through the time I was in the military. There was always somebody who you would
10 try and grab something or somebody else. Then they already met the same fate if they got
11 caught. They got beat pretty bad and then they ended up with a medical discharge or
12 something. They used to beat them till an inch of their life. Oh yeah, they beat you really
13 bad. Then guys who wouldn't shower and stuff like that, they used to do the same thing
14 with them. They used to throw blankets over them and beat them with bars of soap that
15 were wrapped up in a towel. Then end up in a hospital in pretty tough shape. It's just stuff
16 like that. It's just stuff you got used to. I mean, people from all over the country, different
17 backgrounds, races, creeds, religions, political views, whatever. You had to learn to work
18 as one. By the time basic training was over, you were working as one. So that's what it
19 was for, and it worked very well.

20 JS: Alright, how about disciplinary enforcement for just minor things like normal,
21 everyday problems?

22 CV: Very harsh. I never got disciplined for anything. My uncle told me, "Keep
23 your nose clean, it's going to follow you the rest of your life." Which I found out is very
24 true. Discipline, it could range. I mean, you name it, it could range from anything. They
25 could have you in the middle of the field standing at attention for six or eight hours until
26 you passed out. And if you passed out, you went to the hospital. As soon as you got out
27 of the hospital, you were back out there doing it. They'd have you crawling around in the
28 mud. Take great big piles of wood and they'd tell you to move the pile over here and as
29 soon as you got up there, they'd tell you to put it back again. It was the same with rocks
30 and coal, you name it. "Here, take this pile. I want you to move it over there. As soon as
31 you get it over there, move it back." You would be out there all day and they didn't care.

1 Thirty degrees out, ten degrees out. I mean, it was winter in New Jersey. So usually, you
2 only screwed up once. Then the people that kept screwing up, they threw them out of the
3 Army. They got a discharge unfit for military service. But that was few and far between.
4 We had a guy who was in the National Guard, his name was Segal. He knew he was
5 going to get drafted. He was a schoolteacher from New York. He didn't want to be in the
6 Army, but he knew he had the draft hanging over him, so he joined the National Guard.
7 They hated anybody that was National Guard because they were ducking military service
8 by joining the National Guard. Which is the way we were all brought up. You're not
9 going into the guard or the reserves, you go in the regular military. But Segal was an
10 absolute screw up and they knew it and they knew he was doing it on purpose. He'd put
11 his boots on the wrong feet, he wouldn't button buttons. He wouldn't do this, and he
12 wouldn't do that. They'd make him march 25 miles with his boots on the wrong feet. I
13 mean, he screwed his whole body up by trying to get out on Section 8, they called it.
14 Well, the day before basic training was over, the platoon sergeant called us all together at
15 which time we were pretty much on a first name basis. He said, "Segal, front and center."
16 Segal—of course, he's all done with basic training. So, he's all done. He says, "Here you
17 go, Segal. You got your wish, here's your Section 8. Now get the hell out of my sight."
18 Segal started crying because he had already finished basic training. He was going to
19 graduate the next day and they threw him out of the Army. But they did stuff like that to
20 people. Who they knew weren't mentally challenged or anything, they were just trying to
21 get out of something? And it was usually guys who had gone in the guard or the reserves.
22 People who joined the regular army joined. They did it voluntarily. The draftees, they had
23 no choice. You know, you got drafted, you do your time, or you go to jail. I mean, it was
24 really simple. I got arrested after I got out because I hadn't signed up for the draft. I
25 wasn't eighteen when I went in. I didn't know anything about it. They grabbed me after I
26 got out, handcuffs. "You didn't sign up for the draft." I said, "I've already been in the
27 military." "Yeah, well bullshit." It took them awhile to sort it out, but they got it sorted
28 out. Believe me, I registered for the draft the following day.

29 JS: Did they issue you any sort of apology for anything for doing it?

30 CV: Hell no.

31 JS: Right.

1 CV: No, they came to my house, they said, "If you don't open the door, we're
2 going to knock it down." They came in, they grabbed me, they handcuffed me, they
3 threw me in the back of a jeep and drove me to Boston Army Base and they ripped me up
4 one side and down the other. Of course, then, they didn't have computers. It took them
5 awhile to find out, yeah, in fact I had been in the military already and I had been
6 honorably discharged, blah blah blah. Then they said, "Okay, you can go." I was about
7 twenty miles from home and how the hell and I supposed to get home? "You were in the
8 military, walk. It's only twenty miles." So, basically that's what it was. No big deal.

9 JS: Was this right after you had gotten out?

10 CV: No, it was probably a couple months after I got out.

11 JS: Okay, this would have been '67, '68?

12 CV: No, actually I got out in August of '69. That's when I got my honorable
13 discharge. You have a six year commitment.

14 JS: Okay.

15 CV: So, I went in September '63 to August '69.

16 JS: Okay, well once you finished with basic, where did you go to advanced?

17 CV: I went to aviation school at Ft. Rucker, Alabama.

18 JS: Okay, and could you talk a little bit about that training?

19 CV: It was tough. Learning aerodynamics and celestial navigation and this and
20 that, it was stuff that I never thought I would experience. I never would have heard of
21 half of it. I did alright, you know, I'm going to say I graduated in the middle of my class,
22 but before I graduated, right before I graduated, I'll say, a week before, they came into
23 the classroom, and they split the class in half. If you say there were four rows, you know,
24 side by side they'll say, "Okay, these two rows are Row A and these two rows are Row
25 B." This guy, he flipped a coin, and he says, "Okay, this half goes to Korea and this half
26 goes to Vietnam." That was how I ended up in Vietnam.

27 JS: Oh wow.

28 CV: So, I either would have gone to Korea or Vietnam. I had never really heard of
29 Vietnam. There was talk of it, but nothing on a big scale. You've got to figure this is
30 January of 1964. So, Vietnam was really not talked about much. Some people talked
31 about it, but not very often. Korea, but not Vietnam.

1 JS: Well, at this AIT (Advanced Individual Training), what was your MOS
2 (Military Occupation Specialty), what were they training you to do?

3 CV: I was, let's see, 670.0. Aircraft maintenance basic entry course. It was for
4 fixed wing aircraft. Of course, I never used the MOS anyway.

5 JS: Alright. And since they sent half of you guys to Vietnam, I'm assuming that
6 pretty much most of the guys in the class came like crew chiefs and stuff on helicopters?

7 CV: Yeah, well when I got to Vietnam, I had a fixed wing, if you will, MOS, and
8 they said, "Well, we don't have any fixed wings over here. We've got our helicopters."
9 You're going to be flying in them so it would be good of you to learn your way around in
10 an awful hurry. What you did is you started off with a hanger crew, the maintenance
11 crew. And then on an as-needed basis, you would go out and fly as a door dumber to
12 familiarize yourself with what the crew chief did and what was going on. And then you
13 transitioned into, as people rotated, you transitioned into the position of the crew chief
14 which is exactly how it worked with me. A hanger crew, door gunner, a crew chief.

15 JS: Well, how long did that training there at Ft. Rucker last?

16 CV: Well, I'm going to say six weeks. It may have been eight weeks, but I'm
17 going to say six, though.

18 JS: Okay.

19 CV: But it was an entry level. It wasn't an advanced thing. It kind of tracked me
20 to be a, what am I going to say, a mechanic's helper. Then you have on the job training
21 when you actually get to start working on these things. But I never worked on a fixed
22 wing when I was in. I did after I got out, but not when I went in.

23 JS: Well, given the fact that your MOS was different from what you would
24 actually be doing, was there any value in the advanced training? Was it helpful at all?

25 CV: What, going to Ft. Rucker?

26 JS: Yes, sir.

27 CV: Yeah, I learned aerodynamics and stuff like that. Although, I never even
28 looked in the door of the helicopter. I mean, when I got to Vietnam, that's all they had
29 was helicopters. When they told me I'm going to be flying in it, believe me, I learned in a
30 hurry. I was quite mechanical anyway, so it was no big deal. I picked up everything in an
31 awful hurry. I have many accolades from pilots for my abilities of the crew chief. I just

1 got one, an article written about me in a newspaper a couple years ago. I did a lot of
2 flying. Plus, they taught us all how to fly, too.

3 JS: Oh really?

4 CV: Yeah, in case of an emergency.

5 JS: Sure, sure.

6 CV: So, when I got back to the United States, I used to fly all the time. The pilot
7 would go to sleep. In the United States you only flew with a pilot and a crew chief. In
8 Vietnam you flew with a pilot, co-pilot, crew chief, and door gunner.

9 JS: Well, what if I came into the classroom and told you that half of you guys
10 would be going to Vietnam, what was your reaction to that?

11 CV: I didn't know anything about Vietnam. I mean, I knew I was going to go
12 somewhere anyway and all I heard about Korea was bad so I said, "Well shit, Vietnam
13 can't be any worse. At least it's warm there." I took that with a grain of salt. I found out
14 in a hurry it wasn't a nice place. The first night I was there they got attacked and
15 mortared and everything else. I said, "Holy shit, I don't like this place." But I did go back
16 for a second tour.

17 JS: Oh, you did, okay.

18 CV: Yeah.

19 JS: Alright, well did you go, was it onto Vietnam directly after Advanced?

20 CV: No, I went from Ft. Rucker, Alabama, to the Oakland Army Terminal. Then I
21 flew out on a, believe it or not, a propeller German plane and island hopped across the
22 Pacific. The jets were just coming into being. I flew on a cargo plane with no windows,
23 nothing. I mean, you're talking eighteen hours out of whack listening to those engines
24 screaming. There's no instillation, no soundproof, no nothing. I think the first leg was
25 three thousand miles. That was from California to Honolulu to Hickam Air Force Base. I
26 think that was probably like a ten, twelve hour flight. Then we went over there to Wake
27 Island and Wake Island to Guam, from Guam to the Philippines and from the Philippines
28 to Saigon. The shortest leg of the route was from the Philippines to Saigon. That was
29 probably six, seven hours on a propeller driven plane.

30 JS: Did you guys, when you would stop, did you spend much time on the ground?

1 CV: We did in Honolulu. We were there for a couple days, and we had engine
2 problems and we had to change one or two engines or something. Typically, we'd say
3 four or five hours because they had to refuel because they had to do this and that and
4 check the planes over and stuff. Wake Island was the worst. We had to stay there
5 overnight. That was a rat-infested shit hole, if you will. The only thing that was there was
6 a naval weather station. It was an emergency airstrip for the propeller planes so that they
7 could refuel. They couldn't go from Hawaii to Guam with the fuel that they had on board.
8 Wake was not good. You'd picture yourself somebody throwing you in an outhouse and
9 closing the door. That was Wake Island. I guess it's a pretty nice place now, I don't
10 know.

11 JS: Well, were there a lot of other guys going over there with you?

12 CV: Oh yeah, the whole plane was going over to Vietnam. It was officers and
13 enlisted men. There were a couple of us going to the same place, although we didn't
14 know each other, we didn't know we were going to the same place. Then we got to
15 Saigon, and they split us up and put us on another propeller driven plane to the battalion
16 headquarters and we got, I think two of us, myself and one other guy ended up where I
17 ended up. The rest of the guys got split up all over Vietnam. I flew a lot; I flew all the
18 time actually in Vietnam. I ran into most of them here and there all over the country.

19 JS: At that point in the war, I know the American presence wasn't that big at that
20 point. So, were most of those guys going in as advisors?

21 CV: Yeah, well I was with what they call MAACV, military advisory assistance
22 command Vietnam. Then the other one that was there was called MAAG. That was
23 military advisory assistance group. That was probably, and from what I remember, was
24 mostly like CIA.

25 JS: So, you came into country at Saigon? At Tan Son Nhut?

26 CV: Yes.

27 JS: Alright, well when you arrived in-country, what was your first impression of
28 Vietnam?

29 CV: This place smells like shit (laughing). Hot, humid, just the stench in the air,
30 everything. The thing that I found funny, which, I did end up travelling extensively all
31 over the world, something that was new to me was every place I went in Vietnam or

1 anywhere in Southeast Asia they had music playing, I don't know, a local rock station.
2 Hell, I don't know what it was, it was all in Vietnamese. But every place you went, there
3 was music played for all of daylight through these big loudspeakers. You know, it was
4 poverty. Dirt roads, open sewage ditches, it was a pretty impoverished country. Scenery
5 wise, I'd take it over any place I've ever been. The country was beautiful. I don't know,
6 after they started using the heavy folinates, I wouldn't have wanted to see what it looked
7 like, but they had just started that stuff right before I left.

8 JS: Well, what was in-processing like? Was that a very big deal?

9 CV: No, not really because I already had orders as to what aviation company I
10 was going to, and they told me they were going to put me on a plane and send me to the
11 battalion headquarters. From the battalion headquarters I'd check in there or something
12 and they'd send me onward to my final assignment which is what they did. But they had
13 to get us out of there. They had to get the planes out while it was still daylight so that we
14 could go probably about three hundred miles from Tan Son Nhut up into the central
15 highlands because they had no navigation aides. The airfields—the PSP was just
16 perforated steel planking or dirt. So, they had no runway lights, they had none of this
17 stuff. They had to do it in the daylight. So, it was hurry, hurry, hurry when I got into Tan
18 Son Nhut. I was gone probably about three or four hours after I arrived in-country at the
19 battalion headquarters.

20 JS: What unit were you assigned to?

21 CV: I was assigned to the 117th Aviation Company.

22 JS: You said the central highlands. Where were they based?

23 CV: The battalion headquarters was in Pleiku.

24 JS: Okay.

25 CV: That's where I went first.

26 JS: Okay.

27 CV: That was the 52nd combat aviation battalion of which the 107th. They had the
28 two aviation companies. The 117th and the 119th.

29 JS: Okay.

30 CV: I went to the 117th. The 119th was stationed at Pleiku.

31 JS: Alright, how long were you there in Pleiku?

1 CV: Overnight.

2 JS: Just overnight, okay.

3 CV: Which I got attacked my first night. I said, “Oh shit, well 364 to go.”

4 JS: Right.

5 CV: I was not happy.

6 JS: What happened that first night?

7 CV: Well, I got rocketed and mortared.

8 JS: Okay.

9 CV: That was a very rude awakening.

10 JS: So, the next morning, they send you off the next morning?

11 CV: Yeah, it was probably, I don’t know, no matter where you were in the Army,

12 it was 6 AM and I was probably on a plane to Qui Nhon at six-thirty, quarter of seven.

13 JS: Okay, well before moving onto Qui Nhon, would you mind describing Pleiku

14 just a little bit?

15 CV: Pleiku was a shithole. Everything was covered in red dust and red mud,

16 everything. I’m talking an inch of dust every time a helicopter or a plane came in or

17 anything, there was this red dust and stuff swirling all over the place. The place was

18 awful. I ended up flying in there, I don’t know how many times when I was in Vietnam.

19 Every single time I ended up staying overnight there for some reason the place got

20 attacked. That place was not a good place to be whereas Qui Nhon was completely

21 different.

22 JS: Well, what was Qui Nhon like then?

23 CV: Qui Nhon, we were in an old French Army compound, more or less, it was

24 right on the outskirts of the town. Actually, part of the town was around it and it was

25 like—Qui Nhon was a tropical paradise. I mean, the ocean was a hundred yards away.

26 You could hear the surf crash and Qui Nhon was beautiful, absolutely beautiful. I mean,

27 it stunk. The smell would kill you, but palm trees, banana trees, the place was beautiful.

28 At the time, it was pretty secure. We had very little trouble, although the longer I stayed

29 there, the more and more incidences we had of, you know, sapper attacks and stuff like

30 that. The Americans own the day, the Viet Cong owned the night. That’s basically what it

31 was.

1 JS: How big was the presence there at Qui Nhon?

2 CV: Eh, probably between eighty and a hundred. That incorporated that that was
3 the 117th aviation company, the 130th medical detachment, the 256 signal detachment, an
4 Air Force, a small Air Force unit, fire. You know, the crash rescue vehicles and stuff and
5 air —force weather station and then also, a small, they call it the 8th aerial port squadron
6 where the Air Force had two engine propeller planes transport the planes for whatever
7 they use them for. I never flew on one, so I don't know.

8 JS: Could you guys actually go into the town at all?

9 CV: Yeah, we'd go into the town. It was not a long walk, two hundred yards or
10 something.

11 JS: Alright.

12 CV: We still had to have a pass. You had to sign out and sign back in. We had a
13 curfew that I think was midnight and the town was mostly, by being geared to
14 Americans, it was mostly bars and brothels. Yeah, I'm starting to lose your voice there,
15 Jason.

16 JS: Okay, let me speak up some then. What was your impression of the
17 Vietnamese there in the town? Were they very friendly?

18 CV: Very, very.

19 JS: Well, what was the role of the 117th?

20 CV: At the time, they called it Ass in Trash. It was mostly resupply missions and
21 stuff like that. Resupplying Special Forces camps with blood ammunition, medical
22 supplies, food, fuel. We'd always had to swing all the fuel in, in 55 gallon drums. You
23 know, unless there was—we did a lot of troop insertions and extractions, but we had our
24 own—we had three platoons. Two, what they called flag ships and an armament on them.
25 A crew chief and a door gunner. Then we had a gun platoon with armed helicopters.

26 JS: Now, with the troop insertions and the resupply—

27 CV: I'm having a hard time hearing you, Jason.

28 JS: Okay, sorry. Would the troop insertions and the resupply and all that, was that
29 geared toward support for the ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam)?

1 CV: Well, yes and no. It was more geared to the Special Forces camps. Which
2 were scattered. Oh shit, they were everywhere. They had, of course, the Special Forces
3 were strictly with the ARVN's and so yeah, we would resupply them both, I guess.

4 JS: Okay, alright. If you wouldn't mind, if you could talk about some of the guys
5 in the 117th itself. You don't have to use specific names if you'd prefer not to. But I know
6 you talk about some of the personalities and things that you ran into there and got to
7 know.

8 CV: I was the youngest one that was there, age wise. There were a couple of
9 really good guys, and I will mention their names. One, his name was Wilby, W-I-L-B-Y,
10 Nelson. He kind of took me under his wing and he was a draftee. He was a really good
11 guy. He showed me a lot of stuff. "You don't do this; you don't do that. This is what you
12 do, and this is what you don't do." Another guy named Roger, R-O-G-E-R, Knudsen, K-
13 N-U-D-S-E-N, both of them are deceased now. I worked with Roger a lot on his
14 helicopter, and I made damn well sure that when Roger rotated, I ended up with that
15 helicopter. Because I loved that thing. I knew it from one end to another and I did end up
16 with it. Most of the guys were really good. There were a few disagreements here and
17 there with certain people and they'd beat the shit out of each other and then the next day
18 they'd be walking around with their arms around each other. I don't know, it was a pretty
19 tight group. Some of the pilots and stuff were a little bit standoffish because they were
20 officers and we were enlisted men, but for the most part, they knew, "Hey, you're sitting
21 behind them in this helicopter. We'll start getting shot at." Their ass depends on what we
22 do. You know, it wasn't like being in the United States where officers and enlisted men
23 for the most part got along. Although, we didn't socialize, we got along very well.
24 Especially when you got assigned your own aircraft and the pilots got to know you. You
25 didn't have the same pilots all the time, but a good bit of the time. So, it was pretty good.

26 JS: Then the crew wasn't always the same then, huh?

27 CV: No, the door gunners were always different. They used to pull cooks. They'd
28 grab anybody. When you go in the Army, you were trained to be an infantry soldier. So,
29 they'd grab anybody. They'd grab the company clerk or a medic or something and say,
30 "Hey, you're going to fly as a door gunner today." You know, they didn't start getting
31 door gunners until probably October, November of 1964 who were specifically trained to

1 be helicopter door gunners and they were the Wolfhounds which was the 25th infantry
2 division out of Schofield Barracks in Hawaii.

3 JS: Okay.

4 CV: Tropical lightning was there, the tropic lightning. That was their only
5 function in Vietnam was to be door gunners on the helicopters. Then usually you were
6 assigned a door gunner and you kept the same one. Unless it was a personality issue
7 which, sometimes it was, sometimes it wasn't. For the most part, no, but there were some
8 people that just didn't get along, period. It was like oil and water, and you couldn't fly
9 like that. Some pilots couldn't fly with other pilots, and it was just personality. It had
10 nothing to do with ability.

11 JS: Sure.

12 CV: I mean, it's the same. You have coworkers that you avoid, you don't like
13 them, and they don't like you, whatever. So, you can't do that in a combat situation.

14 JS: Alright, when you first came in, did you receive any of the new guy treatment
15 type things that went on or did you accept it pretty well?

16 CV: Not really, no. They had what they call—we lived in these little huts. There
17 were six or eight of us and then they called from hooches, and they always had a hooch
18 commander. It didn't matter what rank they were, I just ended up being a hooch
19 commander. I guess it was like on a rotating basis. The hooch commander, it was his job
20 to surprise you with this and this and this and everything about the place. I had a guy
21 from Georgia, his name was Presley Baskins, and he was a good guy. He showed me the
22 ropes and little by little, just wanted to say, "Hey, you've got to do this, or you've got to
23 do that, but it was good. Everybody was supportive, everybody. I didn't have any
24 problems with anybody. It was a pretty close-knit group.

25 JS: How about the leadership of the unit, was it good?

26 CV: Yeah, we had a major for a company commander, his name was McGuire.
27 He was also a pilot. I flew with him quite often. It was the same military structure,
28 though. You know, you're out at six o'clock in the morning doing exercises, they called it
29 the daily dozen which went on through my whole time in the military. Then they'd give
30 out the assignments and this and that. If you were a crew chief or whatever, you'd go
31 check with flight ops and see if he had a flight and blah, blah, blah. Usually that was

1 posted, and they would before so you'd know anyway. But there was very, very little
2 harassment or anything like that. I mean, you were in a regular army outfit, and you
3 weren't in basic training. It was more or less like being a civilian. I mean, you had a job.
4 You know, you got up in the morning and other than the exercises and the routine
5 bullshit, you get up in the morning, you had breakfast, and you went to work. Eight hours
6 later, ten hours, eighteen hours, however long it was, you went home if you will. The
7 whole military experience was like that. It was just like civilian life only it was very
8 structured, that's all.

9 JS: Alright, well how was morale at the time?

10 CV: Excellent.

11 JS: Okay, well you talked a little bit about, but could you talk a little bit more, I
12 guess, about the daily routine and what the schedule would be like?

13 CV: I can't hear you now, Jason.

14 JS: Okay, could you talk a little bit more about the daily schedule, like what a
15 typical day would be like if there was such a thing.

16 CV: A typical day formation, you had a revelry formation at 6 AM, breakfast, and
17 then when I was in the hanger crew, you went to the hanger and pulled maintenance on
18 helicopters. If there was nothing to do, you more or less hung around the hanger all day.
19 You know, you went back for lunch and then usually at four or five o'clock in the
20 afternoon, that was it. You didn't have guard duty you were on your own until the next
21 morning.

22 JS: How long did it take you to learn about maintenance on the choppers given
23 the fact on what you were trained to do?

24 CV: I'd say, being a very quick learner, I'd say less than a month.

25 JS: Okay.

26 CV: But I mean, even though I flew all the time I was in the military, while I
27 ended up being an instructor a year before I get out, but you know, it's like anything else.
28 You pick up something every day, some little thing. I learned very quickly, and I learned
29 also there were very little that would take some of these helicopters out through the air.
30 These things were work horses, they were made for the military, and they would take a
31 hell of a pounding with little or no maintenance.

1 JS: Alright, what were some of the typical types of maintenance jobs you guys
2 would be doing?

3 CV: Well, most of it at the time was preventative maintenance. Like on a car, you
4 get the oil changed, you get the tires rotated, whatever. It was the same. They had 25 hour
5 inspections which was a minor inspection. Then the 100 hour inspection was the biggest
6 one. We basically tore this helicopter apart and you put it all back together again.
7 Anything that was worn or showed any signs or wear or tear, cables, you name it, you
8 replaced it.

9 JS: Okay.

10 CV: I mean, there's no breakdown lane up in here. We didn't have—at the time,
11 as my time over there progressed, it got harder and harder to get parts because we were
12 getting shot at more and more and more. Especially like main rotor blades and stuff like
13 that, you get a bullet in the main rotor blade, you throw the rotor head out of sync and the
14 thing would vibrate like hell and you had to get that blade changed. We had trouble
15 getting blades. So, we had to wrap tape around the blades to take up and add weight to
16 the blade or what the bullet took out and that was a very time consuming process.
17 Because they had to be perfect.

18 JS: Alright, about how many hours a day would you say a chopper would
19 operate?

20 CV: Oh, well every time you took off with another flight, you could have seven,
21 eight flights a day for that one complete time wise, I'd say, when I first got there maybe
22 three to five hours a day and by the time I left, you were talking easily double that, if not
23 more. There were 12, 14, 16 hours a day.

24 JS: Wow, how long was it before you started going up with them? You started
25 flying yourself?

26 CV: Well, I got there in January—no, I got there in February. It was probably
27 April when I was a door gunner. I got my own helicopter in July.

28 JS: Okay, now when you say you got your own helicopter, would you have been
29 the crew chief at that point?

30 CV: Yup.

31 JS: Okay.

1 CV: That was my helicopter. It was assigned to me. You had to sign for it on a
2 hand receipt. 250,000 dollars which was a lot of money at the time. You're responsible
3 for it, it's yours.

4 JS: At that point, would you have the same pilot and co-pilot, or no?

5 CV: No.

6 JS: But you would always have your same chopper though, right?

7 CV: Yes, I'd have my same helicopter. I would end up with the same pilots here
8 and there, but the only platoon that had basically the same pilots all the time was the gun
9 platoon because all of these armaments systems operated a bit differently even though
10 they are identical. But they could have—you know, once you got used to having this
11 armament system work and sites worked and everything, they used to try and assign the
12 same pilots so that there was little or no room for error here. You know, trying to take out
13 something where you weren't going to be causing, you know, casualties other than what
14 you wanted to cause. So, the gun platoon, they usually had the same pilots and co-pilots.
15 Not always, but for the most part, the slick platoons, if you will, they bounced all over the
16 place. I ended up with one guy that used to fly with me all the time. He was a second
17 lieutenant when he got there and he was a pain in my ass, but we ended up being best of
18 friends. We've been friends the whole time.

19 JS: Well, how large was the maintenance crew?

20 CV: Eh, I don't know, six or eight guys to take care of about twenty-five
21 helicopters.

22 JS: Sounds like it probably kept you guys pretty busy then.

23 CV: Well, it did if a bunch of them got shot up or something.

24 JS: Right.

25 CV: That happened on occasion and then we'd be working, you know, we might
26 work 36 hours straight. If there was something with my helicopter, I had to stay with it
27 even though I wasn't physically working on it, the hanger crew was. I had to stay with it.

28 JS: Okay.

29 CV: And you stay there, and you keep your mouth shut. Otherwise, somebody
30 whacks you in the back of the head with a wrench or something and then says, "I'm
31 sorry."

1 JS: Well, once you started flying, did you enjoy it?

2 CV: I loved it. I loved every freaking minute of it. I was scared shit, don't get me
3 wrong. I was scared shitless every time that helicopter took off, but not afraid of flying.
4 More afraid of dying than flying. I mean, we flew with no doors, you know, I had a
5 seatbelt on. Two inches away from you was the corner of the seat and a couple of
6 thousand feet straight down. But it was pretty scary when you got shot at and stuff. I
7 mean, you could see the bullets flying all over the place. It's the one that you don't hear
8 that kills you. I heard most of them, so I lucked out there.

9 JS: Did you prefer the flying to standing back and doing the maintenance work?

10 CV: Oh, hell yeah, yeah. I didn't like flying in the rain and stuff because we had
11 no doors. I mean, you got soaked, but no, I preferred the flying even though it was
12 considerably more dangerous. I just liked flying, I loved it.

13 JS: Alright, what was the area of operations for the 117th? Where all were you,
14 guys going to?

15 CV: Well, most of the time we ended up going to the central highlands for
16 resupply. Sometimes we'd fly along the coast and do resupply and stuff then. Then we'd
17 have CA's, combat assault missions which were troop insertions and then we'd go back
18 for medevac for people who got wounded or sick or whatever and stuff like that.

19 JS: Alright, and the troop insertion, again, that was the ARVN's and Special
20 Forces guys?

21 CV: Yeah.

22 JS: Okay.

23 CV: Yeah, there were no American ground forces over there. They had just
24 started really coming into being when I was getting ready to leave.

25 JS: Alright, what was your impression of the ARVN?

26 CV: They were useless, absolutely freaking useless. You know, if you walked up
27 to an ARVN, you saw an ARVN soldier and he had an old M-1 Garand, or something left
28 over from World War II. You'd walk up to the ARVN soldiers, "Hey, I'll give you two
29 bucks for that rifle." They'd sell it to you and walk away. They'd go home. It was the
30 same with if you wanted a jeep to take for the ride or something, you'd just go buy one.

1 You know, the ARVN, oh yeah, 500 dong, five dollars American. It's a freaking jeep,
2 they didn't give a shit. They couldn't have cared less about anything.

3 JS: So, they didn't really seem like they were interested in fighting the war?

4 CV: No, no they weren't at all. There were some who were really hardcore. These
5 guys, you know, you were thrown if you looked at them cross-eyed, but there were few
6 and far between. For the most part, the ARVNs were absolutely fucking useless. In
7 anything!

8 JS: Did that have any kind of impact on you guys?

9 CV: Yeah, it did because we were getting helicopters shot down and we were
10 getting guys killed and badly injured in helicopter crashes and stuff. For what? I mean,
11 we'd put a company of ARVN's in somewhere and then they'd call for medevac because
12 this guy doesn't feel good and Christ, we'd have to go on what they call sick call. You'd
13 have half of them hanging on the sides of the helicopter because they didn't want to be
14 there. They wanted to get the hell out of there and go home. They'd be hanging on the
15 side of the helicopter. So finally, we just started taking off with them hanging off the side
16 of the helicopters and, you know, they'd lose their grip eventually and they'd fall off.
17 You know, hey, tough luck pal. That was the attitude where you ended up probably
18 wasn't good. They were useless, absolutely useless. That was my opinion. I don't think
19 they were. The Special Forces, they were more like mercenaries than ARVN's that
20 worked with them. They were probably, you know, gangsters, thugs, or whatever you
21 want to call them that worked with the Special Forces. Their regular ARVN companies,
22 they were just useless.

23 JS: Did you guys also work with or support the Montagnards?

24 CV: Oh yeah, they were great.

25 JS: Okay.

26 CV: Yup, they were great. And those were predominantly in the heart of the
27 central highlands. That's where they lived. The biggest honor that would be bestowed on
28 you is an American were brass bracelets which I ended up with quite a few.

29 JS: Okay.

30 CV: All they did was turn my wrist green. If they saw you with—if you flew into
31 a different hamlet, if you will, and they saw you with one of these bracelets on, you

1 know, this is a good guy. So, it worked out pretty well. They were good people and very
2 family oriented. They were just all around, they were great. I've never met one that was
3 bad. I had picked up some rudimentary Vietnamese language. That was a tough thing in
4 Vietnam because every district stayed, if you will. I don't know how to break it down,
5 but everybody had a different dialect and that was a big problem with the Vietnamese
6 Army. You're from Texas, I'm from Massachusetts, and even though we both speak
7 English we can't understand each other because of the dialect. You know, I can say,
8 "Well, you have an accent." I have an accent, but we're both speaking the same language.
9 So, that was a problem. A big problem with the Vietnamese Army. Half of them couldn't
10 understand each other. Then if you had two battalions, let's say, one that spoke this
11 dialect and the other one that spoke the other one, if somebody got their ass in a sling,
12 they couldn't get any freaking help because they couldn't understand each other and that
13 was a big problem throughout the war. I picked up on that immediately.

14 JS: Well, you mentioned that you learned how to speak some of the language.
15 What type of things did you learn how to say if you don't mind me asking?

16 CV: Well, of course, whore. I learned that one in a hurry, but just counting. You
17 know, numbers one through ten. Where's the this, where's the that? I could read menus.
18 Some of them were in French, some of them were in Vietnamese. But I learned greetings,
19 more or less, in a lot of different dialects so that I could, you know, if I met someone, I
20 could greet them in a proper manner. We always used to carry candy because everywhere
21 we landed, kids came out everywhere. Christ, I don't know where all the kids came from,
22 but Americans were good. We always gave kids candy. I mean, I've seen it from stuff
23 from Iraq and Afghanistan and everything else. Kids love American soldiers and that's
24 the way it was then, too. But I could speak with the elders without an interpreter. I could
25 get, you know, a little bit of information here and there and then a lot of stuff, if you
26 couldn't speak, you could pantomime. They would understand. They could draw little
27 things in the dirt. You wanted to go to a certain place. You could more or less pantomime
28 what you wanted and then they'd draw a little map for you and what have you. But it
29 made things easier for me. They tried to speak English, but I was in the thought, "I'm in
30 their country, let me try to speak their language instead." A lot of guys did that. They
31 were all human beings, I treated them as human beings. Some of the guys treated them

1 like absolute dirt. You know, these are less than human. You can't do that. These guys,
2 little by little would get shuffled off somewhere else. They'd say, "We don't need you
3 and your attitude." But that didn't happen very often.

4 JS: Alright, were the locals every helpful as far as, I don't know, warning you
5 guys or telling you where the enemy was? That type of thing?

6 CV: Yeah, one night we were told that we were going to attack the airfield, so
7 they did what they called aircraft dispersal. So, they sent me to Pleiku, which I didn't like
8 Pleiku anyway. Pleiku got attacked and our place never got attacked at all. Every place
9 that they sent the helicopters got attacked. So, it was misinformation. I don't know, the
10 longer I was there, the fewer and fewer people you could trust. When they were getting
11 paid to supply misinformation or whatever. Of course, the Americans were their own
12 worst enemies anyway. I mean, we had these Vietnamese planting mines in mine fields.
13 You know, you don't tell a son of a bitch where they are. You know, let the Americans
14 plant them. But they had the Vietnamese do it and then you'd see them on guard duty in
15 the middle of the night and you'd see somebody sneaking through the mine field with a
16 satchel on. Well, you know you're not going to step on them because he knows where
17 they all are.

18 JS: Right.

19 CV: So, you'd wait until they get up near the other wire and just shoot them. That
20 happened more and more frequently as my time over there progressed. It was always
21 somebody who had worked on a compound whether they be a cook, a cleaner, a barber,
22 or whatever. It was always somebody who worked on a compound during the day.

23 JS: Did it ever get to the point where they banned them for working on the
24 compound?

25 CV: Nope.

26 JS: It would never come to that?

27 CV: No, they were never smart enough.

28 JS: Alright, well getting back to the ARVN for a second, the problems with the
29 ARVN and the fact that they didn't seem interesting in fighting the war, did you guys talk
30 much about that?

1 CV: Yes and no. I mean, I didn't like the fact when we're doing troop insertions,
2 you know, getting shot at with heavy machine guns and rocket propelled grenades and
3 everything to drop these useless baskets somewhere and then have them screaming in the
4 radio an hour later that they needed to get extracted. You know, if someone calls for an
5 extraction, we went and got them. It didn't matter if they were there for fifteen minutes,
6 we never left anybody. ARVN or anybody else on the ground. They were just plain
7 freaking useless. That was not only my opinion, but I'd also say it was the majority. I
8 mean, some people thought they were great, but for the most part, everybody disliked
9 them greatly.

10 JS: Well, I know you talked about them hanging off the skids of the helicopter.
11 I've talked to some other guys that were on helicopters during the war. Some of them
12 mentioned about them not wanting to get off the helicopter—

13 CV: No, you had to grab them by the back of the shirt and the seat of the pants
14 and throw them off. You had to throw them, physically throw them out. They would not
15 get out of that helicopter. You had to throw them out and then you had to toss their rifles
16 and all that shit, whatever else they had with them out. No, they wouldn't get out. Of
17 course, they'd fool with some Americans, and they were just the opposites. They'd be
18 trying to jump out when you were at a hundred feet. Americans, no hesitation
19 whatsoever, out. But the Vietnamese, no, they didn't want to get out. The Vietnamese
20 rangers, they were a different story. They were pretty elite, and they would get out. The
21 only thing I didn't like about flying the rangers around was they used to bring their own
22 food with them, live. They had ducks and chickens and stuff strapped to their packs and
23 everything else, but you never had to worry about them getting out. They were just as bad
24 as the Americans. As soon as they could see the ground they'd be wanting to jump out
25 and you had to hold them, so they didn't jump out and break their legs or something. But
26 that was the rangers, and we didn't deal with them all that often.

27 JS: Alright, I've also heard a couple guys mention things like they were
28 concerned about the ARVN possibly leaving behind a live grenade. Was that a problem?

29 CV: Yeah, you had to be very careful what got left. So, we used to take
30 everything. It didn't matter what was there. We threw it out. The only problems I ever
31 had with them is (Audio volume lowered) hand grenades dropped in a fuel tank. Yeah,

1 with duct tape around them and the tape would wrap the tape and throw the hand grenade
2 in the (Audio at normal volume again) road ahead so that when you pulled pitch, it would
3 pull the pin out of the grenade or in the rudder control panels. When you push the pedal
4 to the tail roader, it would pull a pin in, and the helicopter would blow up. I experienced
5 finding a couple, but luckily, I always found them, but you picked that stuff up from
6 somebody else's mistake and usually it was fatal, but yeah, we'd just take everything they
7 had, throw it out, to hell with it. Even if it was important, who cares? We don't know
8 what's in and I'm not going to open it and pitch it out.

9 JS: Well, how about if we could change the subject for a minute and talk about
10 the other side of things? How about the enemy? How would you evaluate them?

11 CV: Very, very disciplined, cunning, smart. There was nothing that I could say to
12 detract from. They had a mission and of course, we all know they won, and they won just
13 by, you know, sheer willpower. Jesus, they brought the biggest military in the world to its
14 knees. The Viet Cong were excellent. Probably the only thing that I could ever compare
15 the Viet Cong to would be the usual Israeli Army or something. Take no prisoners, we've
16 got a job to do, let's get it done. And collateral damage, tough shit, we don't care. The
17 only other army in the world I know like that would be the Israelis.

18 JS: From your perspective, what was the difference? They come from the same
19 people, what was the difference between them and the ARVN?

20 CV: Political. It's like these Muslim suicide bombers. Well, they probably
21 weren't all Muslims, but they're suicide bombers, they're on a mission. Nothing's going
22 to stop them. The Viet Cong, it was the belief in communism or whatever the belief. I
23 mean, they were fanatics about it. It was the same of what we have now of the terrorists.
24 You know, they're fanatical and they don't care. I mean, they're willing to die for
25 whatever. The Viet Cong was the same way.

26 JS: Did you guys face Viet Cong and NVA (North Vietnamese Army)?

27 CV: I didn't see many NVA because I was not that far north at the time. I did see
28 them on occasion when we'd do it, we'd have to put some rangers or something in and
29 then you'd see them occasionally, but mostly when I was there, it was the Viet Cong.

30 JS: Okay.

1 CV: And they were pretty secretive. You didn't see them very often. You know,
2 they did all that stuff at night.

3 JS: From your perspective and what you saw, how did the Viet Cong operate?
4 How did they fight?

5 CV: Well, they operated in more or less complete secrecy. I mean, like I said,
6 some of these people worked on a compound during the day and they'd be trying to blow
7 you up at night. You know, I mean, you didn't know who they were. They didn't look the
8 same. They all were the same. "It's got all black pajamas, shoot it." Well, everybody over
9 there wore—the women wore white pajamas, and the men all wore black. You know,
10 what are you going to do? You couldn't kick them out. I mean, if you see a string of them
11 walking across a rice patty carrying rifles and stuff, well that's a different story. Even
12 with a troop-carrying helicopter like mine, we go, and machine gun them. Usually, we
13 flew in a gunship escort anyway and then we'd just throw a smoke grenade and let a
14 gunship go with the rockets and stuff. You know, we didn't have to climb and get out of
15 small arms range and let the gunships do the work. That's what they were there for. They
16 were there to provide cover for the troop carriers.

17 JS: Well, when was your first encounter in combat with the enemy?

18 CV: The very first time—no, probably the first time I flew as a door gunner, we
19 went into a hot landing zone, if you will. Which meant that there was ground fire. You
20 know, you just open up with a machine gun and hope like hell they duck. Most of the
21 time you couldn't see where the bullets were coming from so, you'd just fire in the
22 general direction and hope they were as smart as you are and ducked. That usually
23 worked out pretty well. Although, I did shoot some people up close and personal where
24 they got within ten, fifteen feet of me from jumping out of somewhere. Luckily, I was
25 quicker on a draw than we were. Then again, too, I had a machine gun. They didn't.

26 JS: Well, aside from the M-60 that you had, did you carry any other type of
27 weapons?

28 CV: The M-14.

29 JS: The M-14's, okay.

30 CV: The door gunners, when I first started flying as a crew chief, the crew chief
31 only had an M-14. The door gunner had an M-60. They didn't have enough M-60's. So,

1 the crew chief would have to use an M-14 and you'd just put the selector on automatic.
2 They had 20 round magazines and you go "BRAHAT", and 20 rounds are gone and hope
3 like hell you hit something because they'd climb on you. You had to hold the thing down.
4 You had to wrap your arms through the sling and hold it down because they'd climb. I
5 don't know how many helicopters I saw. The roof of the helicopter laced with bullet
6 holes because somebody didn't know how fast those things could climb. They'd have to
7 hold down. I mean, these guys, like I told you, took me under their wing. They had me
8 out with the M-14. Here, this is how you hold it while you're in a helicopter. You know,
9 blow your own rotor head off. So, I was pretty knowledgeable. It was tough. You don't
10 want to carry a whole bunch of magazines and stuff. I found it better to fire it on semi-
11 automatic. Then I could at least aim it. Semi-automatic as fast as you could pull a trigger.
12 But 20 rounds lasted a lot longer a half a second if it was on full auto. We did try, at the
13 time was the AR 15, which ended up being the M-16. That was useless. The bullets were
14 too light, and the thing was just useless. It was a plastic piece of junk. They used to jam
15 all the time and everything else. They used to smash them and throw them out the door.
16 "What happened to the AR-15?" "I don't know, the freaking thing fell out the door. I
17 don't know what happened to it." We used to call them Mattel toys. I mean, they were
18 junk. I guess they ended up being pretty good after a while, but there was a hell of a lot of
19 people who came home in body bags because they had an M-16 rather than an M-14. M-
20 14 was very heavy, but if you hit somebody with an M-14, if you hit them in their left
21 hand, they were dead. I mean, they would blow you to pieces. One bullet and one of
22 those would tear you to pieces.

23 JS: Well, how about the enemy? What type of weapons did they have?

24 CV: Swedish K sub-machine guns. They had Uzis; they had a lot of old World
25 War II shit. They had a lot of old bolt action rifles. I don't know if they were old French
26 rifles or American. Once in a while we'd go in and shoot up a village or something and
27 I'd have to go in there and clean it up and find a couple of 30H Springfield's or
28 something. You know, we'd find muskets and crossbows. You'd name it, Christ, they'd
29 throw rocks at you.

30 JS: Wow.

1 CV: The one helicopter got a bamboo arrow in a radio compartment and
2 destroyed a hundred thousand dollars' worth of radios with a freaking piece of bamboo.

3 JS: Wow.

4 CV: And that was fired from a long way away.

5 JS: Wow.

6 CV: The bamboo arrow would go through a piece of mahogany. Then I was
7 driving a truck one day and a bamboo arrow came right through the door, steel door. The
8 bamboo arrow went right through the door. Nobody got hit, but the arrow went through a
9 steel door.

10 JS: Right. Well, was your helicopter, whenever you'd be on a mission, was it hit
11 by enemy fire very often?

12 CV: Yeah, mostly in a tailbone because they didn't know how to lead them. I had
13 one come up through the floor between my legs and go out through the roof. I said, "Holy
14 shit, this ain't right." Yeah, I'd probably get fifty or sixty hits.

15 JS: Would you guys have a flak jacket or anything for protection?

16 CV: Yeah, we wore flak jackets. The flak jacket wouldn't stop a direct hit, but it
17 had slowed down, not stop, but not a direct hit. Where we were carrying troops, we
18 couldn't have armor plating, so we used to sit on phone books. A phone book would stop
19 a bullet. So, there wasn't a phone book in Vietnam. The Americans had them all in the
20 helicopters on the seats. But then as the armor plating got better and better, thinner and
21 stronger, they started arming helicopters and putting armor plating in the troop carriers.
22 The gunships didn't have armor plating for weight reasons, too, but they had a hell of a
23 lot of armament. But it was the troop carriers that had to sit on the ground and everything
24 for the most vulnerable. It was just pure weight. The air was just so goddamn heavy over
25 there, these helicopters didn't want to fly to begin with. You know, you used to have to
26 bounce them off the ground and everything else and slide them down the hill to get some
27 lift. You know, you had a lot of weight on board. There was armament in both side of the
28 windows. It was honeycomb aluminum for the pilot and co-pilot. And then they had a
29 thing in the windshield called a chicken plate. They could slide down underneath. For the
30 most part, they could kind of hide their chest, their head was wide open. Trying to get a

1 headshot from somebody on the ground, that would be, you know, that would be a pretty
2 good shot.

3 JS: Well, I've heard of guys sitting on helmets and things as well. Did you guys
4 do that, too?

5 CV: Well, just picture yourself trying to sit on one of them for a few hours, it
6 doesn't work. They had what they called—well, we called them ball protectors, groin
7 protectors, for what? I don't know, but we used to sit on them and then found out that the
8 phone books worked a lot better. So yeah, I used to see guys sitting on helmets. That
9 freaking thing isn't going to stop a god damn bullet anyway, the bullet would just go
10 through the helmet. I said, "Why the hell is this so uncomfortable?" You'd see the guys. I
11 mean, they're sitting on the helmets and the bullets going to the floor, it's just going to
12 slow it down when it goes in your ass, that's all. It's not going to stop it; they weren't
13 bullet proof. All it was, was a piece of tin. I never sat on a helmet. Well, I probably did. I
14 probably tried it a couple of times and said, "Nah, it's probably trying to sit on a bicycle
15 with no seat. No comfortable at all.

16 JS: Well, any particularly memorable flights or missions that stand out in your
17 mind?

18 CV: The one that I'm staring at right now, I've got a great big picture on the 21st
19 of July 1964. I was in a crash in Bong Son I can't tell you the specifics of it because they
20 just came out of the Freedom of Information Act. It was written up as suspected material
21 failure. It wasn't material failure, it wasn't pilot error, it wasn't anything, but that's as
22 specific as I can get. I mean, I know the whole story now, but it took me forty years to
23 find out. That wasn't my own helicopter. I had a premonition that my helicopter was
24 going to get shot down and they were pretty good with superstitions there. So, this guy
25 swapped helicopters with me and his went down and mine was the one that came in and
26 picked me up. So, so much for it, but they were pretty good about that stuff. If you had
27 some premonition that something dire was going to happen, something life threatening or
28 something, if you could get somebody else to take their aircraft. As long as they were
29 qualified, they really didn't care. They were pretty lenient with that, but I mean, up until
30 the day he died, which was a couple years ago, he said, "You know, you should have
31 stayed in your own goddamn helicopter that day, you wouldn't have lost half your hip."

1 Which I lost when the helicopter crashed and rolled over. I got banged up pretty bad. You
2 know, I'm still alive.

3 JS: Was anyone else hurt?

4 CV: Yeah, one guy got killed. He was Vietnamese.

5 JS: Okay. Well, were you out of commission so to speak for a while?

6 CV: Yeah, I was out of commission for about five minutes. They said, "Oh Jesus,
7 let's clean that up, there's a helicopter over there, go." That was it, you know. There was
8 a crew chief on that one and it got him and shot him through the leg. You know, I
9 couldn't walk, I couldn't do anything. They said, "You don't have to walk, all you got to
10 do is sit there. Get your ass over there and go." You know, that was the military.

11 JS: Well, how long did it take you to recover from it? Or have you fully recovered
12 from it?

13 CV: Huh. I guess I never fully recovered. I didn't know until about three weeks
14 later that I had a broken back, too. I had broken a vertebra in my back, and it was a
15 couple weeks later. But you'd have to be dead to get off flight status. I mean, they had a
16 slip that the medic, the flight surgeon used to write DNIF, duty not involving flying.
17 Usually, the only way you could probably get one of them was, you know, have sex with
18 the medic which didn't happen. I mean, you just did not get out of flying. The only thing
19 that would get you out of flying with no problem at all was a head cold. Because your
20 ears and the pressure with the altitude and stuff, the constant changes in the up and down,
21 up and down all day. You had a head cold. They would check that too, make sure your
22 ear drum was red or something. That was just about the only thing that would keep you
23 from flying. When you were on flight status, you flew every day or every time you were
24 scheduled to fly. There were no excuses. Hangover, they didn't give a damn, whatever,
25 no excuses, you fly. So, we had an eight hour rule anyway with drinking. Not that it
26 worked all the time, but for the most part, yeah. If you had a hangover you went into the
27 hanger and you got a little welding torch and you turned the oxygen bottle on and you
28 took a couple of gulps on oxygen. I didn't know it and it did instantly cure a hangover,
29 but you could probably die from oxygen poisoning, either. Too much pure oxygen will
30 kill you in a hurry. But, eh, I was stupid. I'm telling you, that was an instant cure for a
31 hangover. Which I used many times in civilian life until I stopped drinking about twenty-

1 five years ago. This phone is starting to beep, Jason, so it's going to start going dead. Do
2 you want to pick this up again sometime?

3 JS: Sure, do you want me to send you an e-mail?

4 CV: Yeah, send me an e-mail with your schedule and I can see if I can get with
5 my schedule and get on the same page. I just don't want this to cut off in the middle of
6 something.

7 JS: Thank you for your time today.

8 CV: Thanks, you too.

9 JS: Talk to you next time.

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Interview with Carl Vogel

Session [2] of [2]

Date 7 February 2011

1 Jason Stewart: This is Jason Stewart with the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech
2 University, continuing an Oral History Interview with Mr. Carl Vogel. Today is February
3 7, 2011, and this is interview session number two. Okay, last time when we left off, we
4 were talking about what happened on July 21, 1964, when your helicopter went down in
5 the Bong Son, of course. I want to ask you, are there any other particularly memorable
6 flights or incidents that happened during your time there that you could possibly talk
7 about?

8 Carl Vogel: If there was one, it was probably in late August of '64. I was at the
9 base at Pleiku, which was our battalion headquarters, and we were doing resupply
10 missions to Special Forces Camps. We flew into, oh, I don't know, three or four of them.
11 They were having trouble with the hydraulics. I told them, "Well, there ain't shit I can do
12 about it here." I said, "You're going to find someplace to put down. They didn't need
13 hydraulics. The particular hydraulics were rotor controls. It acted like power steering.
14 You could still use the controls without the hydraulics, but the hydraulics were definitely
15 a plus. So, they flew to the big army base at Nha Trang, and they landed at Nha Trang.
16 We were supposed to go there anyway because, you know, that's where we would have
17 picked up a bunch more supplies and more fuel and everything else. I looked at the
18 hydraulics and they were leaking everywhere. I talked to the pilots first. I said, "I'm
19 going to ground this aircraft." He said, "Well, if you ground it, we can't do anything. We
20 can't go anywhere once the aircraft is grounded." He said, "How the hell are you going to
21 fix it?" I said, "Well, if I ground the aircraft, you can circle the red X." Which means it's
22 good for a one-time flight only and that's it, it's on the ground. It doesn't go nowhere. He
23 says, "What the hell is that going to do?" I said, "Circle a red X." I said, "I'll fill this
24 thing, reservoir up to the top." I said, "Don't use the hydraulics unless you have to." I
25 said, "We can fly this thing back to Qui Nhon with the circled red X." I said, "I can fix it
26 there." Which was my home base. So, that's what they did. They circled the red X and
27 went back to Qui Nhon and fixed the hydraulics. I guess that really wasn't—there was
28 another one, probably about the same time. We got called to go pick up—I think it was
29 some ARVN's, I don't really recall whether it was ARVN's or Special Forces or what. I

1 looked at the map with the pilot and it was at night. We were in a place called Phan Thiet
2 which was down in the Mekong Delta. I don't know what we were doing down there, but
3 we were down there. I said to him, I said, "We're not going to have enough fuel. I said to
4 go out there and back." I said, "It's not conceivable." He says, "Well, we're the closest
5 ones." I said, "Well shit, what the hell are you going to do? It's the middle of the night."
6 He said, "What the hell, we'll go." So, I said, "Okay, it's our funeral, who cares, let's
7 go." We went out there and we picked these people up and we're probably 35 to 40
8 minutes out of landing at Phan Thiet. We didn't have any trouble with the extraction or
9 anything else, but we were probably thirty or forty minutes out of Phan Thiet, and the 20
10 minute fuel warning light came on. I said, "This is not good." And he said, "Yeah, that's
11 not good. How accurate are these things?" I said, "Well, I've never really checked." It's
12 like the low fuel light on the car, how far can you go? It doesn't matter what the hell the
13 book says, but this said the 20 minute fuel warning light came on. He says, "I'll increase
14 the power." I said, "Don't increase the airspeed because then you'll be burning more
15 fuel." He says, "Well, okay." I said, "Just get down as close to the ground as you can
16 safely, shut off the navigation lights, and we'll see if we can coast in there." We were
17 probably, I don't know, fifteen minutes out or something, but we were probably flying
18 2,000 to 2,500 feet. You could see the airfield at Phan Thiet, it was all lit up because we
19 had called in. Then the master caution light came on. When the master caution light
20 comes on, you've really got a problem. So, he says, "Jesus Christ." Around Phan Thiet it
21 was all rivers and swamps, I mean, you name it. It was a very hostile place, if you will.
22 Not enemy wise, but terrain wise to have to put down. So, I told him, "Get as much
23 altitude as you can out of this thing." I said, "If we have to, we'll go into dead stick, no
24 engine." So, he climbed to about 4,000 feet, 4,500 feet. Because if you get up too high,
25 you can't breathe because we had no oxygen or anything. Of course, we flew with no
26 doors or anything. So, he got probably up around 4,000, 4,200 feet or something and we
27 called in an emergency. We declared an emergency that the low fuel light was on, and it
28 had been on for about twenty minutes and the master caution light was on, which meant
29 the thing was going to run out of fuel, period. There was no way we were going to make
30 it. We were probably, I'll say, about a quarter mile out the end of the runway at Phan
31 Thiet and the engine shut down. I said to this guy, "How good are you to rotate this

1 thing? No engine, and just keep the thing in the air as long as you can before you run out
2 of room?" It was kind of like the pilot that landed the plane on the Hudson. They just
3 kept putting pitch in the blades and that would basically stop the aircraft in the air or slow
4 it down, so it wasn't doing anything. Then you'd take the pitch out of the blades, you
5 flatten it out, and it picks up forward speed and you're just back and forth on the
6 collective stick, on a cyclic stick. They glide like a rock, but they will stay in the air. You
7 give the guy credit, he put the thing probably about three hundred yards beyond a marker.
8 He put the thing down right on the runway and he got the Distinguished Flying Cross for
9 that. I don't know why. Of course, every time I had one pilot with a Silver Star and this
10 and that and all this other shit, the pilots got everything, the crew members never got shit.
11 You know, we were there, too, but enlisted men got nothing. A couple other things, you
12 know, bullets tearing through this and through that and through the rotor blades and
13 through the hydraulics and up through the floors and through the windshields. It was
14 something you never got used to, but hey, it didn't hit you or, you know, so the
15 hydraulics, you could deal with a hydraulic leak. The only thing it couldn't deal with is
16 something went through the transmission oil cooler or an engine oil cooler or something,
17 then you had a problem. But usually that was when you were coming in for a landing that
18 hit something like that. And you were on the ground anyway, so it didn't make much
19 difference. You know, there were just so many small incidents that you just kind of put
20 them out of your mind. I don't know, there were probably twenty-five or thirty of them,
21 but you don't pay any attention to them after a while.

22 JS: Right.

23 CV: You know, shit happens, and nobody got hurt, who cares. A lot of the stuff I
24 recorded in my own—I kept my own flight log, if you will. A lot of stuff I recorded, but
25 it was a lot of little things that I didn't. You'd get a bullet hole through something. We
26 got back to the base, and if I had a couple of minutes. I had my sister send me some
27 purple nail polish. Well, it wasn't really purple, it was kind of reddish purple and I'd
28 paint little purple hearts on the side of the helicopter. There's one picture that's in the
29 archives of the right-hand side of the helicopter and there's three purple hearts on that
30 side which means there's either two or three on the other side. It went back and forth.
31 There could have been three on the other side, too. You just went back and forth between

1 the sides. It's not specifically which side it went into. And then if you get multiple hauls
2 of something, you know, a lot of guys would put down multiple holes and you usually
3 just got stuck with the one. You got five holes and you got one that would have loaded
4 the whole side of the thing. But for the most part, the Viet Cong were notoriously lousy
5 shots. They probably weren't lousy shots. They hit the helicopter, but they didn't know
6 anything about weeding or anything. So, by the time the bullet came up, usually it hit,
7 you know, most of the hits are on a tail boom or rotor blades because they didn't lead the
8 thing. You know, they should have fired six feet, ten feet in front of the thing. And then it
9 would have been something really bad, like a crew member or something else. Most of
10 the hits that I took were in the tailbone. Some through the cab and stuff, one between my
11 legs, one through the leg of my flight suit. One hit my helmet which I didn't know about
12 either. I said, "What the hell is that? Holy shit, I never felt it." It grazed the side of the
13 helmet, but again I sat down, and the door gunner got in, "Oh there's the exit hole right
14 above your head", but it went out through the bulkhead behind me and didn't miss
15 anything. It put a hole through the engine deck, but it didn't hit anything. But there were
16 a lot of little things like that.

17 JS: Well, speaking of coming into contact with the enemy, I know you briefly
18 mentioned last time, but could you talk more about combat assaults, I guess the procedure
19 for a combat assault and how one would work.

20 CV: Well, I think that those things were constantly changing with the advent of
21 newer and more powerful gunships, you know, with increased armament and different
22 kinds of armament and everything else. I flew what they called a slip ship, no armament.
23 Mine was, you know, insertion, extraction, medevac, for the most part, resupply sling
24 load and shit and everything else. If we were going to have a combat assault mission,
25 which they called a CA, we'd have a briefing. Well, we had briefings before everything,
26 but with a CA, you had the pilot, the co-pilot, the crew chief, and a door gunner for
27 everybody who was going to be involved in this assault mission. They would tell you
28 where they were going, they wouldn't tell you name-wise, to give you map coordinates,
29 because there were Vietnamese in there, too. Of course, the Vietnamese they get on the
30 phone and "they're going to land in this place." You give them map coordinates and they
31 didn't know. Of course, some of them had maps and some could read them better than

1 some of my useless pilots. But they'd tell you, if you got shot down, if you crash, they
2 tell you, "Stay with the aircraft, destroy the aircraft" and we always carried incendiary
3 grenades. You take a machine gun, you shoot up all the radios, and then you blow the
4 aircraft up, and you burn it. They'd tell you which way to go; north, south, east, west,
5 northeast, northwest, and tell you which way to go for your best chance of getting picked
6 up. So, they weren't sending you into where they figured the enemy was. It was sending
7 you away from it. Basically, that was debriefing. You know, good luck and happy trails
8 or whatever they used to say. And then the next morning they'd say, "flight crew wake up
9 at 0400, take off at 0600, rendezvous at these coordinates, pick up whatever you're going
10 to do. Usually, you went somewhere else to pick troops up. There were very few times
11 where—well, maybe a half a dozen that the Vietnamese, the ARVNs were in Qui Nhon,
12 and we took them right out of there. Most, more often than not, we picked them up
13 somewhere else and then proceeded onto our assigned insertion point. Prior to that, the
14 gunships are going to work the place over. Then we'd go in and we'd land and throw
15 them out and just back and forth they just called each troop insertion a lift. They usually
16 did, I don't know, I'd say anywhere between five and seven lifts depending on how many
17 troops we had. We always flew, for the most part, the 117th with the 119th out of Pleiku
18 because we were both in the same battalion. You know, they'd put like thirty, thirty-five
19 helicopters together instead of fifteen and not twenty. The same with the gunships. They
20 had like one gunship for every, I don't know, six or eight troop carriers. It was like three
21 to one. That's what we did. And then the gunships, they would just stay in the air, and
22 they would fly cover while we were sitting on the ground. If something happened, we'd
23 throw smoke, and the gunships would come in on the smoke. If you got shot at and you
24 threw a smoke grenade, immediately in my hand, ready to pull the pin and you drop it out
25 the door, it would fall in the general vicinity of where the shot came from. A channeled
26 vicinity which could be the size of the football or something. The gunships are going on
27 the smoke and just shoot the place up with rocket machine gun fire. That was basically
28 that was the CA. You had to have twenty-five OCS other than combat support missions
29 for one, I think it was one combat hour where in a combat assault, for each hour, you got
30 an hour. That went toward the air medals. All kinds of awards, combat crew chief
31 landings and combat crew chief. All kinds of shit, I don't know remember the exact

1 numbers. It was a difference between combat assaults that was in the other hours. It
2 didn't count towards total hours, but medal wise, it depended on the type of mission. The
3 medals didn't mean anything anyway. They handed them out like freaking candy.

4 JS: Well, going in on a CA, from what you remember, about how often would the
5 LZ's (Landing Zone) be hot?

6 CV: Well, you could go into an LZ that you expected to be hot, and it would be
7 cold. Maybe on the third or fourth lift or something there would be Vietnamese on the
8 ground all the time. By now we probably have sixty to probably a hundred Vietnamese
9 soldiers on the ground. You would in and get the shit shot at you. A lot of times, it was a
10 damn ARVN shooting at you.

11 JS: Really?

12 CV: Oh, hell yeah. I mean, I dropped some Arvin's one time and the damn son of
13 a bitch turned around and he pulled a rifle right at me. I said, "Well, I hope you've said
14 your prayers. You're going to go see Buddha right now, hit them with a machine gun."
15 But it got to the point eventually that the ARVN was so infiltrated with Viet Cong and
16 stuff, we'd drop them off or throw them out, as you heard from other guys, they didn't
17 want to get out. We'd throw them out and take off and then throw all their weapons out.
18 You know, we'd leave them on the ground with nothing and then throw them out a
19 couple hundred feet up in the air. A lot of them probably broke when they hit the ground,
20 but we didn't give a shit anyway. They were just absolutely useless.

21 JS: About how many troops could the helicopters carry?

22 CV: Well, a lot of it depended on the temperature, how hot it was because it was
23 always hot. The average temperature was probably about a hundred degrees. How much
24 fuel we had on board, the longer we flew, the more we could carry because we were
25 burning our fuel. These things burned about a gallon a minute. We had a 155 gallon fuel
26 tank and if the thing was sitting right, it was all dependent on the angle it was sitting at.
27 You could get an extra ten gallons a unit. You figured 155 minutes for 115 gallons of
28 fuel. That too, that was based on something with four people in it. ARVNs were pretty
29 small. They probably weighed—I don't think I met one that weighed over a hundred
30 pounds. They were pretty small compared to an American. I'm not that big myself, I'm
31 just barely 5'9, but these guys are probably between 5'4 and 5'6, some of them were

1 smaller than that, but they were about the height of an average American woman.
2 Although, they didn't weigh as much, which I shouldn't say. Too late now. Then with
3 their hair or whatever the hell they had—I think we used to figure about 130 pounds
4 apiece. So, we'd carry, let's see, I could put two between myself and a door gunner on
5 the floor. I'd say we carried five on an average. Yeah, I'd say about five. I don't think we
6 ever carried less. We always took the maximum. All the aircraft had numbers on the side
7 that were taped on or something else, so these Vietnamese knew which helicopter to get
8 into. So, it wasn't like a Chinese fire drill that would have a board with a corresponding
9 number. We used to land, let's say I had a three on the side of my helicopter, well, there
10 would be a board that would say 3. We would land as close to the board that said three so
11 the soldiers that were standing there waiting to get inserted, they knew this was the
12 helicopter they were getting on and that's how they did it. I would say ninety percent of
13 the time. Make sense?

14 JS: Well, you mentioned the pilots a little earlier about some of them having
15 trouble with maps. Overall, were your pilots pretty good? How would you rate them?

16 CV: Well, I probably shouldn't say this because I talked to one of my pilots all
17 the time and he was a 2nd lieutenant, and they always had an attitude anyway. You know,
18 "I'm a 2nd Lieutenant and screw you, you're an enlisted man and I'm an officer." Yeah,
19 fuck you, too." He was the exception for the rule. He was always a nice guy, but we flew
20 with a lot of warrant officers and a warrant officer was like an ancon in the Navy. You
21 don't know what to do with them. They had no authority, they weren't an officer, they
22 weren't an enlisted man, and they were nothing. The warrant officers were a lot closer in
23 age to usually the crew chiefs and the door gunners because they didn't have to go
24 through officer candidate school. They went through basic training and went right to
25 flight school. So, they were generally, I don't know, I'd say the average age was probably
26 21 for the warrant officers. They usually flew with a field grade of 2nd lieutenant or above
27 and a warrant officer as a co-pilot. But there were warrant officers. You'd apply with a
28 more experienced warrant officer. You know, Jesus, some poor old bastard that's
29 probably 23 years old and he said, "Christ sakes, I'm flying like my freaking
30 grandfather." I was eighteen! Once in a while you would fly with two warrant officers.
31 But the warrants were more on our level as far as, oh, I don't know, military protocol.

1 You know, you're supposed to salute warrant officers and all that stuff because they were
2 in fact an officer. They were called mister, not sir. I generally preferred the warrant
3 officers because things were a lot easier if there wasn't so much—a lot of the field grade
4 officers, you know, military this, military that. You don't say, "Hey, will you hand me
5 that wrench. Hey, will you do this? Excuse me, sir, but can you do this, fucking asshole?"
6 With the warrant officers it's, "Hey, get your ass over here." There wasn't anything they
7 could do to you. It could have been, but, you know, a warrant officer pulling rank on an
8 enlisted man was a no-no. The officers didn't like that. "You can't do that, we're the only
9 ones who can do it because we're real officers. You know, you're shit." It was a lot of
10 animosity between the warrant officers and the field grades depending on where they
11 came from. The ROTC (Reserved Officer Training Corps) officers were pretty good
12 because they went through that shit in college rather the guys who enlisted and went
13 through the whole smear. The West Pointers were the worst ones. We called them ring
14 knockers because they would always wear their West Point ring and I don't give a shit.
15 "I'm a West Point graduate." "Good for you, I graduated from Denham High School,
16 fuck you." This pilot who I'm still attached with, he was an ROTC officer from the
17 University of Vermont. He ended up—he stayed in the Army as a pilot and retired as a
18 lieutenant colonel, but we've been very close for years and years and years. Another one
19 who was a warrant officer who was the co-pilot of the helicopter that crashed in Bong
20 Son, I've been in touch with him all these years, too. So, we did form some, you know,
21 some lifelong relationships. The warrant officer enlisted man, officer enlisted man, that
22 all went to shit after you get out of the military. Everything was first name. And even
23 sometimes, you know, if you met up with one of these guys back in the United States or
24 something after Vietnam and you ended up in the same and I went to the 11th air assault
25 division after Vietnam and a couple of pilots that I had flown with in Vietnam ended
26 there like, "Hey Vogel." And then they'd say, "They don't want to fly with this guy. I
27 want to fly with the guy who's in Vietnam. He knows what the hell he's doing." And that
28 caused a lot of problems for me. Not really problems, but "How come Vogel gets all
29 these hours in?" You had to fly a hundred hours a month to get flight pay. I always had a
30 hundred hours. Shit, sometimes I would have three or four hundred hours and there were
31 guys that would have ten. I flew all the time because they wanted to fly with me because

1 I flew as a co-pilot in the United States. You only flew with a pilot and a crew chief. I got
2 all kinds of hours because the pilots in Vietnam wanted to fly with the guys who were in
3 Vietnam because they went through the same stuff as we did, and they knew that they
4 could trust us. So, it was more of a trust issue than, "Hey, he's my buddy." We weren't
5 buddies, but I got a shit load of hours in the United States only because I had been to
6 Vietnam. Having been in Vietnam so early on in the war, I was a rarity. There just
7 weren't that many people who had been to Vietnam. Especially air crews because the
8 helicopter companies were small. You know, you weren't talking a thousand people, you
9 were talking a hundred. Then when you'd come back to the United States, let's say
10 you've got a plane that's got 75 of us on there, all Vietnam Veterans, well, there were
11 probably three out of the seventy-five who had been in the aircrew. Then you'd come
12 back to the United States, and I don't know how many military posts or something you
13 could go to. So, you end up, well, the outfit I ended up with at Ft. Benning, Georgia, I
14 was the only one that had been in Vietnam.

15 JS: Wow.

16 CV: In the whole freaking company.

17 JS: Right.

18 CV: And that company was probably two hundred, three hundred guys? And
19 people used to look at me and say, "Holy shit, this guy has been to Vietnam? How old are
20 you?" "Well, I just turned 19." "Holy shit! Jesus Christ!" But we got treated very well.

21 JS: Well, while you were in Vietnam, was there much, I guess fraternization
22 between enlisted officers or warrant officers and enlisted?

23 CV: No.

24 JS: Okay.

25 CV: No, even if you were in a bar or something, the officer's kind of stayed to
26 themselves. There were certain bars that the officers went to and there were certain bars
27 that the enlisted men went to.

28 JS: Okay.

29 CV: And it kind of worked out that way. The warrant officers weren't welcome in
30 either one, you know, because they weren't enlisted, they weren't officers, but once in a
31 while we'd go to it, or a bunch of warrant officers would go. There were a bunch of crew

1 chiefs and door gunners. We got along fairly well, but nobody fraternized with the
2 officers. It was just—that was just military. It didn't matter whether it was Vietnam or the
3 United States. The officers and the enlisted men were, you know, they were a different
4 class of people. I mean, you were shit and they were god almighty. I mean, it's probably
5 still the same way.

6 JS: Well, speaking of those types of things, when you were not on duty, if you
7 had any free time at all, which is sounds like you probably wouldn't have much, but
8 when you did, how would you spend your free time?

9 CV: You really want to know?

10 JS: Well, that's up to you.

11 CV: Well, prostitutes. I didn't know if I was going to be alive tomorrow. Two
12 dollars or less than two dollars, 200 piastre, which was probably about a \$1.75 or
13 something American, depending on the exchange rate, whenever I could. You could get
14 any disease you wanted for two dollars. And VD (Venereal Disease) was rampant, no
15 matter how much clashing it took, you usually ended up with something that you didn't
16 want. It was either that or you sat in a bar, and you got, I mean, just completely freaking
17 wasted. The local beer over there was Beer 33, that's what it said on the bottle, 33, and
18 beer was spelled B-E-I-R. I guess the French form of beer. Vietnamese for 33 was Ba
19 Mui Ba. Ba meaning three, mui meaning ten, and ba three. So, it was 33. So, you'd go to
20 a bar, and you'd say however many Ba Mui Ba's you wanted, and these bar maids would
21 bring them over. I think they were fifteen cents or something. The stuff was fermented
22 with formaldehyde. So, it gave a new meaning to the word being pickled. I think by the
23 time I left, I could probably drank five or six of them and still stand up. Any more than
24 that, forget it. For the most part, very little refrigeration over there. It was piss warm and
25 you just got completely wasted on this shit. We had an eight hour rule. If you didn't have
26 a flight the next morning, you know, you were good to go. If you had a flight the next
27 morning, you had to abide by the eight hour rule, otherwise you'd get in deep shit. You
28 didn't want to fly with a hangover anyway. The noise from the rotor blades and the
29 engines, if you had a hangover, you couldn't function. That's why we used to go down to
30 the—the Air Force had a thing called the Ethereal Port Squadron and they had oxygen
31 bottles. You'd take a hit off the oxygen and instantly sober. Yeah, it was good stuff. I did

1 that until I was probably about thirty years old whenever I had a hangover. I was working
2 at the dealership, and I'd go over to the welder with the torches and open the oxygen
3 bottle and stick the thing in my mouth and take a couple of hits off that. You could carry
4 yourself with oxygen, but pure oxygen will kill you. It'll work wonders for a hangover. It
5 didn't do too much for the stomach, but if you had a headache, it would get rid of the
6 headache, but your stomach was filled. Oh god, I don't know how many times I cleaned
7 puke off the side of my helicopter from throw up out the door. "Hey asshole, you get
8 drunk last night?" "Yeah, yeah, fuck you." Everybody else did the same thing. I actually,
9 in the scheme of things, we had a good amount of time off. I mean, we flew a lot, yeah,
10 but we still had time off. I'm not going to say it was liberal time off, a whole shit load of
11 it, but I might get one or two whole days off in a week. You probably wouldn't get any
12 time off for two or three weeks at a time, but then you might get a week off. If you didn't
13 have guard duty, you didn't have anything to do and as long as the town wasn't off limits
14 for some reason, you could go down there and call it a motor pool and check out a jeep or
15 a three quarter something and take off with the guy sitting in the back with a machine gun
16 and we all had our own weapons and we'd kick off and go cruising around the
17 countryside taking pictures and stuff. And it was pretty safe during the day. I got an
18 arrow shot at me and it was stuck on the door of the truck. But other than that, you know,
19 we could pretty much do as we pleased. As long as you didn't get into trouble, they
20 didn't really give a shit what you did. And that seemed to be the norm at most of the
21 places I flew in and out of. As long as you didn't mind getting in trouble with the locals
22 or anything else. Of course, a lot of the people were bullies in high school and stuff, if
23 they didn't get murdered in basic training, they used to take their— (audio cuts out)

24 JS: Hello? Hello? Alright, well the last thing I heard you say was you were talking
25 about people who were bullies and then it clicked off.

26 CV: Alright, the people were bullies if they didn't get taken care of in basic
27 training. They used to take their rap out on the Vietnamese who were much smaller and,
28 you know, they were just a bunch of assholes. Of course, they gave everybody else a bad
29 name, too. It was the same. Hey, a prostitute's a prostitute. That's what she does for a
30 living, that's her job. Don't treat her like shit, she's still a woman. And that was more so
31 with the blacks. If anybody found out that somebody was mistreated, it didn't matter.

1 Hey, a prostitute is still a human being. You know, what she does for work, hey, that's
2 her business. Those women used to make more money than, you know, they could live
3 very, very well with the money that they made. When the average wage was probably
4 forty bucks a year, shit, they could make forty bucks in a couple of nights. Mistreating
5 prostitutes or any of the Vietnamese women that worked on the compound, that was a no-
6 no and that got you, one way or another, somebody would get ahold of you, and they
7 would beat you to a freaking pulp. Most guys who did the beatings would own up to it,
8 you know, because they got called up on it by an officer. He was treating the hooch maid
9 like shit down at this particular bar and was giving one of the prostitutes a hard time and
10 slapping her around and shit. That usually ran along racial lines. The blacks, they all had
11 an attitude and they used to take it on the Vietnamese. Especially the women. I mean, if
12 you look around this country, they treat women the same way, so. I'm not racist by any
13 means.

14 JS: Yes, sir. Was there much of a racial—were there many racial problems
15 between Americans? Between black and white Americans?

16 CV: No, I'll say no. The blacks pretty much stuck for themselves. They were
17 welcome. There were a bunch of crew chiefs sitting around and this black guy came in.
18 "Come on over." He might have driven a fuel truck or something or did something else.
19 We didn't have any problems. The only problems we had were the same things that
20 happened every day in this country. They were fine while they were alone, but you get a
21 bunch of them together and, you know, two more black guys come in while this one
22 black guy goes and sits up with the brothers and then they start getting loud and it ended
23 up being fights and all that shit. I mean, it's the same mentality today. I can be
24 comfortable in a room full of blacks just because a couple white guys come in go, "Well,
25 I'm going to sit over here." Of course, I spent twenty years as a cop, too, so. When you
26 got a bunch of them together, it was always trouble.

27 JS: You mentioned sitting around with warrant officers. Is that who you mostly
28 hung out around?

29 CV: No, I mostly hung around with other crew chiefs.

30 JS: I'm sorry, I apologize, I mean crew chiefs, yes sir.

1 CV: Crew chiefs and the maintenance guys, the guys who worked in the hanger
2 and stuff. We all lived together, you know, in a group of hooch's. The crew chiefs, the
3 door gunners, and the maintenance people were all—you know, there might be one crew
4 chief in a hooch and the rest of the maintenance people and vice versa. There might have
5 been eight crew chiefs and one maintenance guy or something like that. But we were
6 grouped pretty much together which was not the right thing to do. It didn't create any
7 animosity with anybody else, but when they started attacking these bases, that's what
8 they went after. They went after the crew chiefs and the pilots with the mortars and
9 rockets and that shit because they knew where we lived, what buildings we were in. So, if
10 they had spread us out more, it would have been better, but they didn't so what are you
11 going to do?

12 JS: Alright, you mentioned contact with Vietnamese civilians and sometimes with
13 people mistreating them and things like that, but in general, what was your impression of
14 the other Vietnamese civilians?

15 CV: I got along with them very well. I learned while I was there, figuring this was
16 their country, not mine. I learned as much Vietnamese as I could. Although, if you went
17 from—they called it ville to ville, village to village. The dialect sometimes got in the
18 way, but all they wanted to do was live in peace. They didn't want us there. You know,
19 we were in there wrecking their freaking country. Although, a lot of them became multi-
20 gazillionaires because we were there. And the local economy, of course, made tons of
21 money because we'd be buying this junk and freaking trinkets and all this stuff. Clothes,
22 if you wanted civilian clothes, you had to go to the tailor, and they'd make them. Unless
23 you've got mommy to ship them, but I didn't have that. Most of us were estranged from
24 our families for one reason or another. Mostly to the younger guys anyway. We bailed
25 out as soon as we could for various reasons, but usually it was a bad home life. I got
26 along very well with the Vietnamese. I respected them and if you respect someone you
27 get respect in return. I always treated them—well, I'm not going to say as an equal, but I
28 didn't treat them as a lesser being. I don't know how to phrase it. I didn't treat them like I
29 did an American, but I was never knowingly mean to one of them or nasty or anything
30 else. Sometimes a couple of jokes here and there. They were probably hurtful, but eh,
31 fuck you. You know, but that was few and far between.

1 JS: Alright, well did you get a chance to go on R&R (Rest and Recuperation)?

2 CV: I had a couple of opportunities, but what I was doing while I was there; I was
3 saving money, I was going to buy a brand new car when I got back from Vietnam which
4 is exactly what I did. So, I had the chance to go on R&R, but I didn't.

5 JS: Alright, did you see any type of USO (United Service Organization) shows or
6 anything like that?

7 CV: Yeah, there was only one USO show which I got into a pissing contest with
8 some historian over and it was the Bob Hope Show. It was right around Thanksgiving of
9 1964. This man or woman or whoever the hell it was, "That's not possible, the first year
10 Bob Hope was there was 1965." I said, "Well that's bullshit because I went to his show in
11 1964." Those are in the archives, too, flyers of the Bob Hope Show that was held at the
12 5th Special Forces Headquarters in Nha Trang. The slides have a date on them, November
13 1964.

14 JS: Case closed.

15 CV: That worked on a lottery type thing, you know, who wants to go to the USO
16 show in Nha Trang. We can only send one caribou, which was an Army transport plane.
17 It was a very popular airplane in Vietnam. It could take off and land and shit fifty feet.
18 However, many people Caribou could hold, I don't know, fifteen or something. So,
19 everybody who wanted to go—let's say—I don't remember exactly how it worked, but
20 let's say you put a number in a hat and whatever numbers got picked got to go. I was one
21 of the fortunate ones. I had just enough time to grab a roll of film and my camera and off
22 I went to Nha Trang and saw the Bob Hope Show and then flew back to Qui Nhon. It was
23 very impressive, and it was a little bit of home. Joe Saint John and Anita Bryant were
24 there. They came down and of course, this was the first American woman you've seen
25 other than if you were in a field hospital where they had Army and Air Force nurses.
26 These were the first, you called them round eyes that you saw. You know, it was good. It
27 was good to see an American woman. You know, of course everybody thought they were
28 going home with them, but it didn't quite work that way.

29 JS: Well, before getting to the end of your tour, is there anything else we should
30 cover up to this point that we haven't?

31 CV: Just the monsoons, I think.

1 JS: Okay.

2 CV: That would have been winter—not winter, but summer. The summer and the
3 winter were different than here. Their winters were their summers and vice versa. But
4 from November, I'll say November to probably mid-January. I mean, it just fucking
5 rained and it freaking poured. Everything was soaking wet. I'm talking a couple of feet of
6 water everywhere. I mean, bunkers were floating around, and footlockers were floating. I
7 mean, it was awful. The temperature probably went down to seventy or seventy-five
8 degrees, but you were freezing your ass off. You had guard duty and you're out getting
9 soaked and slugging around through the water and the shit and everything. It was just
10 freaking awful. Then we're flying with no doors so, of course, the pilots are okay because
11 they were up front. They were completely enclosed, but the crew chief and the gunner,
12 we were fucked. I mean, you're flying a hundred knots and you got this driving rain. It
13 was awful. It was just continuous. You might get a break here and there and the sun
14 might come out or something, but it was three months and that's the most miserable part
15 of my whole tour was just because you were constantly soaking wet. You were like a
16 freaking prune. I mean, you couldn't sleep anywhere. The bunks were floating around,
17 and you couldn't sleep anywhere. You'd have to go steal footlockers or something else in
18 front of your bunker. For Christ's sake, you had a nosebleed you had to keep the bunk so
19 high. It was just plain miserable and everything, I mean everything was soaking wet. If he
20 had a flight, that made it all the worst because instead of getting wind burn, you get rain
21 burn on your face. You couldn't use the visor on the helmet because you just couldn't
22 see. It was miserable. Other than that, in retrospect, I had a great time over there.

23 JS: Well, did the weather have, during the monsoon season, did that have much of
24 an impact on, say, a regular day to day operations? Would it change the ability to fly at
25 times like this?

26 CV: Yeah, if the ceiling was too low. Qui Nhon was right on the coast, but there
27 was a mountain range right behind us, and you had to be—I think the altitude of the
28 airfield was 20 feet. So, its 20 feet above sea level and a mountain range was probably a
29 thousand, 1,200 feet high. You had to be very damn careful because I mean, you get up a
30 hundred feet and you're in clouds. You had to make damn well sure that if the thing's
31 1,200 feet, you want to be two thousand feet because you can't depend on the altimida.

1 You could depend on them, but they were pretty damn accurate. You don't want to take a
2 chance of slamming it into a freaking mountain. Because you couldn't see it and it was
3 the same. You're coming in for a landing and you get clearance to come into land and
4 you can't see shit. You can't see anything until you're fifty feet off the ground. You say,
5 "Oh shit, there's a freaking connex container sitting there, whoa." You couldn't see
6 anything. And that was the worst part, it was very dangerous flying during the monsoon
7 season.

8 JS: As you were talking, I was listening, but also, I was looking at some of your
9 slides. I noticed there were a lot of kids around. What was your impression of the kids?

10 CV: Well, I don't know where the hell they came from. I mean, a helicopter going
11 into land, I was one. Well, I learned this from the people before me. We used to go into
12 the local village, town, whatever you want to call it, and buy these big bottles of candy.
13 Kind of like the things with the cheese puffs that you can buy at Walmart. The big plastic
14 jugs. Well, they had them full of candy. Anything like chocolate or anything like that, it
15 would just melt, but this other stuff was pretty good, and it was local. We always had jugs
16 of candy and the kids knew, by word of mouth, the Americans have this thing that twirls
17 around and goes up and down. There was always candy. The kids used to—I don't know
18 where the hell they came from. I mean, shit would fly through a village, and you
19 wouldn't see anything and the next thing you know, there's fifty kids around you. But we
20 very seldom had any problems with them. Our biggest problem was getting [them] the
21 hell away from this thing when we're cracking and getting ready to take off. The rotor
22 blades and the tail rotor and stuff, it could chop you to pieces. We used to try to land a bit
23 out from these villages because they were thatched huts, and those freaking things would
24 just blow over. But kids, yeah, there were kids everywhere.

25 JS: So, they were never really much of a threat to you guys?

26 CV: Some of them very well could have been. There was one incident that I heard
27 of. I can't say that there was any truth to it because it was all hearsay to me, and it was
28 probably third or fourth hand when I got it. One of these little kids stabbed a pilot or a
29 crew member or something in the back and then I was told that they took this kid and
30 they hung him from the tail spinner around the helicopter. I don't know. I never had any
31 problems with the kids toward the end of my tour. They put what they called single-side

1 band radios on the two single-side band radios, and they strung the antenna down. We
2 called it a clothesline because that's what it looked like. These things held an electrical
3 charge. We picked up static electricity flying anyway, the same as regular aircraft. But
4 these antennas picked up an inordinate amount of static electricity. It held enough of a
5 charge to knock you on your ass if you were a little kid. To you or to me it would be like
6 you go up to the local horse farm or whatever. As long as you don't wet your thing when
7 you're checking to see if that electric fence was on. You got a buzz like that out of it. But
8 these kids would see this thing and it was something, "Oh, I can hang on this." And they
9 grab it with their whole hand and say, "Holy shit!" So, we used to try to keep them away
10 from, you know, away from the antennas." But other than that, no, the kids were never a
11 problem. Sometimes they'd reach into the helicopter and try and steal a couple of bullets
12 or something that were rolling around on the floor or something. For the most part, we
13 didn't have any problems with them.

14 JS: Alright, well at what point did you receive your orders to come home?

15 CV: In February of '65.

16 JS: Alright, and did you continue flying up until the end?

17 CV: They used to knock you off flight status like two weeks before. I flew the day
18 before I left. If they needed somebody, I was there. It was probably something that I
19 couldn't have refused anyway. I don't know what would have happened. "I'm ordering
20 you to fly." Well, fuck you because I'm going home tomorrow, that don't work. But right
21 before I left, the barracks, the compound started getting personnel. I mean, it was just too
22 small to hold the influx of troops started coming in after the Tonkin incident of August of
23 '64. So, they moved a whole 140th field maintenance detachment to a hotel in Downtown
24 Qui Nhon, a four-story hotel. Probably a week before I was due to leave, I was on guard
25 duty and I heard all this noise coming from the town, which was probably only two
26 hundred yards away. I looked in the direction of the town and I saw that hotel go up in
27 the air and come back down. As far as I know, I'm the first one to report that this hotel
28 had gotten blown up. That really put the shit in everything. I had already turned in a lot of
29 my stuff and everything. I'm standing here and I don't have a freaking flak jacket, I don't
30 have a rifle, I don't have shit. You know, this place just—I don't know how many guys
31 got killed there. I spent the next couple days digging through the rubble for bodies. I had

1 a bad time probably my last week there because we had to sleep in bunkers that night and
2 eventually somebody got me a pistol. I don't remember what it was. You know, we were
3 under threat of attack all the time from dusk until dawn although it never happened. I
4 mean, I couldn't wait to get the hell out of there at that point. I should have been over
5 here all this time and they're freaking blowing up the day before I leave. Which
6 unfortunately happened to a lot of people. They got me out of there as soon as they could.
7 I think I probably left Qui Nhon to go to Saigon. I probably left two days earlier than I
8 was scheduled, initially to leave.

9 JS: Alright, well did you develop much of what they call the short-timer
10 syndrome?

11 CV: Not really.

12 JS: Okay.

13 CV: No, it's just I was too young and too freaking stupid. Yeah, they gave you a
14 calendar at 100 days. I mean shit, you've still got a third of your tour left to do, but they
15 give you a calendar with a hundred days and it was a woman on it, a naked woman where
16 the last day was. You could pretty well figure that one out. When you got down to
17 fourteen days, they gave you another calendar to go along with it and it was called a
18 FIGMO, F-I-G-M-O, a FIGMO calendar, and that meant, fuck it, got my orders, to go to
19 your stateside assignment. Once you got your FIGMO calendar you were like, "Fuck you,
20 I ain't doing this, I ain't doing that." Well, that didn't fly either. I mean, you were still in
21 the military. They were pretty good about trying to keep you away or out of harm's way
22 once you get below, I'd say, thirty days.

23 JS: Okay.

24 CV: I felt pretty good about it.

25 JS: Well, this may seem like a dumb question, but how did you feel about
26 leaving?

27 CV: Mixed.

28 JS: Okay.

29 CV: Mixed emotions because the worst place that you could get sent—I never
30 heard of the freaking thing, but the very worst place that you could get orders for,
31 according to people could come over as replacements and stuff, was you don't want to

1 get orders for the 11th air assault division at Ft. Benning Georgia. And shit, where the hell
2 would I get orders for? So, I said, “Well, maybe I’d like to stay here. I don’t want to go to
3 this 11th Air Assault Division, but I did go to the 11th Air Assault Division and that was
4 the best time that I had in the military. That was my most memorable time in the military
5 was the time that I spent with the 11th Air Assault Division. Which ended up getting
6 designated, the 1st Calve Division Air Mobile, went to Vietnam. I loved the 11th Air
7 Assault Division. All I did was fly. I guess, it all depended on the unit that I was with or
8 the unit you were with. I was supposedly in the worst unit in the whole 11th air assault
9 division, but if I was in the worst unit, it was probably the best unit I was ever in all the
10 time I spent in the military. I was in an air crew. The 11th air assault division was infantry
11 with helicopter transport. So, I was in the air wing of an infantry outfit. It was probably
12 the infantry guys; they had the shit. I mean, they were riding trucks and merch and
13 everything else. Oh, fuck you, we flew over them. So, I mean, being in air crew no matter
14 where I went in the country, when I was with the air assault, we flew all over the country
15 doing fire power demonstrations to show exactly what a helicopter could do. And that
16 was being sold to the, I don’t know, the Defense Department. “This is what helicopters
17 can do.” I mean, we got treated like gold. If you flew anywhere, especially in the Air
18 Force base or a Navy base or something, if you fly in with an Army helicopter, the one I
19 had in the 11th air assault guided missiles on it, they didn’t work worth a shit, but we’d
20 fly in there and we’d carry pistols, and we were held in awe by everybody. “So, you were
21 with the 11th air assault division?” I mean that patch really, that got you a lot. They say,
22 “Jesus Christ, how the hell did you ever get in there?” That was the best time I had in the
23 entire time I spent in the military, it was the time I spent with the 11th air assault division.
24 I had pulled only with Vietnam pilots. Not by choice, but their choice. “I want to fly with
25 the Vietnam guy.” So, it was great.

26 JS: Were you a crew chief there as well?

27 CV: Yes, and when the 11th Air Assault division went to Vietnam, they sent me to
28 the 29th Infantry Division and I said, “What the fuck am I doing in an infantry division
29 with no freaking helicopters?” And they said, “Well, you’re an infantryman now.” I said,
30 “I am like hell.” I raised holy hell and I happened to meet up with a guy who I met in
31 Vietnam. He was a company clerk. I said, “Get me the fuck out of here.” He says, “You

1 want to go to Ft. Rucker, Alabama?” That was the Army Aviation Center. I was a special
2 4th class at the time. Ft. Rucker was all students. So, a Spec 4 was like god, you had a lot
3 of rank. So, I went to Ft. Rucker, and they said, “Well, we don’t know what to do. You
4 have already been to Vietnam, and we don’t know what to do with you.” So, they had me
5 supervising details from, you know, go get this bunch of guys and bring them over here
6 and sweep the floor or paint the building. Eventually one sergeant came over to me and
7 said, “Hey Vogel, how would you like to be a schoolteacher?” I said, “I don’t think so.”
8 He said, “We give you another stripe and then you’ll be a buck sergeant.” “Well yeah,
9 that sounds good.” So, I went to—they sent me to school to be a lecture instructor and it
10 was called Method of Instruction. I went to school, I had a knack for it, for public
11 speaking. I wasn’t intimidated by students who held degrees, aircraft maintenance and
12 things. They didn’t impress me. I used to throw them out of my classroom. “Get the fuck
13 out of my classroom.” You know, you don’t try and shoot down the instructor. I never
14 lied to them. If somebody asked me a question, most of them were smart asses. I’d tell
15 them, “I don’t know the answer, but I will get the answer and I will have it for you
16 tomorrow.” I never went back on my word. I loved instructing. I ended up getting
17 certified to instruct Pratt and Whitney General Electric and Light calming gas turbine
18 engines, which, I still have the license. That was a good time at Ft. Rucker. I bounced
19 between Ft. Rucker, Ft. Walters, Texas, which was another flight school and Ft. Stewart,
20 Hunter, Georgia, teaching. It was all good.

21 JS: How long did you do this?

22 CV: December of ‘65 to September ‘66. Actually, I taught a class a day after I got
23 discharged. I was supposed to—I got discharged on September 29, 1966. Not discharged
24 but separated. The sergeant 1st class who ran the particular school, he says, “Hey Vogel, I
25 know you’re getting out today, but is there any fucking way you can teach a class for me
26 tomorrow?” I said, “Well, I’m not in any freaking hurry to get home.” So, he said, “Well,
27 just keep your uniforms” because I’m supposed to turn them in. He said, “I’ll get your
28 uniform back.” And he did. I spent the whole day teaching. You know, I was sad to leave.
29 I said, “I’m done, fuck the Army.” FTA, they call it, fuck the Army. Everybody who was
30 getting out, they used to have these little things you would put on the back of the car that
31 said, “Adios, motherfucker.” Cause I had one of those, too, on my brand new ford. The

1 further away from Ft. Rucker, they headed north, the more I wish I was back in there.
2 That went on for years and years and years. I really miss the military because of the
3 structure, and it shows. I'm anal with some of the stuff, even my fucking closet. I drove
4 my wife crazy, they said that's why she died, to get away from me. My fucking shirts had
5 to be buttoned and everything had to be facing the right way. I'm still that way to a
6 certain extent, anyway. But I thank the military for who I am now.

7 JS: Well, if you don't mind me asking, what did you do after you got out?

8 CV: Well, I did a lot of things. I wasn't used to—I said, “I'm not standing in
9 line.” I stood in line the whole time I was in the Army. They called it a hurry up and wait.
10 I said, “I don't like something that somebody says, fuck you.” Shit, I don't know how
11 many freaking jobs I had for the first six months I was out. Some people look at me
12 cross-eyed, I just think, “Fuck you, I quit.” And I did, but eventually I went to work for
13 the post office for a while as a letter carrier. I couldn't deal with that because there were
14 too many drunks. Even though I drank myself at the time. One night I was at a party.
15 Actually, it was my brother-in-law's going away party. He was going to Vietnam, which
16 I laughed at him. He joined the National Guard. “Fuck you, I ain't going to Vietnam, I'm
17 joining the National Guard.” Well, his was the only unit in Massachusetts that got
18 activated to go to Vietnam. And now, to this day, he has no benefits. “Fuck you, I went to
19 Vietnam.” I said, “Yeah, but you were in the National Guard. That didn't count.” It does
20 now, but it didn't then. “You were not considered a soldier; you were just as bad as the
21 freaking draft dodger if you went in the National Guard or the Reserves.” They have no
22 benefits, but after this particular party, I went outside and this guy that was there, his car
23 wouldn't start. Of course, I knew about cars, too. I went over and I fixed the thing. He
24 says, “If you're ever looking for a job, give me a call.” He says, “I'm the service manager
25 at the Saab dealer.” I had never heard of a freaking Saab. I didn't know what the hell it
26 was. But I got fed up with the post office. They gave the guy a call. I went over and I
27 talked to him, and he says, “What do you know about Saab's?” I said, “Nothing.” I said,
28 “I've never even fucking heard of one.” Then I found out they had a two-stroke engine
29 and a three cylinder. They were little pieces of shit and everything, but he offered me 25
30 cents more an hour than I was making at the post office, which was three dollars and
31 thirty-three cents an hour. So, I took the job and stayed there 21 years and made a

1 fortune. I was making a hundred grand a year. Then the place went out of business and
2 took 457,000 in retirement money with them. Yeah, so I was fifty years old and broke. I
3 ain't much better off now, but I got a room full of my ads, that's all I care about. I don't
4 owe anybody anything so I'm doing pretty well in the scheme of things. Health wise, not
5 so good, but everything else is pretty good.

6 JS: Well, after you got out, did you follow the war in the media?

7 CV: I got in so much trouble with everybody after I got out of the military. I got
8 called everything, I got spit at, anybody found out that not only was I ex-military, but I
9 was ex-Vietnam. I got treated like shit. I'd walk into the bar, and I always had my hair
10 cut short anyway. I walk into a bar, and they say, "Fucking baby killers." I just didn't fit
11 anywhere. That went on up until I'd say about ten years ago when people just started
12 recognizing the fact that the men and women who were in Vietnam, we weren't over
13 there killing freaking babies. That was all a college shit that started out in California,
14 Berkley, University Southern California or eventually made its way to liberalism at
15 Harvard University in Massachusetts. Now all the war protests and the shit and
16 everything else, I'd say something, and I'd start getting pelted with rocks and shit and
17 everything else. That went on for years and years and years. I did join the VFW (Veterans
18 of Foreign Wars), the American Legion, and the Disabled American Veterans, but that's
19 forty years ago and I have yet to go to a meeting. So, I don't know or belong to any of
20 the—I don't belong to them, but I'm not a participating member of any of the fraternal
21 organizations, if you will.

22 JS: Okay, how about reunion organizations?

23 CV: I still talk to a bunch of guys, and they are always after me, "You've got to
24 go to a fucking reunion." Well, this one's dead, this one's dead. Shit, they're dying off.
25 They were all in their mid to late sixties or early seventies or something. I told my pilot,
26 he's down in Florida for the winter, asshole. I told him, "They're having a reunion for the
27 117th in St. Louis in June." I'm not really able to travel by myself anymore. I'm very
28 unsteady, I've got all kinds of problems with my legs and something that's from
29 helicopter crashes. Not just in Vietnam, but multiple crashes in the United States when I
30 was at the flight school with student pilots. Yeah, multiple, I'm talking twenty to thirty
31 crashes. You know, they wrecked more freaking helicopters and you're going to be a

1 fucking pilot? Oh my god, you just get out of one and then go get in another one. Shit,
2 they used to wreck them all the time. I told the shim, I said, “If you want to go to reunion
3 in St. Louis in June.” I told him, I said, “We’ll get together in Boston or Cincinnati or
4 Cleveland or some goddamn place, Chicago and go to St. Louis.” But he’s not really into
5 reunions, either so. You know, it’s just a bunch of old farts sitting around talking about
6 what they did forty freaking years ago. So, that’s never been my thing. I may go, I don’t
7 know. I don’t think so, but I may. I’m getting a lot of pressure to go.

8 JS: As far as the war itself goes, after you left, how did you feel about the
9 way it turned out?

10 CV: We could have won that war in 1965. Now, I sent an audio tape, and I don’t
11 know if you can look it up or not, but it’s called the Bawdy, B-A-W-D-Y, Ballads of the
12 117th Hims, H-I-M-S. There’s one thing—this was recorded live in Vietnam while I was
13 there. There’s one on there called Madam Contum, it’s probably about halfway through.
14 This thing’s probably an hour long. If you’re able to pull that up and listen to it and you
15 listen to all the words, Maxwell Detail was in charge of the forces over there when I was
16 there and this Madam Contum, she was a madam at a whore house. But there was a thing
17 on there that said, “I saw Mac Taylor just the other day and he said, “In ‘65, we’ll be on
18 our way.” It says, “So Madam Contum took these words to heart and for our boys she’s
19 doing her part. The queen of swords that can be bought and gonorrhea is all we got.” But,
20 right in that tape it says, “In ‘65 Mac Taylor said the other day in ‘65, we’ll be on our
21 way.” We had them bombed into fucking oblivion in 1965. Then all the war protests.
22 “Stop the bombing, stop this and stop that and everything else.” And it went right
23 downhill from there.” We could have been out of there in 1965. The war was run the
24 wrong way. I mean, completely. It was run by politicians instead of the military. If the
25 military like in Iraq, Afghanistan, or anything else, if they just let the military do what
26 they’re trying to do, we wouldn’t be in these freaking places for years and years on end.
27 It’s the politicians and, I’m sorry if you’re a peace nick, let the military do its thing.
28 There’s going to be collateral damage, yes. Civilians are going to die, whatever. Let the
29 military do its thing and we wouldn’t have to worry about anybody. This country should
30 have dropped policies like the Israeli’s. You know, hey, you want to hijack one of our
31 planes? Fuck you, you’re going to die. So, they go on the plane. No negotiating or

1 anything, they just go on their wooden machine guns, and they start killing people. So,
2 some civilians die, collateral damage, but all the hostage takers are dead, too. If this
3 country would have dropped the policy like that, we'd be in a lot better shape. You'd
4 probably be alive to see the downfall of this country. I won't, but this country is turning
5 socialist and what you see is what you're going to get, and it's not headed in the right
6 direction. So much freedom, once you start taking the Pledge of Allegiance out of schools
7 and God, I'm not a bible thumper by any means or anything, but this is a Christian
8 country and it's got to stay that way. You can't keep taking this stuff out. Because the
9 country is going to turn around and it's going to be an Atheist, Muslim country before too
10 long. Another thing is, you have to make English the official language of the country. But
11 that's just my opinion.

12 JS: Well, before wrapping up the interview, I've got a few more broad-based
13 questions I'd like to ask if that's alright. Well first off, looking back on your experiences,
14 how do you feel about your involvement in the Vietnam War and about America's
15 involvement in general? Do you think we should have been there?

16 CV: No.

17 JS: Okay.

18 CV: No, I'm an isolationist. Keep your nose out of everybody's business.
19 There're enough people starving to death and poverty and shit in this country, take care
20 of this freaking country first. Ain't nobody coming over here helping us out. Help
21 yourself before you go sticking your nose into everybody else's business. That too, is just
22 an opinion. That war was doomed from day one. Everybody blames Lyndon Johnson, but
23 Kennedy was the president when I got my orders. So, you know, who's to blame?

24 JS: What do you think about the way the media handled the war?

25 CV: There wasn't much media there when I was there, but the media with
26 everything, in general now, causes more harm than it does good. You know, it's nice to
27 keep the public informed and everything, but all you have to do is just have one picture of
28 some little kid getting hurt or something else and everybody gets into a frenzy. Oh shit,
29 you're over there killing all the kids and innocent people and raping and pillaging and
30 everything else. Yeah, it may happen, isolated, very isolated. With the prison treating the
31 prisoners like shit and everything, they shouldn't have been doing it. But I mean, they

1 were fucking stupid letting themselves get photographed while they do it. I mean, the
2 military would have eventually get caught up with them and the military would have
3 dealt with it. They don't condone that shit, period. For the most part, anyway. I was never
4 anywhere where anybody would condone causing harm to innocent people. I never saw
5 anybody being tortured. They said, "Oh yeah, they used to torture the Vietnamese
6 prisoners and the Viet Cong." I never saw this and I was right in the thick of it. Did it
7 happen? Maybe, I don't know. But if it's the means to an end, fucking go for it. It's going
8 to save one American if it's worth to me.

9 JS: Well, what's your opinion of U.S. Policy towards Vietnam today?

10 CV: I'm kind of glad that they re-established relations with the Vietnamese or the
11 Vietnamese Government even though it's communist country now. I'm open to that. I
12 mean, look at what we do with Japan and Germany, they're bigger superpowers now,
13 economy wise in the United States. I think normalizing relations with Vietnam, I think
14 they probably waited too long. I'm glad— a lot of people are bitter about it, but I'm
15 glad—I would like to go back there sometime to—I'll call it Saigon. I'll never call it Ho
16 Chi Minh City, but I mean I'd really like to go back there and visit. It may bring back
17 some painful things, but for the most part, it would be good. And like I said before, the
18 people were really nice. I mean, people, for the most part, are really nice. It doesn't
19 matter where in the world you go. You've always got the assholes, but for the most part,
20 people in general are really nice. No matter where in the world I've been, and I've been
21 around the world. There's a hell of a lot more good people than there are bad.

22 JS: Well, is there anything else you'd like to say or anything else we should cover
23 that we haven't?

24 CV: Not that I can think of.

25 JS: Alright, well in that case, I'll go ahead and bring the interview to a close, but I
26 want to thank you for taking the time to do this.

27 CV: Oh, I want to thank you for giving me the opportunity to do it.

28 JS: Yes, sir.

29 CV: I mean, that's why I donated all my stuff, and it may not mean anything for
30 another twenty or thirty years, who the hell knows, but it's history.

31 JS: Well, let me go ahead and stop the recording.