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**The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Roland Trimmer
Conducted by Kelly Crager
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Transcribed by Melissa Wark**

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 Kelly Crager: This is Kelly Crager conducting an Oral History Interview with Mr.
2 Roland Trimmer. Today is 11 August 2015. I am in Lubbock, Texas, on the campus of
3 Texas Tech University, and Mr. Trimmer is joining me by telephone from his home in
4 Twinsburg, Ohio. Mr. Trimmer, to begin the interview, I'd like to get some background
5 biographical information from you, if I can. Can you tell me when and where you were
6 born?

7 Roland Trimmer: August 29th, 1944, in East Cleveland, Ohio.

8 KC: Okay. And what were your parents' names?

9 RT: Roland and Betty.

10 KC: Roland and Betty. And what did your parents do for a living there in Ohio?

11 RT: My dad was a bus driver and a part-time city councilman.

12 KC: Okay. And what about your mother?

13 RT: She was a waitress and later on became a missionary—Baptist missionary.

14 KC: Interesting. Did you have any brothers or sisters?

15 RT: I actually have an older half-brother, a younger full sister, a younger half-
16 brother, and two younger half-sisters.

17 KC: So, you had a pretty full house then, it sounds like.

18 RT: Yeah. We were separated often from time to time.

1 KC: Okay, okay. Tell me about growing up. Where did you grow up? What was
2 life like for you?

3 RT: Well, I grew up in a tough little eastside neighborhood of East Cleveland
4 called Huff Avenue. Huff was tough. Blonde-haired, blue-eyed kid in a predominantly
5 black area up until second, third, fourth grade, I think. Life was not bad. It wasn't great. It
6 was not bad. It was in the down trotted area. I remember some of the friends that I played
7 with and, to this day, remember their names. One was a tough black kid named Butch,
8 who actually taught me how to box because his dad was a golden gloves champion. You
9 know, I held my own with the others because of that. We did not stay there long. I think
10 fourth grade or something. My parents divorced at an early age. I, unfortunately, was put
11 into a boarding home for a year until my mother remarried and separated from my
12 siblings. She remarried. My new stepfather took me in around the fifth-grade timeframe.
13 Life was fine. I always loved my mother. The father relationship was here today, gone
14 tomorrow. He kind of held it against me that I chose to live with her rather than him. So,
15 the relationship was estranged pretty much for the rest of our lives. Stepfather, Jim
16 Robinson, took good care of me, did things with me, fished, hunted, stuff like that. His
17 son, my half-brother, Jimmy Robinson—we are as close as real full blood siblings could
18 possibly be, as I am with my other half-sisters. In fact, my half-brother, Jimmy, and I just
19 golfed together a few days ago. We're in good touch.

20 KC: Well, that's very good. I'm glad to hear that. You mentioned hunting and
21 fishing, so I guess you got away from East Cleveland.

22 RT: We did. Around the sixth grade, that's when my mother and stepfather built a
23 home in Twinsburg, Ohio, and that is where I grew up.

24 KC: Well, tell me about growing up in Twinsburg. It's very different from what
25 your early life—

26 RT: Sure was. We're talking Huckleberry Finn and Tom Sawyer stuff here. The
27 friends I made out there—we worked on farms. We caught snakes and frogs. We built the
28 docks on the crypt. We fished, and we road our bikes for miles and miles and miles. We
29 played baseball almost every day. We built our own baseball diamond, so to speak. It was
30 a good life. It was a great time to grow up. It was also a racially mixed town. Twinsburg
31 was a town that was the underground stop during the Civil War. So, the town always had

1 a black population from years and years back. It was one of the few suburbs between
2 Cleveland and Akron that had a large black population because they were mostly
3 centered in the cities. I grew up racially mixed all my life. So, I really never knew
4 prejudice. We'd always talk—in fact, my brother and I golfed this past week. I had seven
5 or eight of my black buddies from Twinsburg that I ran track with and played basketball
6 with, and we're all still in touch. We are all still very close. We genuinely refer to
7 ourselves as brothers. So, I've had these relationships since the sixth grade. That's been a
8 blessing for me. It really has. So, growing up in Twinsburg was a lot of fun. It's like a
9 boy's dream to grow up, bringing home a pale of frogs to mom. She wasn't too happy
10 about it. Riding a bike and delivering a paper—paper route, that kind of stuff. We had a
11 dog, usually, as we do now. We always had a dog. So, it was pretty good growing up.

12 KC: Well, good. I'm glad to hear that.

13 RT: It was.

14 KC: Yeah. Well, what about school? Where did you go to school, and what sort of
15 topics or areas did you like to study?

16 RT: Well, obviously, with the changes with mother and father and stepfather, I
17 changed school districts about three times—three, four times before the sixth grade or
18 before the fifth, sixth grade. So, that was tough moving different school systems,
19 different towns until we finally settled down. So, I had to be set back a grade because I
20 kept moving from different school systems back and forth. I settled down in Twinsburg.
21 Everything went smoothly. I was a good student—Merit role from time to time. I played
22 sports all year long. Our sports teams were a very, very close-knit family. Even the
23 coaches. We have regular get togethers with our coaches to this day. One of them—my
24 football coach—passed away about seven or eight years ago, and he was like a big
25 brother to me all the way up to that time. Our Athletic Director from way back in the
26 '60's is still alive. He's still feisty. We get together with him a couple of times a year.
27 He's still kicking. We just talk and have memories and have a great time talking about it.
28 A lot of these guys—they're still my friends that I socialize with, I hang around with.
29 Guys I worked on the farms with and baled hay, shot crows with BB guns, that kind of
30 stuff.

31 KC: Right.

1 RT: So, it really was—I couldn't have asked for a better scenario after moving
2 from the huff area in East Cleveland then out to Twinsburg.

3 KC: Yeah.

4 RT: And growing up there. The town I live in right now is Aurora, and it's the
5 next town from Twinsburg. I still maintain a P.O. box, mailing address in Twinsburg.

6 KC: Okay.

7 RT: I walk in the hardware. I walk in the post office. It's very common to walk
8 into someone that I know even to this day. So, that's—it's unique, and it's precious.

9 KC: Yeah. And it certainly sounds like you appreciate it too, by the sound of it.

10 RT: Oh, I do. You don't know it until much, much later. But yeah, I remember the
11 teacher telling us, "You're going to miss these days." They were right.

12 KC: Of course, we're always too young to appreciate it at the time.

13 RT: Yeah, yeah.

14 KC: Well, I wonder if you might tell me about growing up during the '40's,
15 certainly the '50's and the '60's. Particularly, what you remember about the Cold War
16 growing up, the confrontation between the East and West—the United States and the
17 Soviet Union. Some of the different events of the Cold War that you might remember.
18 Can you talk a little bit about growing up in that environment?

19 RT: Well, I remember the fire drills and the air raid drills in school in fifth and
20 sixth grade. The alarm would go off, and we'd exit out of the school. Or we would be
21 ushered to line up and kneel over against the walls in the hallways. It was bomb threat
22 alert or whatever kind it was. That's pretty much it. I don't remember much of that. I
23 mean I played baseball all the time. I wandered. My mind wandered, and I wandered.

24 KC: Right.

25 RT: And I really, really didn't start taking an interest in politics or what was really
26 going on with my country until high school started with politics and American
27 government and World History and American history and stuff like that. Then it became
28 an interest. I'm profoundly interested to this day. I'm very dedicated historical buff on the
29 Vietnam War. When I do my talks—I do a lot of talks. I like them to be different, as
30 different as it can every time. I will always get back to the heart and soul of what it's all
31 about with the Vietnam War and my buddies, what happened to us over there and what's

1 happened to us since. I always like to delve back into time and talk about Vietnam as a
2 country and talk about the Vietnamese people back in the times when they fought off the
3 Mongol hoards, and they fought off the Chinese after centuries of being dominated by
4 them and how they fought off the French in the Battle of Dien Bien Phu. They were
5 really very resilient people throughout time. So, they were a very respectable enemy, so
6 to speak. We weren't fighting farmers with pitch forks. We were fighting seasoned
7 warriors, who just wanted to be left alone. They were resilient. They weren't war like.
8 They were resilient. Again, they fought off the Mongol hoards and the Huan Dynasty in
9 China for centuries. That interests me a lot. I have an affection for the Vietnamese
10 people. I don't hate them. My anger is geared towards my government.

11 KC: When did you graduate high school?

12 RT: I graduated in 1963.

13 KC: 1963. All right, now, obviously, this is a time when you're coming of age
14 during the Kennedy administration and John F. Kennedy's presidency. It meant an awful
15 lot to folks in his generation. What do you remember about Kennedy and what kind of an
16 impact does that time happen?

17 RT: Well, I was pretty much affected the same way most everybody was. I kind
18 of really idolized that president. His tragic death—we all remember it. It was just tragic.
19 We were all in school. But we didn't know about the negatives or the political things, oh,
20 the dirty laundry in the closet that they all display now. We just had great opinions and
21 perceptions of him back then, as I did with Eisenhower and Truman. It's not until you get
22 out in the world, and you start hearing the negatives from people. It's like I didn't know
23 about racial problems until I got out in the world after leaving Twinsburg until I got in
24 the service and travelled around the country, around the world. I was faced with the
25 prejudices and the hate—people from different parts of the country and how they grew
26 up. I didn't grow up that way. So, I didn't have them. I don't have them now. But I
27 developed my attitudes, my opinions, as we all do. I'm still very patriotic, but again, I
28 have a lot of anger from the Vietnam War for obvious reasons. I don't have a "get even"
29 mentality or attitude, but I'd still like to see justice served for all of my brothers. And
30 that's probably the main reasons for my books because my books were gritty, passionate,
31 very truthful and hard-hitting. The VA would not consider me their close buddy. In fact,

1 many, many, many, many people from VA have read the book, doctors, my primary care,
2 my psychologist and stuff. None of them have anything negative to say about it. I told it
3 like it is. I told it like it was. Blah, blah, blah. But the bureaucrats up above, the Benefits
4 and Comp administration people probably would feel a lot differently because I
5 constantly contradict their ways, their system, their ineptness, and ruthlessness
6 throughout the books. Everything is documented. I sourced everything. I document
7 everything. I know stories about vets that spent fifteen, seventeen, twenty years fighting
8 VA. A husband and wife that both died before the husband got any benefits. He didn't get
9 any benefits. They both died fighting the VA for his disability rating. He was in a
10 wheelchair. He was a platoon brother of mine, and a lot of sad stories like that. So, it's
11 tough for me to not carry the anger because the relationship between these guys. We
12 really, really are brothers for life. We're from another family. We're fighting in a battle
13 next to a guy day after day. You're being exposed to the dangers. We were in '68, the Tet
14 Offensive year, the bloodiest year of the entire war. In fact, it was so bloody that the
15 media, the government, or both seemed to be hiding. They were hiding the casualties, the
16 number of casualties that were taking place in 1968. In fact, like the My Lai incident,
17 which happened in 1968 wasn't released for several years afterwards. They kept it a
18 secret, the My Lai Massacre. As it turns out, when the Tet Offensive year ended in
19 1968—these are phenomenal figures. Americans—we suffered a hundred and three
20 thousand casualties—that's killed or wounded—in the one year of that war. That total
21 exceeds the total casualties of Americans in every war since combined—just that one
22 year, 1968. It's in the books. It's in the history. It's online. It's clearly there. You do that
23 math. You can even throw in the Indian Wars. But only the Civil War and World War II
24 exceeded the Vietnam War as far as total casualties. But that one year, which got out of
25 hand. That year got so much out of hand. We were on a mission of destruction, it seemed
26 like. Search and destroy, search and destroy, body count, body count, search and destroy,
27 body count, body count, daily, nightly, 24/7. It's like the generals were obsessed with
28 the process. We felt like sacrificial lambs that we were being sacrificed. We had no
29 purpose. It felt like we're not coming back, we're not meant to come back. We developed
30 attitudes like that that were very common. It was true for a lot of them. It was true for,
31 obviously, a lot. Fifty-eight thousand died over there, and over a million of us have

1 supposedly or allegedly died since coming home from the Vietnam War. There are many
2 sources and statistics that show that Vietnam veterans have actually been dying at a faster
3 percentage than our fathers and uncles from World War II. Not higher numbers, but a
4 faster percentage. So, therein lies my reasons for the anger and writing books to defend
5 and to spread the word and to tell my brothers' stories, so that their memories will not be
6 forgotten, which is the main interest for me to participate in this survey, as well. I care
7 very dearly about the Vietnam veterans. I remember their faces over there. I remember
8 their faces from back here. I've gone to too many funerals over the last ten or twelve
9 years from premature deaths from Agent Orange caused diseases, PTSD heart attacks,
10 and things like that, what have you. I sit with the families at each funeral because we are
11 all like family. I'm in touch with the families of the platoon members that have passed
12 away prematurely. Like I said, there's too many of them. I was starting to get really
13 paranoid when they seemed to be—when it seemed like one of them was falling every
14 three or four months, guys that I served with. We lost enough of them over there, let
15 alone back here. That's when I started thinking about writing the books, the first book
16 called *Undead property?* With a question mark leaving hope that we're not condemned
17 property. I feel that Vietnam veterans are an endangered species. I really do. Out of the
18 2.8 million of us, 2.9, total of 3.0 million served in Southeast Asia if you include
19 Thailand and the Philippines. Roughly half of us are gone. I don't know. The situation
20 with those remaining alive has become oh so evident with me with which remains in my
21 platoon. All the hundreds of I've been in touch with since my first book *Undead*
22 *Property?* They're showing me the same thing. They're double amputees. They're
23 messed up in their head. One of our platoon members was on forty—he was considered
24 forty percent on disability. He had full blown diabetes. He was going in for dialysis three
25 times a week. He was not able to work anymore. But they only had him on forty percent
26 disability. When I found that out, I contacted congressmen. I contacted a couple other of
27 my platoon buddies. We all banded together. We wrote. We got a hold of Veteran
28 Services and got Curtis Daniels—that was his name—in the State of Texas. We got him
29 back in for another evaluation, and they immediately got him up to a hundred percent
30 with some back pay. Unfortunately, he died about a year and a half later from his
31 diabetes. So, you know, stories like that remain with me. I'm not going to forget these. I

1 lived these experiences. I'm not going to forget them. It's pretty hard to forgive a
2 government that's responsible for things like this. Every morning, I read a new story
3 about a new scandal or a new not so tender loving warm and fuzzy thing that was
4 uncovered at the VA that was covered up or distorted. I have my own battles going on
5 with the VA. I have a ten-year battle going with VA on my disabilities. I suffered back to
6 back strokes right after my first book came out, after I finished. Within weeks after my
7 first book came out, I suffered back to back strokes and was hospitalized. I was operated
8 on, saved. The VA doctors saved my life. I'm grateful. But it never should've come to
9 that. The fact that they left me sitting in the emergency room for an hour when I checked
10 in caused me—and it goes without saying my primary doctor agrees—it caused me to
11 lose my vision in one eye, permanently impaired vision in one eye. I have problems with
12 balance and motor skills and depth perception and memory. I believe it's the beginning of
13 dementia. I think it's clearly the beginning of dementia, and so does my wife. So, I can
14 remember everything I did, seems like, in my life. I can remember everything that
15 happened in Vietnam. But I can't remember where I set my coffee cup down thirty
16 seconds ago. I can't remember where I left my wallet when I'm checking out at Walmart.
17 I leave it on the counter. I do this constantly. In a week's time, I misplaced three credit
18 cards. I'm still searching for one. This goes on and on and on with the dementia part. I
19 have a service dog. She's great. She's a big lovely friendly fluffy Newfoundland, Bella.
20 I've been blessed with the medical care at VA. Most of the medical care of those people
21 has been excellent. My problem—and most of our problems—have come with the
22 compensation and benefits of the administration people. Those people. I've—one of my
23 platoon buddies, Bobby Vest, Goldsville, North Carolina. He literally turned his car
24 around one time when he found out that a cop examiner blatantly lied on his porter
25 evaluation. Bobby turned around. This is quote unquote. He turned around in his car and
26 drove back to that VA and charged through the lobby and up the stairs after that doctor
27 and proceeded in trying to choke the life out of him. He's obviously banned from the VA.
28 Things like that, you know, I've had my times when I would challenge a cop examiner,
29 and they would question me on this. Something on that. They would—oh, a couple of
30 them have belittled the effects of Agent Orange. "It's roundup. It's a little more than
31 roundup. It's very, very borderline whether Agent Orange really caused your problem or

1 this problem.” They would indicate that the government was actually doing us a favor
2 and being very lenient with us. “We don’t know for sure if Agent Orange is the cause of
3 your diabetes or if Agent Orange is the cause of many of these diseases and the early
4 deaths and stuff like that.” You’re kind of leery. Do you get back in their face and
5 endanger yourself of receiving a good rating? Well, yeah. Most vets would be leery of
6 doing that. It’s behind closed doors, so it’s not reported. It becomes your word against
7 theirs anyway. But I’ve had several of those. I remember one day, one comp and tent
8 examiner after about an hour interview or exam with me, he said, “Yeah, well, you know,
9 you were wounded. You have a Purple Heart, but you’re okay. I don’t see the damage.
10 We can’t even find how you were treated for that wound.” I sat there infestered, and I
11 stood up. I never remembered what everybody told me. “Don’t lose it. Don’t lose it.” I
12 leaned over on his desk, and I said, “Look, you. You don’t have any idea what the heck
13 you’re talking about.” January 3rd, I was on an armored personnel carrier. We were in an
14 ambush outside of a town called Tran Ben. There was an explosion. Either an RPG hit the
15 track which I was on or on top of or landed next to it. I don’t remember. It knocked me. It
16 knocked the APC. It knocked me off, and I landed on my head, knocked unconscious.
17 Battle’s going on. I was medevac’d on a chopper with the other wounded back to a small
18 out post called Do Ting. It was a small base camp. It was schedule to be checked out the
19 next morning. Well, unfortunately, the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese regulars had
20 other plans. Around midnight of July 4th or so give or take a minute, it began. Do Ting
21 was hit with over five hundred rockets, mortar, and RPGs. They overran the perimeter.
22 They overran the base camp. They were in (inaudible), as we call it. They blew up the
23 clinic. They blew up our hooch. All of our personal belongings were destroyed. I took
24 some shrapnel in my knee and my foot. The battle raged all night, and it’s documented. It
25 eventually—they were fought off and cleared the perimeter was cleared. I was bandaged
26 up, sewed up, bandaged up, and two days later I was sent out to the field. I never was
27 checked out for the concussion. Very little treatment done to the shrapnel wound in the
28 knee and the foot. They cleaned it, took the metal shrapnel out, cleaned it, and bandaged
29 it up. And I was back out in the field January 5th walking point all over again. So, I told
30 this to a Captain then, “Jesus, you son of a—I never got a chance to get treated. They
31 overran our perimeter. They human waved us. There was no—” As a matter of fact, we

1 had our first reunion, our platoon. None of us saw each other after we left. None of us
2 went back. None of us signed up or extended. We had seen too much, too much horror.
3 We all wanted to get out of there. We didn't want to see each other. We didn't want to
4 see anything that reminded us of Vietnam. But in 1988, a couple of the platoon members
5 and their wives went through the Army located services, and they organized a reunion
6 that none of us will ever, ever forget. It brought us back together in a way. We realized
7 the bond that we had. The tears flowed freely. Husband, wives, kids. We've all remained
8 in touch since. Saying goodbye from that reunion was extremely difficult. So, even
9 though we tried to have a couple more, it was just too difficult to say goodbye. We
10 decided we're not going to do it anymore. I attend other reunions on a company basis or
11 division basis. But as for our platoon, well there are only five of us left now. I talked to
12 them on a personal basis, and when I can, I visit and get together. Curtis Daniels was
13 dying from his diabetes in Texas. My wife and I visited him several times, spent time
14 with the family and Curtis. He and I were extremely close. When I saw his legs from the
15 diabetes after a couple of toes were cut off from one operation and one leg, these legs I
16 can't even describe how bad they looked. You can tell what it looks like when their legs
17 are going from diabetes. It was ungodly. He didn't last much longer. Possibly, had he
18 been covered and treated—quite possibly much sooner and a lot better, he'd still be here.
19 Okay, yeah, that's possibly this, possibly that. My own little situation, I was not
20 diagnosed with my diabetes II until 2010. That doctor—when he had diagnosed me
21 through the lab test, he called me up and asked me to come in to see him. I came in. Dr.
22 Paul Vanchers was his name. He told me. He said, "You're diabetic. You got diabetes
23 type II." I said, "Well, can I get over it? Can I cure it?" He says, "Nope. You're going to
24 have to change your lifestyle and live accordingly to get it under control. You can get it
25 under control." Then he said, "As a matter of fact, Mr. Trimmer, your medical records
26 show that you've been diabetic since you came into the VA system in 2005-2006. No one
27 ever told you? You were never made aware?" I say, "No, no. I'm not a doctor." So, I had
28 151 or 180 glucose reading. I didn't know what that meant back then. No one told me. I
29 didn't know anybody who was diabetic. Now, in my family, there had been diabetic. No
30 one has ever died from diabetes. In my family it wasn't something to deal with. Anyway,
31 he confirmed and said that I was officially in his medical opinion I was diabetic back

1 when I first came in the system. Could I have been—had I been treated and had I been
2 taking care of my diabetes better for five or six years earlier, I may not have had the
3 stroke. It's very possible. So, I weigh these things. It fuels my anger when I go see a cop
4 examiner person. Knowing how we live, the conditions we lived under, in my book, cop
5 examiners literally shot people. It's the living conditions we were put under. Just
6 indescribable. We lived like pigs. Stone Age people lived better than we did. They ate
7 better than we did. It was just deplorable, despicable. It was just out of hand. We never
8 got over it. My own jungle rot has never been cleaned up. I tried several times. I have a
9 lot of scars on my legs from the jungle rot. Here I'm seventy years old in 2015. The
10 guys—there are a lot of positives for Vietnam veterans out there. I don't want to sound
11 totally negative because I'm not. I have a lot of positive attitude in me and have a lot of
12 fight left in me. I'm motivated to do whatever I can for any or all my Vietnam War
13 veteran brothers for as long as I breathe. Unfortunately, it was a very small percentage of
14 troops—Vietnam veterans—that incurred or lived through such deplorable living
15 conditions. The non-combat personnel lived very well. The large fortified base camps—
16 they had a hooch. They had a PX. They had three meals a day. They had fresh clothes, a
17 shower. They had a radio and a bunk and a fan. PX movies. All that sort of things. They
18 had roads and jeeps. We slept on rice paddies, and we slept in red ant nests. It was not
19 uncommon for a bamboo viper or a cobra to wither by while we were on our search and
20 destroy missions and what have you. The clothes rotted off of our bodies. The boots
21 rotted off of our bodies. In fact, those wounds that I received on July 4th, the knee and the
22 foot, which were attended to as well as possible for field conditions, turned into cellulitis
23 after a couple of months, and I was hospitalized with infections and bad cellulitis in knee
24 and foot. It's very conceivable that I could've lost my leg or lost the foot had I continued
25 and had I not been treated. So, we were—we felt like we were sacrificial lambs. Of
26 course, to compound all of this what was starting to happen back home. Our attitudes
27 deteriorated even more. "What the f are we over here for? What the f do they think we're
28 doing here? The guys in Korea fought because of the domino theory allegedly. That's
29 exactly what that war was all about, so why wasn't Vietnam just as justified as the War in
30 Korea was?" The domino theory, which turned out to be reality. Laos went communist.
31 Cambodia went communist. Thailand was on the verge of it. The North Vietnamese was

1 constantly probing Thailand, and the Thais knew it, which was why they fought
2 alongside us in the Vietnam War and the Australians. Filipinos knew it, which was why
3 they fought alongside us in the Vietnam War. South Koreans knew it, which was why
4 they fought alongside of the Vietnam War. We felt—from what little news we received
5 because mail wouldn't reach us for days and days. So, every now and then we'd get a
6 stars and stripes newspaper. The news would be four weeks old. You'd read about the
7 protests and the riots and the things that they were saying. I can remember to this day this
8 is why we're over there. Forget the reception of coming home. This is why we're over
9 there risking our lives and living like dogs, in our minds, fighting for our country, as our
10 fathers and uncles did. It's the same patriotic mentality that they had. But the media
11 looked like the media was distorting everything about this war. When I came back, and it
12 was still going on, I would watch some of the newscast stuff. I noticed every time they
13 talked about—a lot of us have this discussion a lot—every time they would talk about,
14 “Another search and destroy mission in another village in Vietnam is destroyed.” They'd
15 always show a burning village in the background every time they referred to a search and
16 destroy mission by us. They didn't tell it like it was that the Viet Cong had burned the
17 village. They didn't tell it like it was that we had received rounds. We had received fired
18 from the village while we were on the mission, and we were defending ourselves. That
19 particular village was harboring and hiding the Viet Cong. Not exactly at their will. Most
20 instances, it was against their will. Nevertheless, we would be shot at. We would be
21 ambushed by enemies in this village, and we would fire back. Sometimes things got out
22 of hand, as Oliver Stone depicted in his movie *Platoon*. The minds of those guys
23 deteriorated. Unfortunately, they destroyed a village in that movie and killed some
24 people. That happened. Oliver Stone served in the same division that I did. My buddies
25 and I were basically the replacements for that unit, which was pretty much wiped out at
26 the Battle of Sui Tre, which is a movie he depicts in the movie *Platoon* at the end of that
27 movie. It was one or two of the largest single day battles of the entire Vietnam War. No
28 one ever heard about it. The media never heard about it. Oliver Stone was, I guess,
29 talking to some of the guys who had actually served with it. “Did we really fight there?
30 Did it really happen? The media never covered it, never mentioned!” But you can go
31 through the 25th Infantry Archives online, and you can find everything you want.

1 Documents, which I have done in both of my books. I've sourced all of my figures and
2 facts—things about Agent Orange spray: when, where, how, the amount. That kind of
3 stuff. A lot of charts and things in both of my books that most people who read them
4 never know including Vietnam Vets themselves. They never knew. Casualties—the
5 casualties, the casualties. I fully believe that a clerk motor pool mechanic, a driver for the
6 inspector general, kitchen help, back in a primary nature-based camp, when they would
7 see choppers bringing in the body bags of our guys from battles that that was traumatic
8 for them. I fully believe that when they were mortared and rarely was their perimeter
9 encroached because on a major base camp is just that, a major base camp. They have
10 heavy artillery. They have access to air power. They have rows and rows and rows of
11 concertina barbed wire and well-fortified bunkers. They're not living in the ground or in
12 the jungles with nothing over their heads but the canopy. But I believe when those mortar
13 attacks hit their base camps in Cu Chi, Khe San, whatever, Pleiku, that they were
14 traumatized also. But the level of trauma and stress that they incurred and the living
15 conditions and the trauma from our living conditions and the constant threat of an
16 ambush in our lives on a daily basis out there, there's no comparison. Absolutely no
17 comparison. In my books, I kind of iterate—I kind of hit on that, but I back off. I
18 apologized too to my brothers. Look, all of Vietnam was a battlefield from Cambodia to
19 the South China Sea to Khe San to the Mekong Delta. It was all one big battlefield.
20 Everyone was in danger. Agent Orange, though it was focused primarily in combat areas
21 where the heaviest combat would take place, it did drift. I studied that. It did drift. It
22 floated. But much of Vietnam was pretty much safe from Agent Orange. There were just
23 a few very, very (audio cuts off).

Interview with Roland Trimmer

Session [2] of [3]

Date 19 August 2015

1 KC: This is Kelly Crager continuing an Oral History Interview with Mr. Roland
2 Trimmer. Today is 19 August 2015. I'm in Lubbock, Texas, on the campus of Texas
3 Tech University. Mr. Trimmer is kind enough to join me by telephone again from Ohio.
4 Mr. Trimmer let's pick back up with your time there in the spring, summer of 1963,
5 graduating from high school. Did you know what you wanted to do once you graduated?

6 RT: Oh, sure. I wanted to be a professional baseball player.

7 KC: Oh, is that right?

8 RT: Yes.

9 KC: Tell me about that.

10 RT: Well, there was a slim chance. It wasn't a complete no chance. I had been on
11 an all-star at every level in the league up to high school. Unfortunately, our high school
12 was very small. It dropped baseball after my freshman year because our track teams are
13 so dominant. So, everybody went out for track. I actually did both in my freshman year. I
14 played centerfield on the baseball team and ran track. They tried to schedule me at the
15 same school. That was fairly common with small schools back then, I think. But it
16 couldn't last. So, they dropped baseball. So, we focused on track. We won many, many,
17 many championships and became like a terror in northeast Ohio. It was just this very
18 small school in Twinsburg, Ohio. We're running the best. We'd win against the best and
19 the biggest schools we could find. Back in my mind was always baseball. Baseball.
20 Baseball. So, I went onto college part-time.

21 KC: Where did you go to college?

22 RT: I bounced around taking night courses at Kent State University, at Cleveland
23 State, and at Cuyahoga Community College and then I think eventually in '65 or so—
24 maybe '66—I started full-time hours at community college and still taking some Ohio
25 course here and there at an Ohio State extension in Canton or Kent State or something or
26 Akron, you know. All this time, I'm always working, working part-time, trying to pay my
27 way. I had to pay my own way. I didn't have any other source, any means. In '67, I was
28 getting—I don't know if I want to say frustrated, but I was watching and experiencing all
29 of my friends—not all of them because some went to college too—but a lot of them are

1 getting drafted and going away to Vietnam. Whether I felt guilty or not, I don't know
2 that. But I let my hours drop below full-time, which no longer kept me from the draft.
3 Well, what I didn't think of was I had hooked up with a class A baseball team in the
4 summer of '67. I not only made it, but I was starting centerfielder, cleanup hitter. Three
5 years of not playing any baseball at all didn't happen. It was like they say riding a
6 bicycle. I just started right off and was looking pretty good. Before a big game was
7 coming up, I received my draft papers. Of course, I was devastated. I had forgotten that I
8 was no longer disqualified from the draft because I wasn't going full-time in college. I
9 went to the next game, and the coach came up to me and said that there were scouts there
10 from three major league teams—Phillies, Athletics, and Indians. He said, "They're here
11 to see you and two other guys." One of the other guys was Jim Bandage. He was our left
12 fielder. I was a centerfielder. Jim went on to play football for the Miami Dolphins. He
13 was an All-American at Michigan at football and went on to play for the Miami Dolphins
14 and earned a Super Bowl ring. So, it was good company. Well, I played the worst game
15 of my life. I had nothing but Vietnam and the draft on my mind, and I wasn't focusing on
16 baseball. That's for sure.

17 KC: I wonder, could you tell me what you knew about Vietnam at this time? Had
18 you been keeping up with it, as events continued to develop over there?

19 RT: Well, you know, you saw it on TV. They referred to it as the living room war.
20 You saw the news reels. Every now and then there was a headline in a newspaper. I wrote
21 back and forth to several of my buddies, which also hit me pretty hard that they were over
22 there. I felt like I wanted to go, but yet not totally sure. The War wasn't that unpopular
23 yet. '66, '67 there was still a hint of patriotism and guys wanting to go over there and be
24 the next John Wayne or Audie Murphy or something. I kind of had that feeling in the
25 back of my mind that I wanted to serve my country and make my mother and have my
26 mother and my family be proud of me, my school, my town be proud of me, and serve
27 well if I went. So, I turned my uniform in after that game. It didn't matter. I was leaving.
28 I was going away in a month. I just said that my heart's not—I can't. I'm not going to
29 finish the summer out playing baseball. So, that would end my aspirations for a baseball
30 career. As it turns out, it wasn't that far-fetched. I had a (inaudible). So, of course, the last
31 month or so, I didn't really prep myself for going into the service, for going into

1 Vietnam. I drink a lot of beer. I kind of just let myself go. I figured that the Army training
2 would get me into shape, and it did exactly that. But I drank a lot of beer and put on a few
3 pounds. I got my last bits of fun in, so to speak with the friends I still had back home
4 before I left. That month went by fairly quickly. All of a sudden I'm on a bus on my way
5 to Fort Knox, Kentucky for basic training in September of 1967. Of course, this is a few
6 months before the infamous Tet Offensive started in '68.

7 KC: Tell me about your time there in basic training. What was your routine?
8 What was that experience like for you?

9 RT: You knew pretty quick that you were there to be brainwashed. The drill
10 sergeants from every level, every—they're always mentioning Charlie. Victor Charlie,
11 Viet Cong, and always preaching to you to be alert and always preaching to you talking
12 to you about booby traps and about ambushes. It started right away. It was obvious that
13 they were prepping us for that right from the very, very, very beginning. Unfortunately,
14 they didn't know at that time—and we found out later—that the VC, Victor Charlie, the
15 Viet Cong, weren't going to be much of a factor in '68 and thereafter as during the Tet
16 Offensive as we pretty much wiped out and destroyed the Viet Cong infrastructure. Our
17 war would be with the North Vietnamese regulars supported by China and Russia. But
18 throughout basic, it was always VC. "Victor Charlie this." Try to change this to imagine a
19 Viet Cong opposing us when we did our hand battles and our training and our facing off
20 with things. When we're shooting the mannequins, imagine a Viet Cong. A lot of times
21 they had imaginary Viet Cong with a cardboard dummy with a straw hat and a
22 Vietnamese face on it. So, the brainwashing was apparent. It was obvious. There was no
23 way around it. But not everybody went to Vietnam, obviously. I wanted to go. I had made
24 my mind up that I wanted to go, so if in my mind if I had any say of it, I was going to go
25 to Vietnam. But I was drafted, so they're going to send you to where they want.

26 KC: Right.

27 RT: I did not enlist, which can give you a little bit more of a guarantee not to go
28 to Vietnam. They might send you to Germany or someplace like that or stateside duty
29 rather than Vietnam.

30 KC: What about AIT once you finish basic training? Where was that for you?

1 RT: Well, interesting you ask, they made a movie about where our Advanced
2 Infantry Training was—Fort Polk. Fort Polk, Louisiana, in other words called Tiger
3 Land. The name of the movie was *Tiger Land*. They called it “Little Vietnam.” Coming
4 out of basic, my best friend, who was also a Cleveland guy, Johnny Victoran, we went to
5 basic together. Johnny decided that he wanted to go airborne. I didn’t. I said, “John, I just
6 want to go over there and get it over with. I’m just going to go straight to AIT wherever
7 they send me.” We’re talking later on after AIT, but we’re both sent to Fort Polk,
8 Louisiana, north fort Tiger Land.

9 KC: Describe Tiger Land for me.

10 RT: Tiger Land during those years was merciless. We trained with live ammo.
11 The schedule, the routine was merciless. You’re up at four. The bivouacking, the
12 training made basic training look like kindergarten because you’re actually in jungle-
13 type, tropical atmosphere humidity Louisiana. The vegetation, the snakes, the wildlife so
14 to speak, just the overall atmosphere, the environment was like Vietnam was going to be.
15 It was scary, but those eight or nine weeks actually went by pretty quickly. They got us
16 ready in a hurry. I need to tell you. I can remember some of the operations we had and
17 the assignments we had at night. A lot of them—we did a lot of night training because the
18 Vietnam War was largely fought, at least when our enemy over there decided to pick a
19 fight, was done at night. So, we did a lot of night training. Finding your way and knowing
20 how to use a compass was pretty important. The shape that we were in. I was never in
21 better shape than—even in high school running track, playing baseball, playing football, I
22 was never in the physical shape that AIT and basic and Fort Polk put me in. In my
23 physical fitness test at Fort Polk, one of the races was running a mile. You ran it in your
24 uniform and combat boots. I ran my mile in four minutes and fifty-eight seconds, less
25 than a five-minute mile. Heck, I couldn’t do that back in high school. That’s the kind of
26 shape we were in. Yeah, all of us became experts in all the weapons pretty much that we
27 were taught or shown from a .45 to a M-16, 14, hand grenade throwing. We actually
28 practiced that an awful lot. But humping through the bush was—they drove us
29 relentlessly. As we’re crawling and climbing under barbed wire and stuff like that, they
30 used real ammo when we’re climbing on ropes across rivers or ponds or so. They used
31 real ammo. Occasionally, a troop got hit. They didn’t keep their head down, or it was just

1 erratic. In the movie *Tiger Land*, they show all that. In that movie, *Tiger Land* was
2 actually taken during the early '70s when the Vietnam War was winding down. But its
3 depiction—if that's the right word—was right on how Tiger Land was. It was a twilight
4 zone, and it was good preparation for Vietnam. If anything, Fort Polk, Tiger Land might
5 have been the toughest eight and a half weeks of my life up until—at least up until that
6 time in my life. Obviously, the scenario in Vietnam became real, but it wasn't any more
7 difficult to do what we did in Vietnam than what we did in Fort Polk, Louisiana other
8 than it was real, and the threat was constant. So, the psyche and the mental aspect of
9 Vietnam, obviously we didn't have that fear that we're actually going to be ambushed or
10 we were actually going to step on a real trip wire that was going to blow up. So, all those
11 things became reality rather quickly. Fort Polk prepared us and the brainwashing
12 continued. Every other word out of these guys, and a lot of our trainers, instructors were
13 Vietnam veterans—rangers, airborne guys. They were good. They were all E-6s, E-7s,
14 sergeants. They were good, and they were serious. We respected them. This was no
15 longer basic training. We didn't look at the drill instructor as yogi bear. We looked at
16 these guys as—Rambo moves weren't out yet, but we looked at these guys as the real
17 deal. They were—we listened to them. I paid attention. Everyone else did. I remember it
18 was pretty serious at Tiger Land. It wasn't a joke. So, the US Army did a good job in
19 terms of preparing us, I feel, for Vietnam. They didn't know at the time that the complex
20 of the War and the enemy was going to change drastically from Viet Cong and small
21 ambushes over to human wave attacks per North Vietnamese regulars. It was a different
22 kind of warfare we had to adjust to over there on the spot, on the job training, so to speak.
23 That's the nature of the War. That's the way it would be from then on pretty much after
24 the Tet Offensive, which lasted most of 1968. People refer to the Tet Offensive as
25 January and February of 1968, but it lasted through most of that year, and actually, May
26 of 1968 was the bloodiest year of the entire war. We refer to May as the mini Tet
27 Offensive. But throughout the year—we went on the offensive. After the initial Tet
28 Offensive of January and February, we totally were on the offensive non-stop.

29 KC: Let me—

30 RT: Westmoreland's search and destroy program day and night. We just ever had
31 a rest, never had a rest.

1 KC: Well—

2 RT: Not mentally, not physically. So, Polk prepared us. Tiger Land prepared us
3 pretty well. Unfortunately, all of us lost about fifty or sixty pounds over there from heat
4 dehydration, whatever, diarrhea, and dysentery and diseases and such. Tiger Land, AIT
5 prepared us.

6 KC: Which is the whole purpose of it, of course.

7 RT: Yes, for the worst.

8 KC: You're in—

9 RT: They treated us roughly. There was no white gloves down there. It was tough.
10 It was rough. It was brutal. We hated it. But that's what we had to—it turns out that was
11 what was best for us.

12 KC: So, AIT there in Tiger Land, there's probably no surprise for you. It's going
13 to be infantry for you, right?

14 RT: Oh, yeah. Once you go to—you know you're sent there, that's where you're
15 going.

16 KC: Right, right. Now, after your time here in Tiger Land, you know that you're
17 going to Vietnam. You know that you're going to be a ground pounder. It's going to be
18 infantry for you. Now, a lot of folks received a thirty-day leave after they finished AIT
19 before they are shipped off to Vietnam. Was this the case for you?

20 RT: Yes.

21 KC: Yeah.

22 RT: It was.

23 KC: Tell me about those thirty days. This is a transition period, I think, in a lot of
24 ways for a lot of people.

25 RT: Well, my buddy, Johnny Victoran and I went through basic together and AIT
26 together. We went home together, and we just went home and hung out and laid around
27 kind of. Trying to imagine—I guess we were glued to the TV sets at that time, knowing
28 kind of knowing, anticipating or envisioning what was going to happen and how would
29 we respond, how would we perform, how would we act, will we make it. All the things
30 went through my mind. It was a transition, but pretty much we had been conditioned
31 through basic and certainly AIT in Tiger Land into almost wanting to get it on, get over

1 there and get it on, so to speak. Those thirty days flew by, of course. I can't remember a
2 single minute, a single day of those thirty days. I can remember almost everything that
3 happened in Vietnam.

4 KC: What was your family's reaction to this? You know that you're going to be
5 going over. What was your family's reaction?

6 RT: Well, my mother was the most affected. She felt I was on a mission for
7 suicide. I could've stayed in college. I could've been still playing baseball. She's kind of
8 right. My mother was a very religious lady. She was actually a Baptist missionary. She
9 saved a lot of people in her lifetime with her career as a missionary. Obviously, she
10 prayed to her god and lord profoundly for me over there and wrote. I knew that I had the
11 support back there, and I left a girlfriend, a high school sweetheart. We went together
12 since the ninth grade.

13 KC: So, now the time comes. It's time for you to report. Where do you go from
14 Twinsburg?

15 RT: Well, first of all, a couple buddies of mine threw me a going away party.

16 KC: Oh, is that right?

17 RT: Yeah, Columbus, Ohio, on the campus of Ohio State. My next assignment is
18 Fort Lewis, Washington. You can actually see Mount Rainier from the fort when I got
19 there. But that was my next assignment. Unfortunately, I was AWOL the first day.

20 KC: How's that?

21 RT: Our party in Columbus being the reason.

22 KC: Right.

23 RT: So, a couple of days. I woke up the morning I was supposed to be flying to
24 Seattle on the front lawn of a fraternity house. So, we were a couple days late. But the
25 Army waited for me. They didn't penalize me

26 KC: Oh, is that right? Well, that's good news, I guess.

27 RT: They were kind and patient.

28 KC: Yeah. Now, are you going to leave out of Fort Lewis, I assume, then?

29 RT: Yes. We're going to leave out of Fort Lewis in a day or two just processing
30 basically. We're not going to do anything there. We're not going to stay there very long.
31 It was in and out in a day. Just like that.

1 KC: Tell me about the trip over. How did you get there?

2 RT: Flew. We flew. We had two stops. I can't remember which was first or
3 second. I actually can't. Hawaii and Guam. Talk about night and day. Guam was just a
4 giant rock at that time, very little population. It was a base, obviously, for the U.S., which
5 they used in World War II. Hawaii—we're kind of hoping Vietnam would kind of look
6 like that, but it wasn't the case.

7 KC: right, right.

8 RT: But unfortunately, my wallet was stolen in Hawaii while we're sitting at a
9 restaurant and having a couple beers. So, I would end up going to Vietnam without any
10 money. Not that you needed a lot, but until my parents could wire me some or until I
11 could get my next check, my whopping \$82 a month, which was my salary, which was
12 my pay until I started earning combat pay then I'd go up to \$116 a month. But I was
13 pretty much having to borrow money left and right for a few things here and there. But
14 that was only for the first week, week and a half because after my initial processing and
15 transition period, it was smack dab thrown into it just like we were at Fort Polk. We were
16 thrown into it down there. The real Vietnam became a shock. It was just thrown at me.

17 KC: this is a good question to ask at this point then, I think. Once you land in
18 Vietnam—first off, where do you come in? Do you go into Tan Son Nhut?

19 RT: We came in—there were various three or four or five different places, but we
20 came in through Camron Bay, which is—it was like a resort area. It's where some of the
21 troops would go for R&R—rest and recuperation or rest and relaxation. It was also a
22 major hospital there where a lot of the wounded were taken care of. But it was a resort
23 area. You're on the South China Sea. It was gorgeous, gorgeous white sand. So, you're
24 still not really getting a taste of Vietnam other than when you first got off the plane, the
25 heat and the smell hit you smack dab in the face. This was a smell like never before that
26 you'd never experienced.

27 KC: Describe it for me.

28 RT: Well, the weather was the smell of death, the smell of ammo. It was just
29 stench. A combination of things. It was overwhelming, and it was distasteful. It was a
30 shock. Fort Polk didn't prepare us for that. The heat, of course, was very similar. I can't
31 say it was much different. Both humid and tropical. But that was the initial thing.

1 “Wow!” You immediately hear the artillery in the background. You’d hear it all day long,
2 so you think there’s battles going on all the time. In some areas there were. But Camron
3 Bay was a safe spot. There wasn’t going to be any danger there unless a stray mortar
4 round, which I never saw. We were there for three days. We filled sandbags at KP, just
5 like we did back at the basic training. Every evening, at five o’clock everybody would
6 amass into one huge group and stand there and wait for their orders and see where you’re
7 going to go and what unit you’re going to be going to.

8 KC: When did you arrive in-country by the way?

9 RT: I arrived in-country early March. Middle March 1968.

10 KC: Okay, okay. As you mentioned, of course, this is obviously a very busy time.
11 The Tet Offensive had been rolling for a while here although winding down in a lot of
12 parts. What units are you assigned to?

13 RT: Well, my initial orders said Saigon. Trimmer: Saigon. “Wow! Saigon!” I
14 immediately wrote a letter back to everybody. “Hey, I’m getting assigned to Saigon!”

15 KC: what did Saigon mean to you, at least at that point?

16 RT: Safer. It meant to me that I probably wouldn’t be out in the boonies with a
17 hard core combat unit. They did try to get me a security clearance out of basic, but I cried
18 that I didn’t want it. I protested. I said, “I don’t want the security clearance. I want to go
19 infantry.” Well, I got my wish. So, I thought, “Well, they’re going to send me to Saigon.
20 Whatever it is, they’re going to try to get me a security clearance for, they’re going to
21 hook me up with someone like that.” I don’t know. I was optimistic. So, what Saigon
22 meant, as several other places—Ben Hua, Tan Son Nhut, or Long Bien—I ended up in
23 Long Bien. From there, I got transferred directly to a little outpost, basically called Do
24 Tin, not too far from the Cambodian border. It was not a major base camp at all. It was
25 scary. The noises were louder, especially at night. It often got mortared. I was only there
26 for, I think, maybe a couple of days and then sent out to the field.

27 KC: What unit were you assigned to?

28 RT: Initially, I was with the 2nd of the 12th Infantry, which was originally 4th
29 Infantry unit, but they were transitioned and merged into the 25th infantry. I was only
30 with them for a few days. The worst thing that could’ve happened happened. We got
31 transferred to the unit that Oliver Stone had served in. Bravo Company of the 3rd of 22nd,

1 the walking regulars, who were renown for taking some of the highest casualties of any
2 unit in the U.S. Army. They had just been pretty much wiped out in Bravo Company at a
3 battle called the Battle of Good Friday in early April. A bunch of us were all transferred
4 over to them immediately as replacements.

5 KC: I wonder if you could tell me about this.

6 RT: Pardon me.

7 KC: I'm sorry. Coming into this new unit, B Company 322nd, what was it like to
8 be a replacement coming into this with a group of seasoned soldiers. Can you tell me
9 (inaudible)?

10 RT: They weren't a lot of them left, so. There were only maybe four or five left
11 from the first platoon, so we came in replacing that many guys—a full platoon with thirty
12 guys. In any course, they were terrified. They were in a state of shock from the human
13 wave attack in the Battle of Good Friday, so the stories quickly adjust. You're on guard.
14 You're tense. You're alert. In any given moment, night, evening, it was difficult to close
15 your eyes and sleep at night. We were smack dab out in the middle of the field in a base
16 camp. We weren't even at an outpost like Dao Tien, which was much more secure. The
17 first night out, we got sent out on ambush. I walked lead point first night out with 3rd of
18 22nd. It was fairly uneventful, but it was scary to me walking through that jungle at night,
19 listening to the sounds and wondering what's going to happen and just praying that I
20 don't lead us into an ambush. We would set up our little camp—our platoon—we would
21 dig. We would carry a lot of, lot of, lot of stuff on our back.

22 KC: Such as what?

23 RT: Oh, your towel, your digging tools, utensils, ammos, two or three bandoliers
24 or ammo, your hand grenades, your C-rations, some of your personal stuff, god knows
25 why, an extra towel, an extra pair of socks, maybe an extra t-shirt. But that was pretty
26 much it. You couldn't carry enough hand grenades, as we learned later on.

27 KC: All right, now, you come into the unit. Your first night out, you're going to
28 be sent on an ambush. You've never been sent on an ambush before. Can you take me
29 through this process, becoming acclimated to not just the climate and the geography but
30 also the folks within the unit? What's it like for someone to come in new and to be sent
31 out on an ambush?

1 RT: Well, we were all called the “f’ing new guys.” The f’ing new guys always got
2 the shit job, so to speak, which is one of the reasons I was put on point right away. They
3 always put the f’ing new guys on point or flank security or rear guard or something,
4 which were the most obvious points that would be attacked, would be vulnerable to an
5 ambush. It was breathtakingly frightful. We had starlight scopes, so we could see in the
6 dark somewhat. They were primitive to today’s equipment, of course. But the platoon
7 leader would have the starlight scope and walk behind the point man. The point man
8 walked in front of everybody. You’re swinging that machete, and you’re wondering,
9 “Geez, I’m making all this noise with this machete. They can hear us coming a mile
10 away.” The mosquitos were indescribable. We couldn’t use any mosquito lotion because
11 they gave off a smell, an aroma, a smell that the Viet Cong could smell. So, we couldn’t
12 use any mosquito lotion. We’d get to our designated ambush site. You set up your camp,
13 and like I said, you dig in. You carried sandbags too—empty sandbags, which we filled
14 for our bunkers. Prepare for the evening. Set out your claymore mines. Prepare for being
15 ambushed, actually, if you will. We would be. We were probed, mortared. That was
16 always the case pretty much every night, we’d get probed. Whether we were actually
17 attacked, it didn’t happen that often. But we easily got probed, and people got hit. So, we
18 lost a couple of guys that first night from the mortar attack.

19 KC: Actually, mortared the first night, so they obviously knew you were out
20 there?

21 RT: Sure. Oh, later we would find out they knew a lot more than that. They’d call
22 us out by our names at night because a lot of them were working during the day as a
23 barber or as a cook in some of the Army base camps. They were Viet Cong at night.

24 KC: You mention that you were setting up an ambush. This is your first one. Can
25 you tell me how you would set up an ambush?

26 RT: Well, we had our claymores. We’re actually walking single file out there. We
27 think we’re setting up for an ambush after we set up our perimeter with our claymores. It
28 basically—they know we’re there. We’re the ones that are most likely to be ambushed.
29 All the noise we make, thrashing through the jungle, through the leaves, through the
30 bush, and the noise digging our holes and our talking and stuff like that. There was no
31 surprise ambush that we were going to pull. It wasn’t like we were long range recon

1 patrol where we're going out strictly for information and spying and trying to be
2 invisible. We were—as it turns out, we weren't supposed to be invisible to the enemy, we
3 were supposed to draw fire. We were supposed to bring them to us. That was the goal.
4 We didn't know that at the time. It eventually—we knew that. It's suicide sending a
5 platoon size of twenty men, thirty men out to pull an ambush that when you could very,
6 very easily run into a company or larger sized enemy unit. It was just almost suicide.
7 There's no strategic value to it whatsoever, as we later learned, of course, time after time.

8 KC: How did this evening play out? You mentioned being mortared. You
9 mentioned being probed. Can you take me through that part of the activity?

10 RT: Sure. I don't know what time. We set up guard duty. There'd be two or three
11 of us each bunker or hole, if you will. They weren't really bunkers. We would try to
12 scrape up and cut some palm trees, some logs, and dig a hole as deep as we could without
13 digging down and actually hitting water because it's swampy. We'd try to be as
14 comfortable as possible, but there was no such thing as comfort. That was over it. The
15 living conditions from this point on were indescribable. They were horrendous. You lived
16 with the bacteria. You lived with the snakes. You lived with the bugs. They're all around
17 you. The stench, the discomfort. You didn't have toilet paper. You didn't have an
18 outpost. You wiped your butt with leaves, which could be contaminated, which could
19 have been sprayed with Agent Orange. That was a luxury if you had a little packet of
20 Kleenex. That would be your toilet paper. Left in your bag, in your sack. That would be a
21 luxury. People would trade for stuff or even buy it. For gosh sakes. It was insane. Well,
22 we were probed. We were mortared. You can hear them coming. You could hear the
23 sound. They were landing around us. Eventually, it hit one of our spots, our bunkers, and
24 two guys were wounded badly enough that we did not see them again. They stopped.
25 That was it. That happened routinely. Sometimes, they would tease us. They would crawl
26 up just far enough. We couldn't see them basically. They were still being—they knew our
27 claymores were out there. That was our big time ambush hoping someone will walk into
28 it, and we'd set up our claymores, and we'd just unleash our fire power and get some
29 body count. Body count, body count, body count. That was the whole goal, the whole
30 mission from above. Body count, body count, at any cost. Clearly, it was at any cost.
31 Body count. Some nights, they would talk to us. The VC or NVA—sometimes they'd

1 work together. Sometimes you fought a unit that was mixed with Viet Cong and NVA.
2 Sometimes, they would talk to us. "G.I. G.I. You die tonight, G.I. G.I. You no see your
3 wife tomorrow." Sometimes, it happened that they would actually call out someone's
4 name. "Jenner! We know you there, Jenner. You die tonight." That kind of mental psyche
5 played on your mind. "Johnson no like you. Johnson don't care for you." President
6 Johnson. They were masters. A lot of people don't understand or didn't understand or
7 didn't bother to understand or learn or study, but the Vietnamese were fighting wars like
8 this against superior forces for centuries. People would refer to them as, "Oh, well, you
9 fought farmers and peasants with pitchforks over there. You didn't really fight an army,
10 right?" You know what, go back in the history books, and ask Genghis Khan and the
11 Kublai Khan that question if those were people with pitchforks that beat the Mongols
12 year after year and fought them off. They used the same tactics that they used with us.
13 They were fighting guerilla warfare. They would burn their villages when the Mongols
14 invaded North Vietnam. They would burn their crops. They would hide in the mountains
15 and conduct guerilla warfare and torment the Mongols. And before that, they fought
16 China for centuries. History—the victories. Defeating the Chinese and defeating the
17 Mongols, it was worth reading for anyone because the tactics that they used and the
18 resiliency, they weren't warlike. They weren't trying to conquer anybody. They just
19 wanted to be left alone. China kept invading Northern Vietnam over and over until
20 eventually in the final battle at Bach Dang River in 938 AD an overwhelmingly
21 successful victory by the North Vietnamese against a far superior Chinese force sent
22 them on their heels. That was it, and then the Mongols started their conquest. Reading all
23 about that, there were several invasions in a row. Each one at one time or another was
24 fight off. The final one in 1288, I believe was the final straw that broke the camel's back
25 for the Mongols. Genghis Khan had aborted his attempts at conquering Japan, and he'd
26 become obsessed with the Vietnamese because they couldn't win the battle. They
27 couldn't conquer North Vietnam. These resilient people kept fighting back and kept
28 coming back and kept coming back. The Mongols lost that final battle in 1288. As a
29 matter of fact, they couldn't even retreat successfully. I remember the terrain, the jungle,
30 the Mongol woods. The Mongols rode in calvary. They rode horses. Well, they couldn't
31 operate. They couldn't maneuver in this kind of terrain. When they tried to retreat in

1 1288, the Dai Viet—that's what they were to be the North Vietnamese—pursued them
2 and destroyed them. They never got back to China. That was the end of the Mongols
3 invasions of China. Then you can go on to what happened with the French if you want. I
4 studied that. France was unsuccessful as well, eventually. Here we are. We came in, and
5 okay, we're like the Chinese. We're like the Mongols. We're like the French. Paying no
6 attention to the history of these people. I understand—I know now that it was not a civil
7 war between the north and the south. The North was trying to conquer the south as North
8 Korea was trying to do with South Korea. It was not a civil war like when the American
9 revolutionaries fought for their independence. South Vietnam was a separate country as
10 North Vietnam was. They were divided by the 17th P arallel or something—the
11 DMZ. That's the way it was supposed to be. But North Vietnam wanted none of that. Ho
12 Chi Minh wanted all of South Vietnam. He actually wanted all of southeast Asia. He
13 wanted Laos. He wanted Cambodia. He wanted Thailand, clearly to be all communist.
14 So, we're fighting this supposedly barbaric and prehistoric, if you will, type of enemy
15 who had centuries of background, centuries of warfare. Some of the revolutions that were
16 fought against the Chinese and the Mongols were led by women, by women of the
17 Vietnamese. The women were very tenacious in the Viet Cong ranks, very tenacious,
18 very well-schooled, well-taught, well-trained. This was the most magnificent prehistoric
19 or primitive military one could ever see that we ever faced. There was nothing primitive
20 about them.

21 KC: Sure. I wonder if you may—

22 RT: They were cunning. They were shrewd. The history shows that the earliest
23 stone tools were found about ten thousand years ago in Southeast Asia in what would be
24 North Vietnam, the earliest stone tools.

25 KC: Mr. Trimmer, Mr. Trimmer—

26 RT: Yeah, they were farmers, rice farmers. That's what they wanted. That's what
27 they lived. That's all they wanted.

28 KC: Mr. Trimmer, maybe we should kind of drift back here to your experiences.
29 You have this ambush that you guys set up this first night. Okay, so you've been probed.
30 You've got the mortars. Take me through the next morning. This is your first full night,

1 your first full day out there in combat in Vietnam. Take me through the next day. What
2 goes on the next day there once the sun comes up? What are you going to do?

3 RT: Well, we were pretty shook up. We lost—a couple of men had to be
4 medevacked that night. We were pretty leery. You never knew if it was going to happen
5 again, but for the most part, you weren't going to get ambushed or confronted in the
6 daytime. You'd have to stumble onto them for the most part. That's what we did. We did
7 try to do that. So, we were told to saddle up and basically eat your breakfast, your C-
8 rations, your crap, your bananas or pineapples or whatever you had. We're going out on
9 search and destroy, which was a sweep through the same muck, the same terrain, only
10 you can see where you were going for the most part during the day. Not entirely because
11 sometimes the terrain was triple canopy. It was so thick. It was almost impenetrable. I
12 always thought that we were still very vulnerable to be ambushed again, ourselves,
13 because here I am or whoever was walking point, flailing through the bush with this
14 machete, more concerned about not getting attacked by red ants or a bamboo viper or a
15 poisonous spider than Viet Cong or NVA and really not looking ahead for an ambush.
16 So, the next day, that's what that was. It was a sweep. We did get ambushed. We got
17 ambushed just before the sunset. We were ambushed with a .51 caliber machine gun that
18 they wield around on a farm cart. I remember the man that got hit. His name was Beck.
19 He was from Chicago. A .51 caliber can go through three or four houses. You can
20 imagine what it does to a human body. Beck only had five or six days left to go, and he
21 was going home. That happened all too often, way too often. I experienced more
22 situations like that in my tour in Vietnam where a guy would get hit, and he only had
23 three, four, five, six, seven days left in-country. Geez, you think they could've cut them
24 some slack and let them spend the last week in base camp, some place before he goes
25 home. So, again, we had lost two guys last night to the mortar attack and then the ambush
26 with the .51 caliber. That guy got hit. He was the only one that got hit. But the mark is
27 left on us. We still talk about Beck.

28 KC: What kind of effect does that have on you and the unit when you lose
29 someone like this?

30 RT: Well, you start going from fear to anger. You never lose the—I'm not going
31 to say you never lose the fear because we actually became quite fearless and quite

1 bloodthirsty, looking for it. The attitude changed immensely as time went on. We wanted
2 to kill enemy. We wanted to have contact. We couldn't wait for it, as time went on. But
3 in those stages, it's still, "Man, oh man, oh man, what am I in for? I still have three
4 hundred and fifty some days to go! And I've already seen three guys go down with this
5 unit! How am I going to make another three hundred and fifty some days?" Those are the
6 things that are going through your mind. You don't think you're going to make it. You
7 just don't. Again, the conditions sucked. That's all we said. "This sucks." This is what we
8 said all the time as you're pulling your one leg out of a three-foot mucky swamp, and
9 then the other one gets out. You managed to get on dry land eventually, and then you
10 have to get all the leeches pulled off your body. That was daily routine.

11 KC: Part of your routine, as you mentioned, was walking point. Can you tell me
12 what you're looking for, how you approach walking point? Sure, you've been trained in
13 Tiger Land looking for booby traps and things, but what is it like to be on the ground in
14 Vietnam in '68 walking point?

15 RT: Initially, as the f'ing new guy as inexperienced, there was nothing they
16 could—any kind of training in Tiger Land they could do to really—we couldn't detect
17 booby traps. They were perfectly concealed. It would be rare that we would ever discover
18 one. But fortunately, where we were at at this time with the terrain, the time in the war,
19 we weren't further south where more of the booby trap type of warfare prevailed. We
20 were closer to the Cambodian border where the NVA's, the North Vietnamese came and
21 went back and forth, and we were in the Iron Triangle that it was called where this huge
22 tunnel complex, hundreds of miles of tunnels had been built over centuries. So, they
23 could disappear. They would pull an ambush in broad daylight and disappear into these
24 tunnels. It was mind boggling. It was a phenomenon that should be one of the wonders of
25 the world, the Tunnels of Cu Chi. Walking point—you are just so alert. You're just so
26 watching everything that moves, every leaf whether it's the wind blowing or the giant rat
27 or a giant lizard crosses your path. Eventually, you become hardened. You become not so
28 sensitive to things like that. But in the beginning, in the early times, you're just—every
29 minute seems like an hour. Time went by very slowly walking point on search and
30 destroy missions. Then we set up our camp again. I think that's you right now.

31 KC: I'm sorry.

1 RT: I heard a phone ringing in the background.

2 KC: Okay.

3 RT: Oh, no, someone's buzzing me. I'm sorry.

4 KC: That's okay. That's fine. How long were you out in this initial sweep that
5 you were on?

6 RT: Well, funny you should ask that. The first one in April of '68, end of March
7 into early April, mid '68, was for about maybe a month. So, we lived out there for about
8 thirty days without any kind of—obviously, there's no facilities, no showers, no soaps, no
9 toilet. A lot of times, most times, no hot meals. Sometimes they would try to fly in some
10 food. We might have a hot meal if we were operating out of a base camp. When I saw a
11 base camp, I say a fire support base. But if we were just our company size, we were on
12 our own for our C-rations and whatever we can scrape up and what we were willing to
13 eat. So, for thirty days, we had one uniform, one set of fatigues, a couple of pair of socks,
14 so you were always able to change one and allow the other pair to dry and a towel and a
15 poncho. A poncho was pretty important especially when monsoon season came. All these
16 things weighed down your backpack. The towel was probably my best friend. Boy, that
17 thing stunk. The only thing you could wash it in, because there was no soap, would be a
18 bomb crater or a stream river that was swampy and mucky and dirty and full of bacteria.
19 The uniform, the fatigues would literally be rotting off of our bodies before the end of
20 that thirty-day trip in the field.

21 KC: And you're being resupplied by helicopter on a regular basis of C-rations?

22 RT: Sometimes not on a regular basis because they took fire. They knew where
23 we were. They always knew where we were. Helicopters would try to come in and bring
24 in mail. They would be—they, meaning the enemy, would be a click or two a couple of
25 hundred yards outside of us at all times sort of like when the cavalry and stuff were
26 dropping through the old west. You'd see the cowboy movies, and the Indians knew—
27 they had their eyes on them at all times. Well, they had their eye on us at all times. We
28 were in their backyard. They would shoot back at the helicopters whether they just had a
29 carbine or if they had a .51 caliber or if they had RPGs. They would fire back. Anytime
30 they took fire, they would not land. We would not get our land. We would not get our
31 meals. We would not get our fresh clothes, and that was more often than not.

1 KC: At the end of this—

2 RT: We came in after that thirty-day event—I would say thirty days—replenished
3 at Dao Tien. It's still an outpost, which is a glorified base camp. No paved roads. Very
4 little—it was in—Dao Tien is located in what's called the Michelin Rubber Plantation,
5 and that's what we were surrounded by, a rubber plantation. We were in a hot bed of the
6 Tunnels of Cu Chi. Cu Chi was our main base camp, our headquarters, and not too far
7 away twenty miles away or forty miles away. We went in for two or three days, and I
8 remember those two or three days because we had a couple of hamburgers and French
9 fries. That was special. But that was it. We were in there for two or three days, and then
10 we were sent back out where we stayed continuously for eighty-eight days. That's
11 documented. It's recorded in (inaudible) history on their website. They set the record for
12 the combat unit being in the field, in the bush eighty-eight days. Needless to say, our
13 fatigues more often than not were rotted and our boots. More often than not, we were
14 wearing rotted boots. By the time those eighty-eight days were over, I don't know how
15 much enthusiasm there was left. But you didn't want to go back out.

16 KC: So, what was the purpose of being out here for eighty-eight days? What was
17 the operation that you were on?

18 RT: Search and destroy at all costs. Get in the enemy's face. Draw fire. If you're
19 lucky enough, by the officers, the senior command desires, you're lucky enough to draw
20 fire, draw the enemy out, then you can call in artillery and call in the gunships and get
21 more body count. In the meantime, yeah, you may lose a few guys on the ground. Those
22 few guys on the ground are going to go through holy indescribable hell, horror to get
23 those body counts. We weren't out there trying to avoid contact with the enemy. That
24 wasn't our mission. That wasn't what we were there for. We weren't out there to walk all
25 day safely. We didn't go out on an ambush at night to end up safely. The mission, the
26 goal, the intent was to engage the enemy. Day in and day out.

27 KC: Are there any specific instances that come to your mind given this time, this
28 very lengthy period of time that you're out there? Any particular engagement or any
29 particular conversations, any particular developments that come to your mind when you
30 think of this time?

31 RT: Many.

1 KC: Could you give me an example?

2 RT: We were walking in an area in June, middle of June of '68. We'd been out
3 there for a month. Saigon had been hit in May. Ben Hua and Tan Son Nhut Air Force
4 Base had been hit. We were now—now we were engaged in a lot of eagle flights or
5 combat assaults where we would be picked up by helicopters, and we would be taken to
6 hot LZs where there was a battle going on where an American unit had been ambushed,
7 was under fire, and we would be taken and dropped in hopefully behind the enemy to try
8 to engage the enemy and trap the enemy. That was routine. Combat assaults became the
9 norm every day. When you were done, you would be combat assaulted back to where you
10 were, and you would resume your search and destroy mission. June 15th, our sister
11 company Charlie Company the day before had been ambushed and casualties were
12 heavy. They were not able to retrieve their wounded. Their wounded were taken prisoner.
13 We weren't going to leave this area, not that we were going to find those wounded again.
14 But we weren't going to leave that area. We were going to engage that enemy again. That
15 was set in stone. So, Bravo Company was going out on the sweep the next day because
16 Charlie Company had been devastated with their casualties. They would be sitting back at
17 the perimeter for a while and maybe sent back to the base camp until replacements came
18 back in and they were replenished. A lot of times we just sat out there anyway as
19 replacements filtered in totally unlike World War II when a unit was heavily damaged
20 with casualties. They just pulled them off. They took them all back. They might not even
21 go back out. That might've been their battle for the war. They might've been finished. No
22 such luck in Vietnam. You stayed out there. I was walking point on the right side, right
23 file, and a guy named Paris was walking point in the left file. He was from North
24 Carolina. The machine gunner behind me was Haywood Taylor. He ended up being my
25 best friend from Chicago, Illinois. I spoke to him a couple of months ago. For some
26 reason—I don't know why—I saw a glimmer of movement. We're in this cold and hot
27 pineapple swamps. It was one ditch after another. Just one ditch of black muck after
28 another. You get on some—there was no dry ground. It didn't exist. It was wet, soft,
29 swampy, or it was a ditch. You had your choice. You went through one after another after
30 another after another after another. We traversed through steams all the time, swamp
31 streams up to our waist, up to our chest. It was insane. But I saw just a glimmer of

1 movement up ahead, and as I was starting my—my instant was just to hit the ground. I
2 started to dive for the ground, and so did the guys behind me. But the left file didn't see
3 me, and the first nine guys went down of the left file in the second including Paris, the
4 point man. Nine guys went down in seconds. So, they had us pinned down. There were
5 tree snipers. There were snipers behind—we were in—we had actually entered a
6 cemetery. Talk about eeriness. They were fire from cemetery stones, and they were in
7 trees firing. We did not pull back. We went forward. We attempted a counterattack. I
8 started hearing the screams from Paris. He had been hit, I think, in three areas. I lost my
9 senses, and I ran. I wouldn't call it running in the kind of terrain we were in. You
10 couldn't run. But I was tromping or plotting to get over to Paris. He was maybe fifty feet
11 away. That kind of terrain, that's—you can barely see in front of you. But I ran over
12 there, and I got to Paris. He was mangled. He was in shock, of course. He was bleeding
13 all over. His ribs were hanging out. He looked like his leg had been shot pretty badly and
14 his foot was maybe dangling by tendons to his leg. I don't know. Anyway, the enemy is
15 still out there. They didn't go away. All of a sudden, I took a round to my head. I was
16 firing back, trying to keep anyone from advancing, trying to figure out how we're going
17 to get Paris back. They had eight guys wounded behind him all in a row. People are
18 trying to get to them. So, this ambush turned into an indescribable nightmare. They say
19 your whole life goes by you just before you die, the whole world was going by me at that
20 time. I didn't know where I was. I didn't know what was going to happen next. I never
21 remembered running over To Paris. The story has been told and described often by the
22 other guys in my platoon to my wife. She's heard it from the other guys. Much of the
23 day, I didn't remember. I know I was there. I know the helmet took a round. I know there
24 was blood trickling down my forehead. I didn't know that I went into shock after the
25 helmet was shot off my head. I remember eventually I shook out of it. The guys were
26 yelling at me to snap me out of it. I was sitting there in shock. I know I crawled over after
27 my helmet to get it, and I got it. I made it back to Paris. The ambush is continuing on.
28 You got nine guys laying there moaning in shock, bleeding, and they can't move. Guys
29 can't get to them. I remember a medic. There's this little stream just to the left side of us
30 where Paris and I were sitting behind a cemetery stone. That's where I was firing from.

1 This medic got, oh, maybe within ten yards of us, and he took a round in the head. His
2 was fatal.

3 KC: What was the extent of your injury?

4 RT: Pardon me?

5 KC: What was the extent of your injury?

6 RT: I just got nicked. I just got nicked. Yeah, the bullet went through the top, the
7 front of the helmet, and it went out the back. I just got nicked. It probably grazed my
8 head enough to give me a little part in my hair. God was there. God was there.

9 KC: All right—

10 RT: The next guy. Another guy is trying to crawl up the next ditch to get to us, to
11 get Paris. He seems to be the worst of the wounded. About half of the guys were rescued
12 before they were able to get up to us, Paris. Another guy named Loftus, Billy Loftus. We
13 called him Farmer. He was a farmer in the hills of North Carolina. Paris was from North
14 Carolina. Loftus' helmet was removed from his head from an enemy bullet. He survived.
15 He was untouched by the bullet. He made it up to where Paris and I were. Then another
16 guy made it over to us, Martino. Martino was the ammo bearer for the left file second
17 squad M-16 gunner. Martino made it over there. There's no way we're going to get up.
18 There's no way we can carry Paris because he was in too much pain. His wounds were
19 too serious. So, we're going to take him down this canal and guide him through there.
20 Martino and Loftus and I started on that job. The guys are yelling, "Trimmer! Trimmer!
21 They're coming up!" Oh, shit. We crawled back to the cemetery stone and started
22 returning fire again to ward them off. They eventually—Loftus and Martino eventually
23 got Paris out. Push comes to shove, the Gooks disappeared. We know we shot some, but
24 it was so thick. It was hard to tell. We know we knocked one out of the tree. It was hard
25 to tell what kind of body count we actually had. That wasn't really our concern or on our
26 minds. Half the entire squad had just gone down. I remember one of our guys, Smokey
27 Ryan from South Amboy, New Jersey, was just an absolute fanatic that day and running
28 to the wounded until he got hit himself. His wrist was almost destroyed. He refused to be
29 medevacked. He fought us, fought the guys. "I'm staying here until every man's out. I'm
30 not going anywhere until every man's out." He tried to do that. The guys had to tackle
31 him and hold him and strap him and make him jump on the chopper to make him be

1 medevacked. That was the mentality that day, which I will never forget, ever forget. We
2 never saw any of those guys again that went down in the left file except Smokey Ryan.
3 He wasn't one that went down initially. He got wounded as he was trying to rescue some
4 of the guys. We never saw any of them again. So our company was at half strength. The
5 attitude after that night indescribable. Depression is an understatement, and you know
6 what? We're still out there. There's eleven or twelve of us left in the right file and three
7 guys or something from the left file left. We're still out there, fourteen or fifteen of us.
8 We got our little bunkers, if you want. If you have access to my book, *Condemned*
9 *Property*, the first one, the picture on the front cover of that is actually the aftermath of
10 that ambush. We're sitting on what we would call our bunker. You can actually see in the
11 background all the palm trees where they'd been shot in half or down. The tops had been
12 shot off. You can actually see the scum and bacteria on my leg, as I'm sitting on this
13 bunker where the guys were actually playing cards together. It was a game called Pong. I
14 remember it. But you could see the faces. There's no smiles. Nobody posed for the
15 photograph. You could see the faces. They're not faces of fear. They're not faces of
16 anger. I guess it's faces of futility, faces of, "Why? What are we doing here? Why?" That
17 pretty much was the attitude for the rest of the tour, I think, for many of us. We became
18 the seasoned vets, if you will, the five, six, seven of us. We kept seeing new guys coming
19 in. You stop making friends. That's an old given in combat. You stop making friends.
20 You covered each other's backs, but you didn't get chummy anymore. You say, "I don't
21 want to talk to you. I don't care where you're from. Just do your job, and we'll both get
22 out of here maybe." It wasn't a lot of hope. You really didn't think you were going to
23 make it. I stopped writing home, as many guys did. The attitude had deteriorated to that
24 level. I still had half a year to go. Man, I still had a half a year to go. There's no way out.
25 There's no way out. There's no, "Hey, you've been a good boy. You've been a good
26 soldier. We'll send you home now. You've seen enough." There was none of that. They
27 couldn't dig up enough combat troops to get out into the field because of the casualties.
28 The casualties in 1968 got out of hand. The media or the Army and the military kept the
29 information secret, or what. But people back home had no idea how many body bags
30 were coming back of Americans on a daily basis in 1968. In fact, the massacre of My Lai,
31 which happened in 1968, Kelly, was not revealed, was not discovered for three years

1 afterwards. The Army kept it a secret. We knew. We knew that guys are coming and
2 going. Coming and going. Coming and going. Every day, you'd hear about the, "Hey,
3 you hear about the 5th Mech last night? They got knocked out. They got ambushed on
4 Highway 1. They got wiped out." "What? 5th Mech got wiped out? What the?" "Hear
5 about the Green Beret Outpost that got overran?" We knew this stuff was going on.
6 Everyone talked about it. We saw it. We were in it. It didn't seem like there was any
7 hope. It just didn't. Well, then—after that day, we were sent on an ambush again that
8 night. We had just fought in that battle that day, lost half of our unit, experienced
9 unimaginable horrors that 99% of most people would never—could ever see in their life.
10 And we were sent back out on ambush, the fourteen of us. We found an old abandoned
11 stone building. We pulled up short of our destination where we were supposed to go for
12 our ambush site. Our platoon sergeant had had enough. We had all had enough for that
13 day. "Hey, you know what? Let's stay here. We got shelter. We're protected. I'll just call
14 in the coordinates where we were supposed to be." It was almost a court martial act
15 there. It wasn't that we were cowards, but we just lost half of everybody we knew. We
16 were half strength, and they're sending us out on ambush. We're beaten. We're beaten
17 down eighty-eight days straight in the field. That's what we did. If there is anything that
18 any of us could or should feel shame for ever over there was when we pulled up a couple
19 dozen meters short of our ambush site on the evening of June 16th of 1968.

20 KC: Now, was your platoon leader involved in this as well?

21 RT: Yes. It was his decision. It was his decision, and he's on the front cover of
22 my book. I won't say who he is, but he's on the front cover.

23 KC: While we're on this topic here, could you tell me about the leadership of the
24 unit as you experienced? It can be as low level as squad leader all the way up through
25 company or battalion commander. Can you talk a little bit about the different levels of
26 leadership that you experienced and how they formed?

27 RT: Sure. Unfortunately, to the fault of the military itself, the type of officers that
28 we see in the beginning as second lieutenants coming over, they weren't well trained. AS
29 a result, they weren't well respected. We actually dreaded them. We would prefer to have
30 a seasoned sergeant E-6 as our platoon leader as opposed to a second lieutenant. They
31 drop like flies over there. They also were the reason a lot of other men died. Because of

1 this, it's not hearsay, some of the were shot by friendly fire by their own men. I know of
2 one instance for sure. I don't know who did it, none of us do, but the second lieutenant
3 took a round into his back while he was on a listening post outside of the perimeter. We
4 were being attacked. We were being ambushed. He took a round to the back. That's all
5 that was ever said. We didn't ask questions. Nobody asked. We just knew. We just knew.
6 We didn't care. We were glad he was gone. Not glad he was dead. Glad he was gone. He
7 didn't deserve to lead us. The hardcore—the NCOs, noncommissioned officers, they
8 were us. A lot of times, they just got upgraded, or they forced you to take the promotion
9 because you ran out of men. You were given a title. I was given title of the squad leader. I
10 didn't want it because, hey, I'm the point man. I became permanent point man at my
11 request. I said, "I'm point man. I don't want to be no squad leader. I'm not going to be no
12 platoon leader. I want to be the point man. I'm tired of seeing the f'ing new guys go
13 down and leading us in the ambushes." So, I was permanent point man for most of the
14 time that I was out there in the bush after the first month or so. I have nothing negative to
15 say about any of our NCOs. I attended the funeral of two of them in the last couple of
16 years—Sergeant First Class Curtis Daniels in Texas and Sergeant First Class Buganny in
17 Madison, Ohio. I served with them both over there, and we socialized together after we
18 came back. My wife with their wives and then with us, our families, and stayed in close
19 contact until they died. Both of them died prematurely from the effects of the Vietnam
20 War, which is the tragedy of why I've written a few of my books too. They were heroic.
21 They were men's men. We couldn't have asked for better men out there. But for
22 whatever reason, some of these—they came from ROTC or instant officer school or
23 shake and bake, they were just creating and producing these second lieutenants that are
24 out there looking for a medal or something. But we didn't respect them very much. The
25 guys that made it to captain, they went through the ropes. They got seasoned, and they
26 got experienced. I saw some pretty good captains over there and company commanders.
27 Above that, you rarely saw anybody out there in the type of base camp areas where we
28 were in the bush rarely, rarely. In fact, I don't remember ever seeing any major or colonel
29 or general out there. In base camp, yes. But there was one instance we were under fire.
30 We were under an ambush. The brigade commander of the 3rd Brigade—his name was
31 Colonel Flint—was seen flying over the firefight, the ambush in one of these small

1 bubble choppers, a little round bubble chopper. He was throwing hand grenades down at
2 the enemy, exposing himself, exposing his bubble chopper for our benefit. He was
3 fearless. He didn't have to do that. Whatever citation or medal he received for that, god
4 bless him. He earned that one. We never forgot him for that. We've seen him a few times
5 since the War ended. He's still alive. He's a retired Major General who lives in Florida.
6 He came to our 20-year reunion in 1988 when we all first got together back since
7 Vietnam. He did a grand speech talking about the unit. They made a movie about Oliver
8 Stone's platoon, but he flew into Boston for that reunion and stayed there the whole three
9 or four days we were there. He drank beer and bonded with us and cried with us. I have
10 great memories of that as a full bird colonel exposing himself in one of those little bubble
11 choppers that you can shoot down with a .22 pistol let alone an RPG or an AK-47. So,
12 that was pretty impressive. I've read, and I've heard about other great leaders, great
13 heroics in Vietnam by officers. One particularly that I had studied and heard about was
14 Colonel David Hackworth. He was a commentator on Fox News quite often as Oliver
15 North was. He died of Vietnam War related causes—Agent Black, Agent Orange. Before
16 he died, he wrote four or five books and a couple of bestsellers.

17 KC: Yeah, a very famous guy.

18 RT: He was, and I had the opportunity of meeting him once in Cocomo, Indiana,
19 in a coming home type parade. They get staged every so often in little towns around
20 America. They still do. In fact, there's one in a town called Brimfield, Ohio, next month.
21 They've asked me to be the grand marshal and to speak after the parade. Of course, I will.
22 I'm looking forward to it.

23 KC: I'm wondering if we can take the time now. We've talked about the actions
24 of the guys in your unit, in the platoon, in the company, in your squads. You've talked
25 about the leadership. I wonder if you might take me through your thoughts on the unit be
26 the VC or as you say more likely the NVA. Can you tell me about who they were, what
27 their approach to things, your overall assessment of the enemy as you faced them in
28 Vietnam?

29 RT: Sure. As best I can. After one ambush firefight at night, we identified one of
30 the bodies. He was the Dao Tien Base Camp barber. That's pretty self-explanatory, isn't
31 it?

1 KC: Well, it may be to you, but for someone else, it may not be. So, can you talk
2 about that in some length for me?

3 RT: Well, he's working in military base camps during the day as a clean-cut so-
4 called Vietnamese citizen, and at night, he's a Viet Cong terrorist, and he's out to kill us.

5 KC: Who was this individual? I don't necessarily mean name, but can you
6 describe his person for me? What was the routine like? How were they received in camp?

7 RT: Well, he was a villager who came into Dao Tien and cut hair. He was our
8 barber. He was reimbursed by the government to cut hair. He was a villager. Most of the
9 Viet Cong that were farmers by day. Some villages were more sympathetic to the Viet
10 Cong than others. Some villages were doing it by force. Some were doing it on their own
11 initiative in the event. It went on. You had villages where the villagers were supportive to
12 the enemy. They were storing food. They were storing munitions in holes and tunnels for
13 the enemy. In some instances, the North Vietnamese—they were more brutal. When they
14 forced the village to support them, they always left their mark on the males. You very
15 rarely did you find a male of any age from thirteen on up or something in some of these
16 villages. If you did, they were missing an arm or a leg or an ear. That was the mark of the
17 NVA, what they left. It could've been someone who resisted to join their ranks. They're
18 always trying to force Vietnamese villagers to join the Viet Cong because their ranks had
19 been decimated in 1968. We had wiped out a force of 150,000 Viet Cong virtually almost
20 entirely in 1968. The battles—the intensity of the battles were so intense and bloody. The
21 search and destroy missions. The Viet Cong, as a fighting unit, by the middle or end of
22 1968, was nonexistent. Everybody coming down the Ho Chi Minh Trail and then
23 infiltrating were NVA. Pretty much everyone we were fighting in the latter half of 1968
24 and from there on were North Vietnamese regulars with Chinese assistance. Physically
25 and with troops and/or military equipment, et cetera. The Viet Cong was, as I mentioned
26 earlier, centuries of these villagers, the peasant farmers, their fathers fought the French,
27 and their fathers fought the Mongols and the Chinese and so on and so on. They were in a
28 constant battle fighting off invasions. One invasion after another. They lived it. It's all
29 they knew. I don't think the Vietnamese and the Dai Viet, whatever they were called
30 back then, but what's known to be the northern part of Vietnam constantly being invaded.
31 They were constantly fighting off their invaders.

1 KC: Right. I wonder if you could pick up the story, again, about the barber.

2 RT: Oh, just shock. When—it was Dave Potoski. He yelled out when he rolled
3 this guy over, “Holy f’ing shit! Look at this guy! It’s our barber!” We all ran over and
4 gathered around. And darn if it wasn’t. I mean, a lot of us sort of fell in love with the
5 Vietnamese people, the kids and stuff. We felt for them and didn’t want to believe that
6 most of them were Viet Cong at night. That was pretty shocking. Americans, as they
7 always have been whether World War I, II, Korea, Vietnam, we’re always generous
8 people. We’re always providing aid. Our medics took care of the civilians. Our medics
9 took care of the Viet Cong, the NVA. We captured if we took prisoners. That wasn’t
10 always a given. But our medics treated them. So, that was pretty shocking. That was—I
11 remember it. I remember plain as day. I remember Steve yelling out, “Holy f’ing shit!
12 Look who this is!” Are you kidding? We were all looking. “Oh, my god. You got to be
13 kidding me. The guy was shaving me with that razor a few days ago.” They would bring
14 them out to the field. We wouldn’t necessarily wait until we went into Dao Tien or Tay
15 Ninh for the base camps. They said they’d bring them out to the field sometimes. It was
16 ironic that we never got ambushed or mortared when they were out there. That makes
17 sense.

18 KC: Yeah. What was the circumstance of this individual’s death?

19 RT: Sniper ambush.

20 KC: Sniper ambush, okay.

21 RT: Maybe half a dozen or a dozen. A pure ambush. Catch a small unit, a squad
22 or platoon by total or complete surprise. Unless you’re the worst shot in the world with a
23 semi-automatic AK-47 and RPGs, three or four guys could wipe out an entire platoon to
24 catch them off guard completely. It didn’t take much. They were fearless. They would tie
25 some of their colleagues. What a favor that was. They would literally tie them to a tree.
26 Kamikaze if you will. You’re going to fight them until you die. Until we kill them, we’re
27 going to keep fighting or until we run out of ammo. They did that periodically. It was a
28 sight game again. The persistence of these people. The mindset, like I said, it was
29 imbedded in them. His dad and his dad and his dad and her mom and her mom and her
30 mom—one of the revolutions that were fought against the Chinese was led by two sisters
31 called the Trung sisters. They are historically famous in the history books of Vietnam.

1 KC: Yeah.

2 RT: And a couple of others were successful in repelling invasions by the Mongols
3 were women. They were tenacious.

4 KC: What about the—

5 RT: They were just trying to protect their land.

6 KC: Yeah. What about the NVA? Compare and contrast them with the VC.

7 RT: Compare them how? I'm sorry.

8 KC: Compare and contrast the NVA with the VC.

9 RT: Well, the NVA were professionally trained soldiers. They had uniforms, for
10 the most part. They always had uniforms. They were better equipped, better weapons.
11 Viet Cong would fight with Carbines, crossbows, whatever they could muster, and booby
12 traps of course. But the NVA were fully loaded. Sometimes they had the support of
13 Russian tanks during the end of '68 and '69. That's when they started showing up. They
14 were hitting boulders across the Cambodian border. When they attacked, it wasn't five or
15 six. It could've been a battalion or a couple battalions. The human wave attack became
16 synonymous just like in World War II the Bonsai Kamikaze suicide attacks. They were
17 there to die. Wave after wave after wave would come at you. They were there to die.
18 Until the fire power came in, if it was possible to call in the gunships because sometimes
19 the in your face fighting was so—we were so close to each other you couldn't bring in
20 the gunships. We had to kill them ten feet away whatever have you. They were relentless
21 as well. Same people. They were just professionally trained. When they were sent down
22 the Ho Chi Minh Trail, which is where they all came down, they weren't expected to
23 come back. They weren't expected to come back. We were going over for a year, and we
24 wanted to come home to Mom and our girlfriend, apple pie, a nice hug. They weren't
25 coming home. They were sent out, and that's what they were going to do until the day
26 they died. So, what were they afraid of? It's a different mindset than the American
27 soldier. The fact that we did fight the way we did is a tribute to my brothers and Vietnam
28 Veterans that they just never received the credit that they deserved. The fact that they did
29 fight the way we did and defeat—there's no question we won that war—and defeat this
30 enemy who had fought off the Chinese for centuries, had fought off the Mongol hords,

1 had chased France completely out of Southeast Asia, and we defeated them in battle until
2 our government gave up the country.

3 KC: Well, Mr. Trimmer, I think that's probably a good time to stop for today.

4 RT: Okay.

Interview with Roland Trimmer

Session [3] of [3]

Date 24 August 2015

1 KC: This is Kelly Crager continuing an Oral History Interview with Mr. Roland
2 Trimmer. Today is 24 August 2015. I am in Lubbock, Texas, and Mr. Trimmer is joining
3 me by phone again from his home in Twinsburg, Ohio. Mr. Trimmer, the last time we left
4 off, you were talking about kind of the meat and potatoes part about your tour there. You
5 talked about being out in the bush and what the experiences were like there for the long
6 search and destroy missions occasionally coming back to a base camp or to a fire base
7 and then heading back out again. You mentioned the number of the people you were
8 involved with, your impressions of the enemy, your impressions of officers and things
9 like that. I wonder if you could tell me what it's like for you beginning today. What is it
10 like to be out on these lengthy missions so far out on the bush? What does it do to you
11 physically? What does it do to you emotionally being out there this long?

12 RT: Back then?

13 KC: Yes.

14 RT: Well, oddly enough, since I've been back, I have sought similar experiences
15 out. I've gone trekking in the Amazon. I've gotten into going to the Everglades dozens
16 and dozens of times. For some ridiculous reason, whatever it is, I've actually yearned for
17 reliving, so to speak, of the experience as bad as it was. I can't explain it. I was doing that
18 up until just a couple years ago before I had the back to back strokes from diabetes. I was
19 still paddling around in the Everglades and chasing rattle snakes and moccasins and stuff.
20 This was—I would carry a machete with me. I guess it affected you that you can't get it
21 out of your system or that you almost, like, you dream about doing it again even though,
22 of course, it was the worst experience of your life as far as living conditions go. I'm
23 infatuated today by tropical foliage, environment. I'm attracted to it. I like it. Not every
24 Vietnam veteran I talk to is like that by any means. But I've talked to a number of them
25 that were in combat and infantry, and they do. They have had the same inclinations or
26 urges, so to speak, for that adventure, so to speak. A challenge as a hobby. Go off into the
27 forest of Oregon or Mississippi or somewhere back in the woods and live. I know a
28 couple down in Florida that have a couple of 101st Airborne guys down there. They're all
29 ranches down there, and they're all way, way back in the boonies. They've been there a

1 while. I've heard of a lot of guys like that. That hasn't been my desire, but I've been
2 happily married for forty years and thought I wouldn't be alive if I didn't have my wife I
3 have today. What did it do to us over there? Well, you go from—you lose fifty or sixty
4 pounds in a month. Dehydrated. You got diarrhea all the time. You have a hard time
5 sleeping. Every now and then, you do stop and take a break if you're in a wide, wide
6 open. In fact, I got a picture of us where we're sitting down, laying down. I show that to
7 people, and they say, "I thought you never took a break." Oh, yeah, we got a break. You
8 got about a five or ten minute shut eye. Of course, someone's always on watch. The
9 whole platoon doesn't sit down and go to sleep. Guys are always on watch. You couldn't
10 go on and on and on and on for a fact that we aged noticeable during that year. That was
11 a lot when we came back. Our family, friends, we aged terribly. So, that effect obviously
12 the unbelievable pressure of living in conditions like that. I don't know which
13 overshadowed which. In fact, I was talking to a platoon buddy a couple days ago, and we
14 agreed. I don't know which was worse—the search and destroy missions, the fighting, or
15 the living conditions. We're living in the swamps. The bacteria, the smell, the stench.
16 That's not something you ever got used to. But then again, when I go camp out in the
17 Everglades, I sit on a rock with a notepad or a book, and I look off into the sky, and I
18 think about 'Nam. I think about those days.

19 KC: Yeah. Well, this is a little awkward time right here, but I think it's important
20 to ask. What sort of things do you think about when you come across these moments?

21 RT: I try to think about when we laughed, which wasn't very often. I try to
22 remember those. I try to remember when we smiled. The guys that are gone. I remember
23 them laugh, and I look off and remember Buganny catching a neat moment with him over
24 there and Smokey in a comical time with him over there. I try to remember mostly when
25 we laughed. But, you can't forget the other items. The way we complained. Oh, my
26 goodness. Did we complain!

27 KC: What were your typical complaints?

28 RT: It sucks. I got to get out of this place. It was just, "Why me?" That's all. Just
29 over and over and over.

30 KC: Yeah.

1 RT: You had really nothing to look forward to until you got within a month or a
2 couple of weeks. Then you start—you would actually go into defensive mode, and you
3 were no longer aggressive and looking for something to happen. You wanted to make it
4 through that last month or last couple of weeks. So, you kind of tiptoed through the
5 tulips, so to speak, if you're still out on the line unfortunately. I wasn't still out on line,
6 but I was in a combat zone base camp. In fact, I was just reading about it. Cu Chi was hit
7 and overrun in February of '69. I was still there at that base camp. They destroyed sixteen
8 choppers, four airplanes, a number of trucks. It was enough to keep you awake at night.

9 KC: You mentioned—

10 RT: It wasn't the same as being out there.

11 KC: Sure.

12 RT: Nothing was like that. Nothing. You knew eventually in your secure base
13 camp that you were going to overwhelm this outnumbered enemy of satchel suicide
14 mission guys. Eventually, they're going to be taken care of. But out there, you never
15 knew where the end was. Never knew. I was reading—my first book—because of the
16 ridiculous statements that some of our high ranking officers and other bureaucrats said that
17 we never lost a battle in Vietnam, which is the most ridiculous statement I've ever heard
18 in my life. We won most of the major battles, but we lost some too. There was very little
19 coverage about those. It was usually kept quiet. We lost some, and some of them, we got
20 massacred. You hear stories out there. The man, the beast—we called him the beast, the
21 enemy. The beast. Out there, the beast is the boss. You're up at night, and we're looking
22 for them all day. They're hiding in their tunnels.

23 KC: You mentioned a moment ago that you didn't spend your entire tour in the
24 bush. You were brought back to the base, I guess, to Cu Chi back there to the base.

25 RT: Right.

26 KC: What prompted this move back? Is it something (inaudible) from an injury or
27 something?

28 RT: My foot and my knee from wounds, scratches, cuts, assortment of things that
29 took place over the previous couple of months just got so badly infected. I developed
30 cellulitis. I had to be hospitalized or I may have lost a leg. It was so bad. I was—gosh, I

1 was incapacitated for almost two weeks for that to subside. It was bad. My foot was like a
2 balloon.

3 KC: And when did this happen?

4 RT: This was hospitalized, I think, in October.

5 KC: Okay.

6 RT: Of 1968. So, when I got out of the hospital, Tay Ninh Hospital, I worked as a
7 mail clerk for a little bit for our unit because I couldn't go out on the line yet. I'm still
8 walking around with a tong on one foot. I still couldn't go out on line and put a boot on.
9 Out of nowhere, the first sergeant comes up to me and says, "Trimmer, you're going
10 down to Cu Chi, division headquarters to interview for a job. Do you want to go?" "Well,
11 yeah, I guess." It was iffy leaving the guys back there was not easy. But we had a
12 celebration that night. I got a picture where I'm actually drinking Carly black labeled
13 beer. My last night in Tay Ninh out in the boonies and then I headed for Cu Chi. I
14 interviewed for the job, and it was driving for the division with the general and the
15 inspector general. So, I had a hooch. I'd get a shower in the morning and a breakfast and
16 a lunch. I had a cot. I had a fan. And I had a jeep. It's just like my whole world turned
17 around overnight. But a lot of the guys back there, they thought they had it tough. They
18 thought they had it bad because it's hot, and they're sweaty, and they're dirty. They can
19 still hear all of the artillery and the battles going off in the background. It was like heaven
20 for me the last couple of months. It wasn't really, but it was for me what I had been
21 through. And most of the guys that I was out there with also found jobs off the line.
22 Haywood Taylor, one of my best buddies, got a security job position in Quin Nyon.
23 Smokey Ryan got a job in a training school teaching recruits coming over getting
24 acclimated in-country and stuff like that. Boon, my buddy Boon, took over the mail clerk
25 job that I had for about four or five days after I got out of the hospital. Until those things
26 were happening, I found myself trying to find ways to go back out to the base camp to
27 Tay Ninh to the firebases where they were whenever the officers that I was driving were
28 out of Cu Chi went to Saigon or something when they weren't in town. I tried to get on a
29 courier chopper and head up to Tay Ninh and jump on a jeep with somebody with a
30 convoy who has taken supplies out to the firebase where they are at and spend some time
31 with them. I felt compelled to do that. I'm glad I did. I can remember the last time that I

1 did it. I was sitting with a guy named Curtis Daniels. We were sitting in a bunker, and we
2 were all talking. He was sitting with all these other guys, who were all new guys, what
3 we went through in our eighty-eight day missions and our search and destroy missions,
4 which were pretty much coming to a halt in the end of '68 and almost entirely 1969. Fire
5 support bases became the mode. Making the enemy come to us rather than us seeking out
6 the enemy. I guess the timing just sucked that I was sent in 1968 and got the experience
7 that we did because pretty much anyone you talked to that went to Vietnam, they didn't
8 do all that. They didn't live out in the bush for three months at a time. They always had a
9 base camp or fire support base or something there to report to or go back to or shelter,
10 safety over their head or something like that. But I guess I just got it at a bad time.

11 KC: Yeah.

12 RT: But I got the memories.

13 KC: right, right. You mentioned that you were sent back for medical treatment
14 because of your knee and your foot and the problems that you had there. I wonder if you
15 could tell me about the type of medical treatment, the quality of care that you received.

16 RT: Well, that was basically it. They waited until my leg basically almost rotted
17 off before I really got the treatment. I was supposed to be treated July 3rd when I got
18 knocked off the APC and was knocked unconscious. I was medevacked with other
19 wounded into a base camp in Dao Tien. I was supposed to be observed and seen that
20 night, which I was not. The base camp was overrun by a sizable force—approximately
21 five hundred rounds of rockets and RPGs and mortars hit Dao Tien that morning. They
22 managed to get through the barbed wire in places. They were inside the perimeter. They
23 destroyed some buildings. They destroyed our hooch. They blew our hooch up. I never
24 got treated. I took some minor shrapnel wounds that night, which were basically
25 bandaged, sewed up and bandaged, because the battle was going on all night. They did
26 not—I say, "They." We were finally able to bring in air power. Of course, they didn't like
27 to fight during night. They liked to fight during the day. They wanted to bring the battle
28 as close to us as possible, so that we couldn't bring in artillery or use our air power. But
29 they were there until the wee hours of the morning running around. Eventually, they were
30 overcome. But I was sent back out to the field quick despite the wounds, the cuts. They
31 weren't major, but they certainly weren't going to get treated with antiseptics and all the

1 things that you did get back home back out in the field. We had a hard time keeping
2 medics alive. So, we just changed the dressing from time to time. There was no hot
3 running water to work with out there. So, in a period of July to August-September, it kept
4 getting worse and worse. The foot and my crotch and my knee—the jungle rot was
5 horrible. The jungle rot actually has never been cured. I still have scars and blemishes on
6 my legs from the jungle rot. It was so bad. They tried everything back there. Nothing ever
7 worked. It has, I guess, subsided, but it's the bacteria or whatever it was is still under the
8 skin, is what they say. It could, like, activate or something again. But I have all these
9 blemishes from where the jungle rot was. Every time I would go back to Florida or
10 Louisiana or something like that and do my Everglades thing like that, it would flare up
11 like crazy. So, coupled with the jungle rot and the infections—you had cuts and stuff all
12 the time because the elephant grass was cutting blades of elephant grass. The terrain that
13 you were in. How could a wound heal out there? As insignificant or small as it was, I
14 have no idea how the heck a wound could heal out there. But I didn't receive any medical
15 treatment per se during those days. When I was hospitalized, yep. I stayed in Tay Ninh
16 Clinic for about ten days. They took care of it. They had to cut the foot open up and let it
17 drain several times. It would just blow up again and get infected again. So, I was there for
18 a while. Our medics out in the field were phenomenal. I could never say enough about
19 them. We didn't have enough of them. They didn't last long enough. They just had
20 bandages for crying out loud. When you take on numerous casualties at once, and you
21 have one medic, and that medic has got to get up and try to reach the various wounded
22 during a firefight themselves, which more than likely, they're going to get hit. They did
23 the best with what they could.

24 KC: Yeah. Sure.

25 RT: None of our guys in our platoon—none of our medics made it back. Not one.
26 One would go, another replacement would come. He'd get hit. Another one would come.
27 I can't remember the name of any of our medics, nor can any of my other platoon
28 brothers. We remember one Hispanic kid who got shot in the head the same day that I
29 took a round to the head. He tried to get up to us. He took a round to the head that day.
30 Morales or something. I cannot remember the name of one single medic. We just know
31 that none of them made it back.

1 KC: Well, we have you here at the hospital in Tay Ninh. You mention that you're
2 going through the mail and trying to recover as best as you can. You get word that you're
3 to interview for a position. It doesn't sound like you had volunteered for this, put in for
4 this. So, someone must have put you in for it. Do you know how that worked?

5 RT: I could type.

6 KC: That's all it took?

7 RT: Because of the interview. I could type. That's all. That's exactly it.

8 KC: So, when do you finally move down to Cu Chi for good? When did this
9 happen?

10 RT: October—sometime in October of 1968.

11 KC: 1968. Okay. And from here, your job was to serve as a typist and drive
12 officers to and fro, thinks like that.

13 RT: And aid the driver. That was pretty much it.

14 KC: You talk about the conditions and how much better they were obviously than
15 in the field.

16 RT: Much better. Much better.

17 KC: what about the relationship with those guys that were in the rear to the guys
18 who were frontline troops, as it were? What was it like for you to move back?

19 RT: It was a little rocky at first. I finally made friends with two. In fact, I can only
20 remember two that I made friends with. One was a Spanish kid from California named
21 Cabilar. He was a clerk at the general's office. He was very respectful if you will in
22 understanding about what we went through out there whereas a lot of the other base camp
23 warriors didn't give a rat's ass, didn't have any understanding or appreciation for what
24 the heck we were doing out there. I don't know. They just didn't. The other guy that I
25 befriended was actually—he was former combat. He was a tank driver. His tank was
26 blown up by mines, and he lost his entire crew. His name was Messner. He was from
27 Montana. So, him and I hooked up, and we were best friends. In fact, he and I went to
28 R&R to Australia together. We almost went AWOL together too, but we came back. He
29 and I were a natural fit and Cabilar. But other than that, I can't remember. I can't
30 remember another one that I made friends with. Their sarcastic remarks and stuff when

1 the guys from the bush would come in didn't sit well. I actually got into a couple of fights
2 over it.

3 KC: What kind of things would they say?

4 RT: Oh, scummy, grungy, low-life grunts. That kind of stuff.

5 KC: It obviously didn't sit very well with you.

6 RT: No, not at all. Of course not. I know what they were doing risking their life
7 on an hourly basis.

8 KC: You mentioned an R&R. You chose Australia. Tell me about this R&R. Why
9 did you choose Australia? When did this occur? Take me through this little vacation.

10 RT: I always wanted to go. Most of us—when you're in the field, you were rarely
11 given the chance to take that opportunity to go on an R&R. A lot of times, they would
12 bypass you because of casualties. There were manpower shortages. They'd say, "You
13 can't go. You can't go. We need more replacements before you can go. Next month,
14 maybe next month comes around, and we'll see if there's a slot open." That's what we
15 heard over and over and over. So, I was out in the field for ten months without an R&R,
16 if you will. Some of these guys that I found out were working or living in base camps
17 would have two or three R&Rs. They'd go to Taiwan. They'd go to Tokyo, Australia,
18 and what have you. But I just always wanted to go to Australia. We always heard from
19 other guys how wonderful it was, how great they treated them when they went over there.
20 Messner, my buddy and former tank commander, he wanted to go there too. So, that was
21 cool, both of us going there.

22 KC: So, what did you do during this R&R?

23 RT: Slept on the beach a lot and drank. I drank mostly every night and slept on
24 the beach. Just about it.

25 KC: It's just good to get away, I guess.

26 RT: Yep. Well, and there were white women, blue-eyed white women there. First
27 chance to see those, and they were awfully friendly to the American G.I.s. They treated
28 us and toured us around, if you will. A lot of people, even the Australians, I heard, they
29 took in a lot of American GIs and housed them and took them in and stuff like that. I
30 think—in fact, I read a—there was a book out. What was the name of it? *Those That*
31 *Couldn't Return*, something like that. That's not the real title. It's about Vietnam veterans

1 who did not come home and did not want to come home. They stayed. They stayed either
2 in Vietnam, or they stayed in Australia, et cetera. I have that book. I have about eighty
3 books here about the Vietnam War. So, Messner and I made it back. We didn't have
4 much longer to go. He left country just a couple of weeks or a few weeks after that. I left
5 just a couple of weeks after him. We had our R&Rs with about a month to go. To be
6 honest, I don't know if we could have come back if we were still out in the field being let
7 loose in Sydney, Australia, and romping around Bandai Beach and the King's Cross and
8 the beaches and then have to go back to—you can see how guys could be tempted to go
9 AWOL and not come back.

10 KC: Yeah. Well, you mentioned that you and your friend were tempted to go
11 AWOL

12 RT: Oh, absolutely.

13 KC: What was the story behind that? How'd that work out?

14 RT: We just—I can remember him looking at me, and I can remember us looking
15 at each other. I can see his eyes twirling and a big grin on his face when we were talking
16 about it. But not the exact words, just our expression. We were envisioning or imagining,
17 “Do we want to go back?” “Yeah, yeah, yeah, let's get that thought out of our minds.
18 We're not going to let the guys down. We're not going to do that.” We just went. But it
19 was a passing thought.

20 KC: Okay. Tell me about life in the rear. What was your daily routine like in the
21 rear? What was the relationship and kind of the pace of life taking place back there?

22 RT: Well, it wasn't really strapped like it was stateside where you did have to
23 report into a formation in the morning. You still had to go stand in line for chow and
24 crap. Your bunk still had to be made. Your fatigues had to be cleaned. They had dry
25 cleaning there, so they had TXs with EM clubs. They had all the amenities, all the so-
26 called luxuries. There was a swimming pool, for crying out loud. There was a movie
27 theater. All that stuff there! You always had cold beer. Well, we couldn't even have beer
28 out in the field. Can you imagine what a cold beer would taste to a guy that's been out in
29 the jungle for three months?

30 KC: Yeah.

1 RT: We couldn't even have beer. We could not be affected by alcohol just like the
2 guys and all the rumors about the pot smoking. I did not see that—not in '68. I did not
3 see it. I heard it got—when I got to base camp, I saw it. It was rampant back there. I
4 heard as the War was winding down in '69, '70, that's when it became really bad. But I
5 did not see it. We would've beaten the shit out of anybody out in the boonies that we
6 caught smoking grass who are supposed to be pulling watch, supposed to be alert when
7 we could've had our throats cut any given night. I did not see it. I didn't. I did not smoke
8 any grass over there. I did when I got back, as I was running away from life and society. I
9 did when I got back, but not over there, I didn't.

10 KC: But you say it was pretty prevalent back in the base camp.

11 RT: Back in the base camp, it was rampant. Every hooch—there was a group of
12 guys blowing grass some place.

13 KC: So, what was the official or non-official reaction to this if it was that
14 obvious?

15 RT: It was just allowed. They didn't hide it.

16 KC: Officers, first sergeants, non-coms, nobody did anything about it?

17 RT: The officers were in their own hooches, in their own quarters. They didn't
18 stay with the EMs.

19 KC: All right. What about another one of these topics that often times comes up is
20 race relations especially in the rear? Can you describe that?

21 RT: Yeah, that was a problem. That was clearly a problem. Out in the field, it was
22 not a problem. Back there, it was a problem. It became obvious to me immediately.
23 Different attitudes, different just completely different attitudes from black to white, white
24 to black. Out there, I didn't see any difference in color.

25 KC: well, can you describe the environment in which this took place or give me
26 some examples of the problems?

27 RT: Yeah, they seemed to actually form in groups or gangs. I think Black
28 Panthers had entered the scene back in the States around that time in the '60s. As the War
29 was winding down and getting closer to '70 timeframe, it appeared more that the blacks
30 were more involved or being gravitated or being pulled to the Black Panther way of life.
31 In fact, when I came home back from 'Nam, I was shocked when I got to my little

1 hometown of Twinsburg, Ohio, where all we had was the black population since the Civil
2 War, and the Black Panthers had infiltrated there. Race relations had deteriorated in
3 Twinsburg, Ohio, which we never had problems until then. But, yeah, it was definitely a
4 problem back in the base camp. The attitudes weren't the same. We were out there
5 fighting for our lives, fighting for our buddies, covering each other's back. Back in base
6 camp, they didn't care about you. They didn't care. They didn't say any—they didn't
7 care about the war. I can't say that I blamed them. But if they had a taste of a couple of
8 weeks of what we were going through out there, it might've changed their attitude a bit.
9 But the attitude kept progressing. Partly because of all the commotion that was going on
10 back in the States with the protesting ramping up, the attitudes. The support of our
11 country had diminished substantially. So, the guys coming over were bringing those
12 attitudes with them. They didn't want to be there. When I went, I was certainly fearful
13 and afraid that I was going into combat, that I was going to fight for my life, but I went
14 there without objecting. I went there without protesting. But that became more popular,
15 and the attitudes just kept getting worse. We could see it when the new guys kept coming
16 in, the replacements. They were more rebellious. They didn't want to pull guard duty.
17 They didn't want to do this. Every time sick call lined up in the morning. More of them
18 would line up for sick call to get back to base camp and do a lot of the base camp details
19 like burn shit or something. But the attitudes continued to disintegrate substantially as
20 time went on and understandably so. After you've had time and years to think about it
21 and look at things and talk to people, you understand how and why it happened, the way
22 they were being influenced back here.

23 KC: What about white and Hispanic attitudes?

24 RT: They never had a problem with Hispanics, not a single one. I don't ever
25 remember a problem with any Hispanics.

26 KC: What was the—

27 RT: Base camp, field, no matter where. At any time in the service. I personally
28 did not have a problem with blacks. It just—the attitude was different. I noticed when I
29 came back to base camp out of the field. I got into a couple of altercations because they
30 didn't want to do their thing. "Oh, you're picking on me because I'm black," and that
31 kind of attitude, which is ridiculous. But I didn't have a problem. I had a problem with

1 attitudes, but I never developed a problem with blacks. But the Hispanics were never a
2 problem, absolutely never.

3 KC: What about white attitudes?

4 RT: Well, you had some rednecks, some guys that came in with some inborn
5 hatred and problems. There was—they contributed to the racial tensions back in the base
6 camp. It didn't happen out on the field though. We wouldn't allow it. It just was not
7 going to happen. But it was back there, yeah. They contributed to the racial problems as
8 much as the Black Panthers, probably. I didn't participate. Mesmer and I hung around
9 together, and pretty much everyone left us alone. The word was out what we did out
10 there. They pretty much left us alone.

11 KC: You mentioned a little bit ago that as your time in Vietnam is winding down
12 that you kind of took a different attitude. Maybe it's a short-timer's attitude, as some
13 people would call it. Can you talk a little bit about that?

14 RT: Sure. Probing with mortars was common. When we were out in the field, and
15 we were out on our ambushes and search and destroy missions, I mean they always knew
16 where we were. We weren't incognito. We would get mortared pretty much every night.
17 Back in the base camps, they had the same routine going where they would probe Cu Chi
18 and mortar it. It kept you alert. You never knew if there was going to be a follow-up of an
19 actual attack. There rarely was on a major base camp, but it could happen. Mesmer and I
20 used to sit on top of his bunker during the mortar attacks when I was first back on base
21 camp, sitting there sipping on our beer and just laughing, watching all these base camp
22 warriors run around like a bunch of chickens during the mortar attack. We'd just sit there
23 on top of his bunker just laughing. We didn't run for cover. With a couple of weeks left,
24 we started going for cover. Major difference.

25 KC: What do you think sparked this change?

26 RT: The hope. "Hey, I might actually be going home. I might actually be going
27 home. I'm going to make it. Hey, I can beat this thing. I can beat it. I'm going to make
28 it." You went through all that for the previous three hundred and sixty days, and by golly,
29 you didn't want to blow it in the last five or ten.

30 KC: Sure, sure.

1 RT: But you didn't care when you had a hundred and eighty or two hundred days
2 to go. You just didn't care.

3 KC: All right, now. You're a short timer. The clock is ticking. You're getting
4 closer to the time to go home. What sort of things do you do to prepare for this eventual
5 end?

6 RT: Life went on. I did my job with the AG. Not much. I didn't have hardly any
7 civilian clothes. I think when I went to Australia for my R&R, Mesmer and I each bought
8 a couple of shirts and something, maybe one pair of dress pants or something. My hooch
9 had been blown up twice during the course of May and July. Whatever personal
10 belongings we had brought with us or even bought or acquired in our tour, it had all been
11 destroyed two times completely. So, I didn't have much personal stuff left. In fact, when
12 I was hitchhiking home from Cleveland Airport, I was in my summer dress greens
13 uniform. I was still in my uniform. I wouldn't take it off. We were advised to take it off.
14 But I would not take it off. I didn't have any civilian clothes basically. There was nothing
15 to prepare for other than you just start thinking about what's going on in your life before
16 you went into the Army, before Vietnam. We didn't know how much different that
17 civilization was, how much it had changed, the clothes style, the music, the attitudes. You
18 go from the '60s, and you're playing '60s music, '50s, '60s music, and you come home,
19 and it's the Beatles and rock stuff starting. It just was like, "Wow." We were lost in time.
20 But we didn't know that. We didn't know that until we got home.

21 KC: Yeah. Take me through the process by which you come home. It's a couple
22 days before. You get your orders, get your paperwork taken care of. Take me through that
23 whole process by which you came home.

24 RT: Well, it's kind of long and drawn out, but it didn't matter. You go through
25 security and leaving Cu Chi. We jumped on a bubble chopper, I remember. Noah Kowski
26 was with me. He was from my platoon. We went together. Lo and behold, Cu Chi was
27 probed that same night that we went home. That morning we went home, it was probed
28 with mortars. We kind of just laughed it off. "Well, wouldn't you know it. Dirty, rotten
29 Gooks. Can't you leave us alone on the way home, for crying out loud? Wouldn't you
30 know it!" We just laughed it off. From there, we went to Long Bien where we had to stay
31 for another day or so. Long Bien was another secure area, a large base camp. It was also

1 where the famous Long Bien prison was for the U.S. Army. It was—yeah, you’re going
2 back. You’re doing KP, standing at attention, formations two or three times in a day. That
3 lasted for a day or so. From there, I think we went to Camron Bay and out. We stopped in
4 Guam, which is like a big rock then. On the way over when I went to ‘Nam, we stopped
5 in Hawaii. But on the way back, we stopped in Guam. Uneventful. I can’t even remember
6 the flight, the twenty-some hour flight. I can’t even remember it. I could’ve slept half the
7 way. It’s hard to say. I remember landing in Oakland. I remember landing, definitely. It
8 was in the wee hours of the night. It was fortunate that it was wee hours of the night
9 because we heard all the stories of the guys who were passing the stories on the way they
10 were treated when they got in. But there weren’t a lot of people there. A couple of guys
11 said they got spit on. Someone said a couple legs were thrown. I did not experience that.
12 All I got were stares, no friendly looks, of course, just stares. You transition and process
13 through Oakland and fly home into Cleveland. Same thing. Stares, nothing but stares,
14 cold stares. No smiles. No welcome home. No thank you, like today. It’s just exactly as it
15 was. I remember the very, very distinctly.

16 KC: What was your reaction to this? Did you expect something different?

17 RT: Well, we had heard, but I don’t know how you prepare for something like
18 that. I guess you know you’re coming home. You’re wearing a uniform. You’re wearing
19 your medals. It’s obvious where you’ve been. You know what you did over there, what
20 your brothers did over there. I guess I expected more from America. I was disappointed,
21 yeah. But after—the years have gone by talking to the various dozens and dozens and
22 hundreds of Vietnam veterans, that kind of treatment wasn’t as common in the south for
23 those guys. But in the north, it more so was—west and north. But the south—they more
24 or less welcomed them home with open arms more so. To this day, the attitudes down
25 there towards servicemen and Vietnam veterans is very, very warm.

26 KC: Tell me about your time coming back. Do you still have time to serve in the
27 Army? What are you doing when you get back? Take me through this time when you get
28 back.

29 RT: Oh, yes. Unfortunately, yes. I still had five months to go, which was
30 absolutely ridiculous. There should’ve been some transition, some kind of breaking in.
31 There was nothing, absolutely none. I spent my last five months in Fort Hood and played

1 war games, again. I came close to going AWOL a number of times. I came close to
2 getting reprimanded, punching out higher ranking sergeants. My attitude kept going
3 further south.

4 KC: Why?

5 RT: I thought I should be home. I shouldn't have to be playing war. I wasn't
6 playing war with other Vietnam veterans. I was playing with stateside guys who had not
7 been to Vietnam. Their attitudes—they weren't—they couldn't care less that I was a
8 Vietnam veteran. They weren't respectful. They weren't whatever. You remember, this
9 was after time had been progressing. The attitudes of the Army was going downhill
10 anyway at that time. It seemed like the discipline was also getting looser. I was a
11 sergeant, and I had details. It wasn't like I had to do KP or any kind of that stuff, any of
12 that duty, or any of that stuff anymore. It made me a supply sergeant in headquarters
13 company in Fort Hood. So, I had details every day, and I could pretty much do what I
14 wanted. But I still had to go out in the field and bivouac and play war games. I couldn't
15 do it. I just couldn't get into it. I just couldn't get into it.

16 KC: Do you continue to follow the War at all?

17 RT: Did I?

18 KC: Yeah.

19 RT: No. In the very early beginning and up until the time Saigon surrendered
20 from that moment when it was over then. I followed the killing fields, what was going on
21 in Cambodia for a while. Of course, it made us sick because to us, it looked like the
22 domino theory was actually being put into effect. Thailand was being probed constantly
23 by the North Vietnamese. Cambodia had been taken over. Laos had gone communist.
24 Philippines was next, people figured. It looked like the domino theory was in fact
25 happening. "Told you so! Told you so!" But Thailand held off. Of course, China and
26 North Vietnam got into a pretty serious border war in the late '70s, which shows you
27 what the North Vietnamese were made of. They kicked their butts. They won that border
28 skirmish, no doubt about it. They won it. They sent the Chinese back to China on their
29 heels. I was still following it.

30 KC: What'd you think—

1 RT: Some things—nobody wanted to talk about it to us. Nobody. If I was
2 following it, I was following it within myself on my own. Nobody wanted to talk about it.
3 Nobody wanted to hear about it.

4 KC: What'd you think about the end of the War both with the Peace Accords in
5 '73 and then the fall of Saigon in April of '75? What are your thoughts on those two
6 events?

7 RT: Well, when the North Vietnamese rolled into Saigon, I had the same feeling a
8 lot of guys did. I wanted to blow something up. I felt helpless. I felt like, "What did we
9 do over there? Why did we do it? What just happened?" The Peace treaty was signed just
10 like it was in Korea. The line was drawn on the 17th Parallel where there was a North
11 Vietnam and a South Vietnam just like Korea, and the line is set, and that's the way it's
12 going to be. There's going to be the communist North Vietnam and the democratic South
13 Vietnam. We're going to protect them and not give up on them, bail out on them. That
14 was clearly what we did. Near the end of the War with the North Vietnamese and South
15 Vietnamese ran out of gas for their tanks and planes. They were running out of ammo.
16 We had cut them off. The stuff is pretty sickening.

17 KC: Yeah. Well, tell me about your life after all of this. Do you pursue an
18 education? Do you pursue a vocation? What are you doing—

19 RT: Yeah, I got an early out. I returned to college. I tried it. I could not focus. I
20 could not. I just couldn't meditate. I couldn't focus. I couldn't stay at it. Where I'd gone
21 for two and a half years before I got drafted, and I tried a couple of semesters, and I just
22 couldn't do it anymore. In fact, I quit my job. I was drinking profusely. I was just—
23 nonstop. I was always looking for some place or a reason to drink and party and keep my
24 mind away from what happened the last several years. The drinking continued well into
25 the 80's. It was pretty bad. I did not have any DUIs fortunately. I was very lucky. I had
26 many car accidents, several totaled cars. I had many car accidents. Everyone was a single
27 car accident. There was no one in the car with me. I never had been involved with
28 another vehicle in the accident. They were always single-car accidents with me in the car.
29 I had like nine major accidents. Some were alcohol-induced, and some weren't. Some, I
30 just floored it and let it go and ran out of space on the road. I didn't much care.

1 KC: Obviously, what you're saying here sounds like it's associated with Post
2 Traumatic Stress Disorder.

3 RT: Oh, I was suicidal. I was clearly suicidal.

4 KC: Can you talk to me about what it's like to deal with this level of PTSD that
5 you had?

6 RT: There wasn't any. There was nothing to deal with. It wasn't recognized.
7 Nobody knew what it was until the last ten years or so, it seems like. I sought out
8 psychiatric help a couple of times. They didn't know what was wrong with me. \$75 an
9 hour or whatever it was back in the late '70s and middle '80s, I think, when I sought out
10 psychiatric help. They didn't know what was wrong with me. It really didn't come up
11 with the term, it seems like until the last decade or so. Now they have all these great and
12 wonderful save-all treatments and programs available. But they pretty much feel that
13 Vietnam veterans should be over it, and they shouldn't have PTSD. Heck, World War II
14 vets still have PTSD. Some of them are just checking in and getting help because now
15 there is therapy available for PTSD. God was obviously on my side. I should've never
16 made it through the '70s let alone the '80s with the direction I was heading clearly. God
17 had something else for me and just wasn't going to allow me to do myself in nor allow
18 me to hurt anybody else in my process of reckless abandoned driving. I am grateful. God
19 knows I'm grateful. I am. I think my calling kind of is—I'm writing books now, and I'm
20 reaching out to other Vietnam veterans that are still lost. A lot of them are still lost.
21 They're lost in space. They've given up. They don't care. They're just withering away.
22 They don't talk about it still. My books have reached a lot of them, and they bought them
23 to me. Since I went through what they went through, we can talk. We do. Of course,
24 we're on the phone. We're not face-to-face because there in Texas or California or
25 Oregon. There's one guy who lives outside of Mattawa, Washington or Mattawa, Oregon,
26 or whatever. He has to drive 40 miles or something to get to a telephone. So, I can't reach
27 him. He just ordered two of my books and gave me his address in Mattawa. He said,
28 "Yeah, I have to drive forty miles to the post office to get this." So, he's living out there
29 in the boonies in Oregon some place. You know, that's—to me, it's been difficult,
30 extremely difficult. But I've—the satisfaction factor has topped the depression factor, so
31 to speak. I mean if I hadn't written the first book—if it hadn't had done what it did with

1 guys and made the impact, it impacted a lot of lives. It really did. I would've been
2 devastated. That's what I hoped would happen. I wasn't looking for any fame or any
3 notoriety or a best seller or that kind of stuff. But I was hoping that my brothers would
4 see this book, and they would take it for what I meant it for. It was written for them, and
5 they know that. They know that. Therefore, I went on to write the second one not that I
6 even really wanted to. But I was motivated. I was egged on to do it. "You got to write
7 another one. You got to write another one." I don't know if I want to. The first one
8 almost killed me. But I did. So, I don't know if it's going to have the same effect as the
9 first one. It's only been out since the July 4th weekend. It's too early to tell.

10 KC: Yeah. Well, it certainly sounds like it was certainly something that allowed
11 you to explore your experiences and memories and feelings on these things and put it into
12 print, which I know can be a really valuable kind of thing. I just got a couple of other
13 questions for you here, Mr. Trimmer. They are questions that I typically ask everyone.
14 They're kind of broad questions, so answer how you see fit. The first is, looking back on
15 these experiences both in the War and following the war, how do you think that Vietnam
16 has most affected your life?

17 RT: That's a tough one. Vietnam, first of all, as a combat recon infantry man
18 point man forced to be survivalist in the worst of conditions in life braced me for my
19 selling career. I learned the way they fought over there, guerilla warfare, propaganda
20 attacks and things. In sales, which I was in for many, many years until my strokes—I
21 would still be in it. I thought I had a job for life. I would still be doing it. Vietnam
22 prepared me. The war, fighting, combat, tactics, and the will to live, the tenacity I
23 developed, the persistence, Vietnam made me stronger and tougher along those respects,
24 but I was a walking time bomb at all times. I mean I had to watch it. I could fly off the
25 handle with a client let alone with a publisher, a supervisor. If they rubbed me the wrong
26 way, I could fly off. That was Vietnam in me too. Always on the defense. Always
27 looking behind me. Still, I went to dinner with a couple of friends last Thursday or Friday
28 with my wife. He was a retired master sergeant in Iraq. He picked a table way in the
29 back. It was in the corner. It was the furthest corner of the restaurant. I couldn't hardly
30 see squat from where I was going to sit. I said, "Well, I can't sit here." He goes, "What
31 do you mean?" I said, "I can't sit here. I got to get out of here. I can sit in the corner, but I

1 have to have visuals in front of me. I'm too enclosed." I'm near seventy years old. All
2 these years. I got stuck at the back of a plane one time, and I was hyperventilating
3 because I was panicking. "I can't get out. I won't be able to get out of here. What if
4 something happens?" That's the way it was when you were over there. You were
5 fighting. You were out there at the jungle at night. You couldn't see two feet in front of
6 you sometimes for crying out loud. You could hear all of these sounds out there. You
7 didn't know what was going to happen at any minute. Being stuck in that corner in that
8 restaurant—fine restaurant Davis Wrinkles, an Irish pub. But it was confined, and I was
9 in the corner. There was hardly anything in front of me or the side of me. I said, "No, I
10 got to get out of here. I'm sorry." My wife wasn't there. She came later. They asked her.
11 She said, "Oh, yeah. He gets really paranoid like that. We always let him pick his seat, so
12 he's got his back to the wall, and we don't sit in any corners hidden away from
13 everything and enclosed." I've been scared of the dark since Vietnam. I do not participate
14 in firework celebrations. Never. I stay in during 4th of July. I haven't been to a fireworks
15 display since our own in July 4th of 1968 when the attack of Dao Tien on that night. So, it
16 has affected me in ways that I'm taking with me to my grave most likely. My wife—I
17 wake up in the middle of the night, and you're in a cold sweat. It still happens. It doesn't
18 happen as often, but it still happens. You had a bad nightmare. I was having
19 hallucinations. I developed them—they were very severe during the writing of the first
20 book. The first book brought out a lot of things that I thought I had buried that I forgot. I
21 actually had to take a hiatus, take a break, a couple of breaks from the book. I wasn't sure
22 I was going to finish it. Then, the guys started dying from my own platoon when I was
23 writing the book, then I started to panic with that. "Well, these guys aren't even going to
24 see my book." That's why I was writing the book, *Condemned Property*. Are we
25 condemned property? They're dying as I'm writing the book. So, my stress perked up and
26 accelerated during that timeframe. I think they tried to speed up finishing the book. I
27 would've liked to spend more time on it, which is maybe the reason I wrote a second one.
28 I don't know. I don't know. But I wrote for them. They received it. Especially combat—
29 anyone who served in combat over there appreciated that book *Condemned Property*. I
30 can't tell you how many people have written to me. They start their letter off like, "It's
31 almost like I was your shadow. I was there. I did that. That's what exactly happened to

1 me. This and that. Day in and day out.” I’m not saying they loved it, but they related.
2 Some of the guys actually had to put it down and go back to it. They couldn’t finish it, sit
3 down and finish it. Some guys have told me that they couldn’t put it down. They’ve gone
4 back to it several times. They keep it and reference it. They were looking forward to my
5 next one. It was good for me overall. In Vietnam, in many ways was good for me overall.
6 But in many ways, well, I wouldn’t have had the stroke most likely. I wouldn’t have had
7 the PTSD, the hyper tension level I have and the high blood pressure that I have. I don’t
8 walk around with that cross, bearing that cross. I have two arms. I have two legs. I have
9 good support around me. Friends and family, family friends. I have good support, so I’m
10 blessed with that. I’m a Christian. I’m not a holy roller, but I’m a Christian. I definitely
11 believe, and I have hope. That’s what kept us going over there, I think, sometimes was
12 that we still didn’t know we were carrying that hope. But when we fought—you see the
13 guys fighting for their lives in a battle. It’s a little different than the enemy who was just
14 like throwing themselves on our concertina barbed wire, and they’re getting shot to
15 pieces. Unless you actually killed them, they kept on coming. That wasn’t our mentality.
16 We had aspirations of going home someday. The North Vietnamese were never going
17 home. They were sent down the Ho Chi Minh Trail, and that’s where they were going to
18 be for the rest of their life. So, it doesn’t matter when they died—today or tomorrow.
19 They didn’t have any hope. But they were dedicated. They were dedicated. Why? Talk
20 about brainwashed! They were brainwashed. Uncle Ho, Ho Chi Minh, their god. Good
21 for Ho. We just wanted to get home and see mom and have some apple pie and see our
22 girlfriend again someday. So, you know, it drove us on and on and on. So many didn’t
23 make it. The biggest anger that I carry around my neck is all the premature deaths since
24 we’ve come home. I just saw an article this morning, and I try to stay on top of all the
25 news regarding VA. Of course, which involves Vietnam veterans. Anything involving
26 VA. There was a headline. I don’t know what newspaper it was. I file these things, and
27 the file is getting so thick. Here it is. “VA Wants All Veterans Exposed to Agent Orange
28 to Apply For Benefits.” Well, that’s great. *The Salisbury Post*. I think that’s North
29 Carolina. Well, that’s great. But you can’t even take care of the ones you got. Great!
30 That’s what we want! We want you to take care of us. But you’re not even taking care of
31 the ones that already applied. We’re standing in line and dying before we get taken care

1 of. That's where I'm at now in my life. I consider myself a staunch veteran advocate. I
2 will not hesitate to write a letter to a congressman. I'm going to a town hall meeting
3 tomorrow. The senator is coming into Sullen, Ohio, and I'm going to put myself down for
4 that meet a long time ago. I'm going, and I'm carrying a copy of his letter to me that he
5 wrote to me when my first book came out. I said, "That's pretty neat. Wait until he sees
6 this. Remember this, Senator? Remember this? This is you."

7 KC: Well, I've got one last question for you, Mr. Trimmer. And, again, another
8 kind of large question. Looking back on it, over the years, forty, fifty years of Vietnam,
9 what do you think is the lasting legacy, the lasting historical significance of the Vietnam
10 War?

11 RT: Stolen valor. Stolen valor. We had our valor, our honor, and it was stolen
12 from us. Clearly.

13 KC: By whom?

14 RT: Our country, congress, America. It just whizzed on by. There was no hoopla.
15 There was no thank you. There was no welcome home. We didn't have any heroes. Very
16 few people know that people like Norman Schwartz and Cullen Powell and some others
17 who were Vietnam veterans before they were anything else. Our heroes aren't known to
18 the public. They're not household words. Our valor was stolen. Our honor—we were
19 never allowed to be honored. I think—I know that's why so many of us have sort of come
20 out of the woodwork, come out of the closet. March in parades? No. I know a lot of
21 Vietnam veterans that just started marching in parades around Memorial Day and stuff,
22 putting their uniform back on after forty and fifty years, getting a taste of that. It feels
23 good. But what was taken away from us and deprived all these years, I don't know how
24 America can ever pay it back. Over a million of us are gone. How can you rectify that?
25 Over a million of us have died prematurely since we came home because the VA, our
26 government, Congress, didn't take care of us. Now they want to welcome you home. I
27 accept it all graciously. But if you start to talk about it a little bit, they walk away. They
28 turn away. Well, I really didn't want to get into a conversation with you about it, but
29 welcome home. I'm glad you're here. Okay, fine. Well, we gravitate to ourselves.
30 Veterans hang with veterans. Vietnam veterans look for other Vietnam veterans or other
31 veterans. We hang with ourselves because a lot of us also are more of one political—we

1 favor one political side than another. So, we have that in common. Every single vet
2 buddy I have—every single one is a conservative is a patriot, is a patriotic conservative.
3 But we get along.

4 KC: Well, Mr. Trimmer, is there anything else you'd like to add to the interview
5 before we bring it to a close?

6 RT: How much I appreciate it. I appreciate that you all are doing this. So many
7 years have gone by since that war, and a lot of people just want us to bury it, forget it. In
8 fact, I was contacted by another group called—it's a California. They're doing a
9 documentary. The fact that some of our honor that was stolen is—our story is still being
10 told, and I like to see that. A lot of the guys, it's too late, and they don't care. But I do.
11 I'm glad for them. I'm glad for the families when our story gets told and it gets told right.

12 KC: All right. Well, that sounds like a good time to bring the interview to a close.
13 Thank you very much.