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**The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Victor Bary
Conducted by Kelly Crager
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Transcribed by Samantha Holmes**

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 Victor Bary. Today is 30 March 2016. I am in Lubbock, Texas, on the campus of Texas
3 Tech University, and Mr. Bary is joining me by telephone from his home in Cranford,
4 New Jersey. That is correct Cranford, right?

5 Victor Bary: That is correct.

6 KC: Okay great. To begin this interview, Vic, I'd like to get some background
7 and biographical information from you if I could. Can you tell me when, where you were
8 born?

9 VB: Sure, I was born in Clinton, Oklahoma, in April of 1944 where my father was
10 stationed in the Navy as a lieutenant who was an instructor at an avionic school. They
11 had moves—Oklahoma's a strange place for the Navy. They had been at Galveston, but
12 the flying weather was so bad they moved inland.

13 KC: Mm-hm, and what was your father's name?

14 VB: Victor Bary as well.

15 KC: So, you're a junior then?

16 VB: I'm an Alexander.

17 KC: Oh, okay all right, not quite junior. What about your mother, what was her
18 name?

1 VB: Here name was Eleanor Woglom. She was born in New York, her father was
2 a medical researcher at Columbia and a resident at Columbia Presbyterian, and she met
3 my father while at Barnard and he was at Columbia.

4 KC: I see. Did you have any brothers or sisters?

5 VB: I have one brother, Paul, who is four years younger than I am, and he lives in
6 Denver, Colorado.

7 KC: Okay, well tell me about your parents. What did they do for a living?

8 VB: Well, my father worked for first for RCA Radio, before the war and then
9 after the war went back to work for them with MBC Television, he was a technical
10 director, set up the first two UHF [Ultra-high Frequency] transmitters in the United States
11 and at the end of his career won an Emmy for his coverage of a number of Olympics.

12 KC: Oh, is that right?

13 VB: Yeah.

14 KC: That's very interesting.

15 VB: My mother was a housewife. Later after my brother and I were much older
16 she went to work for a while as a medical check at Columbia Medical, not Columbia, I
17 forgot which, another one of the universities in New York.

18 KC: Okay, I assume you didn't grow up in Oklahoma then by the sounds of your
19 parent's positions.

20 VB: Oh, no.

21 KC: Where did you grow up?

22 VB: (laughs) I grew up—my father's work quickly took him to first Connecticut
23 then to New York, so I grew up in suburbs around New York City. My father worked
24 most of his career in or out of radio city in New York.

25 KC: Okay, so tell me about growing up here on the East coast in the shadows of
26 New York City if you will. What kind of childhood was that like?

27 VB: Well, it seemed like an ideal childhood. I guess most peoples do. I grew up
28 in suburban neighborhoods with really very little connection to the city other than the fact
29 that my father got on a bus everyday to go to work there. But you know I grew up in the
30 first post WWII suburban development, so grassy lawns, lots of activities, we lived most
31 my time in Fair Lawn, New Jersey, this section called Bradburn, which was the first plan

1 community, was started in the late '20s. They try to make it stepped right into the
2 depression and wound up being owned by the insurance company for a while, but it had a
3 complete year around sports and activities for children based on a nominal fee assessment
4 homeowner. I later worked as a lifeguard and during my summers and we would have
5 visitors from all over the country wishing to set up the same kind of arrangement.

6 KC: Hmm, so were you pretty active as kid in sports and outdoor activities and
7 things like that?

8 VB: I was a very—well, I think all kids were active then, that was a time when
9 you after breakfast you got on your bicycle with your peanut butter and jelly sandwich
10 and your cub scout canteen, and Mom said, “Be home at 6:00 PM for dinner.”

11 KC: Right.

12 VB: (laughs) So very different from today where kids seem to have to be
13 transported everywhere by automobile and every activity has to be overseen by adults
14 and have professional training. In the suburban areas I grew up in, every area had what
15 was known as a what or the woot developed area that you know the suburban housing
16 hadn't descended on yet and most of our time was spent you know, you'd go out to the
17 sandlot or whatever, see how many people you had, and if you had eight people you
18 made rules for baseball that could be played by two teams of four. Never needed or really
19 wanted an adult present.

20 KC: (laughs) Right, I can certainly understand that relate to that. Different times
21 of course, very much different times. Well, what about schooling, where did you go to
22 school and what were you interested in?

23 VB: Well, I was, I went to school really from third grade on in the Fair Lawn
24 School system. Went to, in high school I became interested—I never was a great athlete,
25 which was a great disappointment, my father was a brilliant athlete, he had set records in
26 swimming in the New York Y system, one of them stood for over twenty years and he
27 was co-captain of the Columbia swimming team, he had boxed, been on the rifle team, I
28 was just a mediocre athlete, but I did run track in high school and ran in the first ever four
29 mile relay for high school boys and we took second place. Every one of us ran miles in
30 the four minute range.

31 KC: Wow, that's impressive.

1 VB: Yeah, mine had a lot of seconds tagged on after the fourth. But so, I was a
2 typical kid I guess, interested in girls, joined a couple of clubs, chemistry club and a few
3 others and that was about it.

4 KC: Were you a very good student?

5 VB: I was actually a rotten student, up 'til my senior year I had been sort of a
6 class clown through grade school and junior high school and it—early in high school I
7 was infatuated with a young lady and really had no plans to go to college, my parents as a
8 last desperate move sent me on my junior year on a tour abroad, conducted by my French
9 teacher and suddenly I found myself surrounded by very great kids, all planning to go to
10 college who I thought were terrific people and were very interested and came back and
11 announced to the girl we were breaking up, put a full press on my senior year and went
12 from a mediocre student to a straight A student with 1200 SATs [Scholastic Aptitude
13 Test].

14 KC: So that really kind of put the bug in your ear, I guess?

15 VB: Oh, it sure did.

16 KC: About more education, more opportunities, seeing the world, things like that,
17 I guess.

18 VB: And I returned to school two or three times since college graduation for
19 further degrees.

20 KC: Very good, very good. A lifelong kind of thing there I guess, sure. Tell me
21 about growing up in the '40s and '50s, I mean this a time of Eisenhower era if you will,
22 but also the time of the cold war. What do you remember about the cold war, how did
23 that, or did it impact your life?

24 VB: Certainly, I can remember duck and cover in the classrooms and getting
25 under your desk or going out in the hall to behind the steel wall anchors to you know in
26 case of a nuclear attack, so that was a little scary, but you just took at as the way things
27 were. I think the biggest thing I remember and it really didn't occur to me 'til later on
28 was I grew up in a suburban New Jersey neighborhood where we had one African
29 American family and I remember the kids in high school, the Whatty kids were always
30 absolutely terrific students, participated in sports and band, and years later, it wasn't 'til
31 years later heard how difficult it must have been for them because they never went to any

1 of the proms and certainly there wasn't any cross racial dating then, so it must have been
2 a very lonely existence for them, but at the time I never thought about it.

3 KC: Yeah, well its interesting and this comes up from time to time when we talk
4 to folks who grew up during this era. We often times think about the South being
5 segregated and obviously it was in a variety of problems there, but often times in the
6 North these kind of things were there as well. Did you see any sort of purposeful
7 discrimination toward these folks, or was it pretty open?

8 VB: Well, let me—it was not direct invisible other than the fact that it was, I'm
9 sure that relators steered people away from housing in these communities and I think I
10 knew as a white kid that if I was ever to have trouble and the police was there and the
11 other person was black that I was going to be the one who was going to come out on top.
12 You mentioned the South, I went to school in Virginia. My first wife was from
13 Richmond. And I know when I arrived and expressed concern about things I saw there,
14 the Southerners were quick to point out to me that you know my Yankee liberalism was
15 all well and good, but they lived in communities where there were large numbers of
16 blacks, I grew up—I was in one that had one family out of a population of twenty
17 thousand, so you know who was I to instruct them.

18 KC: Certainly a difficult and complicated issue and complicated time on various
19 issues.

20 VB: It continued I guess you'll get this later, but it continued in the service in
21 Vietnam.

22 KC: Yeah, and that's definitely something that I want to talk to you about once
23 we get to that point for sure. All right, well, you mentioned that education kind of opened
24 you eyes, you were much more interested in better grades and kind of a future.

25 VB: Yeah, let me mention I think I had two outstanding teachers my senior year
26 that really left an impression. I guess the school realized I was bright, if under achieving
27 up until then because I was put in both first PSSC physics class taught and also in an
28 advanced history class. My history teacher, Ellen Bookbinder, was a doctoral candidate at
29 Harvard in history who was teaching as he worked on his dissertation and he just, the first
30 day there took a look at our textbooks and said, "This is a bunch of neutered nonsense,"

1 he said, “You’re all going to get a subscription to New York Times and were going to
2 talk about how government really works.” That was interesting.

3 KC: Yeah.

4 VB: And the PSSC physics teacher had just come back—Mr. Woodruff from two
5 years with the geodetic and coastal geodetic survey in Antarctica, and he talked about and
6 introduced us to how science was actually done. I thought, “Wow, this is the first time
7 I’ve had somebody who actually does what he’s talking about.” This guy was so involved
8 with us and what he did, we had a student who was living with a family from Argentina
9 who was accepted to Cal Tech and didn’t have the money for tuition, and Mr. Woodruff
10 helped finance his first year on a teacher’s salary.

11 KC: Is that right?

12 VB: Yeah, so you know those two people stand out from my high school
13 experience.

14 KC: That’s quite a commitment from someone.

15 VB: Sure is.

16 KC: So, do you know that college will be in your future? Is this something that
17 you’re striving for?

18 VB: Say that again?

19 KC: College, is college something that you’re striving for at this point?

20 VB: Yes, and my senior year I just put on a full court press and I have to say I
21 was accepted at William and Mary, put on the wait list at UVA [University of Virginia],
22 accepted at Rutgers and at Fairleigh Dickinson.

23 KC: Oh, wow, that’s some pretty heavy weights right there. When did you
24 graduate from high school?

25 VB: I graduated in 1962.

26 KC: Okay, 1962 and that’s a good departure point here. Of course, Kennedy is
27 elected in 1960 and Kennedy meant a lot of things to a lot of different folks in a lot of
28 different ways and kind of a touch stone of the Vietnam generation. What did you think
29 about Kennedy?

30 VB: My parents were very strong Republicans, so initially I didn’t think a great
31 deal of him. As time went on into my senior year of high school and into college, I

1 vividly remember where I was and what I was doing when he was assassinated. I came to
2 think very highly of him. Kind of felt like this personally accepting his challenge to our
3 generation.

4 KC: What about his administration, his policies, what did you think about that?

5 VB: By in large I thought very positively of him. I think subsequently I have read
6 a great deal of misogyny and that he may not have been nearly as good a president as we
7 felt he was at time, and he's certainly the one who got us involved in Vietnam.

8 KC: Right, right.

9 VB: But largely positive.

10 KC: You mentioned that you remember very clearly where you were when you
11 received word of the assassination. Where were you?

12 VB: I got involved in folk music in school and happened to be—we had local
13 food nannies at the college and there was a young woman I sang with and she and I were
14 sitting out on the steps of her dorm rehearsing when somebody came by and told us. And
15 I just remember we couldn't believe it, little side note there was a television show called
16 *ABC Hootenanny*, and they had approached the college about doing some shows here,
17 they would have been during exam reading period and university said, "Uh-uh, no, we
18 don't want them distracted during this," when a group of us became aware of this we
19 went out the head of the sunken garden and held a protest singing. The editor of the
20 college paper was there writing a story, taking pictures, and he later told us he had us on
21 the AP [Associated Press] wire. And all of a sudden, a stop hold came from Dallas and it
22 was Kennedy's assassination.

23 KC: What kind of impact do you think the Kennedy assassination had on you, the
24 community, and the country, in general?

25 VB: Well, I don't think that I had known, other than the assassination attempt on
26 Truman that there had ever been a prior, other than Lincoln obviously, presidential
27 assassination and it just overwhelmed. Didn't seem like something that could possibly
28 happen. So, we all felt sort of a deep sense of mourning.

29 KC: You graduate in '62. Where did you wind up going to college?

30 VB: College of William and Mary.

1 KC: You went to William and Mary, all right. Tell me about you time there at
2 William and Mary. What was that like for you? What are you studying? What are you
3 hoping to do?

4 VB: Well, I arrived planning on a career in foreign service.

5 KC: Well, let me ask you. How did that bug get put in your ear?

6 VB: Well, I think that's my mother she was also the one that encouraged me to
7 apply to Virginia schools. I got to say that with an SAT of 1200, I was probably on the
8 bottom half of the curve for students there. They were just an incredibly smart group of
9 people and I knocked myself out my first year trying to perform well. Matter of fact I still
10 remember I was on the debate team early in my first year and my debate partner was a
11 kid that had gone to Brown's Prep School. And I would trudge home every day with four
12 hundred pages of reading to do with my classes and I would try to read every damn last
13 page, and I'd be up to two, three in the morning. And Don finally took me aside and said,
14 "Kid, you're not going to make it if you do this. Didn't anybody ever teach you how to
15 read a professor?" I said, "No." He said, "Look, most of them teach whatever they did
16 their dissertation on. Watch them carefully. See what he emphasizes. Read that part and
17 hell with the rest of it unless you have time." (both laugh) And he—because of him I
18 think I survived.

19 KC: So, if you have a career in mind with the foreign service, what was your
20 major area of study, what were you focusing on?

21 VB: Oh, I bounced all around, I went from that to French, to economics, and
22 finally settled on English literature as a not too difficult path to a bachelor's degree. I
23 can't say that I was a terribly—a highly motivated or career focused student at that point.

24 KC: Yeah, so you went down a track that pays you all kinds of great salaries.

25 VB: Yeah, right.

26 KC: The good thing was literature. (both laugh) Well, what did you hope to do?
27 You graduate I guess what four years later, so this would have been '66, I guess. What 'd
28 you hope to do?

29 VB: Well, I really, I wanted employment, I had a college girlfriend that I wanted
30 to marry. Fortunately, I worked as a waiter in one of the restaurants in Williamsburg at a
31 time when a lot of really bright people were being attracted to Atlanta. One of them said,

1 “You really ought to look into IBM,” so I contacted them. I went up to Patterson. I took
2 like—it seemed like it took two full days of interviewing and tests. At the end, they
3 expressed interest in hiring me on graduation, so I was going to go to work in some kind
4 of administrative capacity with them. What happened though is that as I got close to the
5 graduation and Vietnam was heating up, it became pretty clear that if I went out into the
6 world, I could have my grown-up life interrupted by the draft, so I asked IBM if they
7 would hold that decision for me if I did my military service first, and they said yes, so on
8 graduation I enlisted.

9 KC: You mention Vietnam and the draft, of course. How aware were you of what
10 was going on in Southeast Asia?

11 VB: Well pretty aware for two—actually a number of reasons, I want to drive
12 back to a junior high class that I had. It was an art class had a most unusual woman who
13 taught it, so now were talking 1959 or so, would read from the *New York Times* to us
14 before, at the beginning of class, and she was talking about what was going on in Laos
15 and Cambodia and she said, “You better pay attention to this. It’s going to impact you.”

16 KC: Hmm.

17 VB: William and Mary required ROTC [Reserve Officers’ Training Corps] for
18 the first two years for all male students, so I went through two years of ROTC. One of
19 our captains had just returned from Vietnam, so he told us about it. I had also—I was one
20 of these students, I wouldn’t read what was assigned, I would go the book shop and just
21 leaf through and find something, and one of them things I found was a book by Henry
22 Kissinger which was discussing really what would become the basis of the 11th Air
23 Assault Division which became the 1st Cav and it was propounding that we needed an
24 anti-gorilla capability, otherwise the Soviets would pick us apart around the world. As
25 they were in Africa at the time saying, “You want a nuclear war over this America?” So,
26 I was aware that all the stuff was noodling around in the background and I am firmly
27 convinced that we became involved in Vietnam in part as a way to test the theory of the
28 1st Cav and Air Mobile to see if we really had—after studying what the Brits had done in
29 WWII with guerilla warfare—if we had come up with a viable answer to guerilla warfare.

30 KC: Yeah.

31 VB: So long story short, I was aware that—what was going on.

1 KC: So '66, like you say things are beginning to ramp up over in Vietnam. The
2 American commitment is beyond the advisory capacity, we have ground troops, we have
3 B-52s, we have the whole shooting match.

4 VB: Right, the 173rd's in there, the Marines are in there, everybody's going over.

5 KC: What did you think about American involvement at the time, was this
6 something that you thought, "This is where we need to be, this is what we need to be
7 doing."

8 VB: No. Both my French professors and my father who I mentioned—we chatted
9 before—had fled Russia 1917. He'd grown up in France part of his life—all advised me
10 the United States had little awareness or experience in that area, that the French had been
11 there from, for over a hundred years had got roundly trounced, and we were making a
12 terrible mistake if we thought we were going to do any better with no background in the
13 area. So, no, I was against our involvement.

14 KC: Yeah, but regardless of where the United States was involved you have a
15 military service looming. You have graduated from college, the exemption wouldn't be
16 there for you, and it looks like you were trying to take some proactive steps here by
17 enlisting, um another one of the benefits of enlisting rather than being drafted is perhaps
18 you have a little bit more leeway in where you wanted to go and what you wanted to do,
19 did you find that to be the case?

20 VB: Well, I did, but I chose badly. My father I mentioned was a Naval officer in
21 WWII. He said, "Son if you're going into the military, you want to go in as an officer,
22 that's the only way to do your service." So, I guess months, couple months before
23 graduation I start going to recruiting offices to look into officer programs. They maybe
24 looked at English literature and said, "Sorry son, we have no interest in you." The Air
25 Force said, "Well, you have 20/20 vision we'd consider you as a pilot, but you're going
26 to owe us six years active duty after that." The Army, bless them said, "Oh, son, we'd be
27 happy to offer you any of our three schools infantry, armor, or artillery. We would
28 recommend Benning infantry because since it's the least expensive training, it's the
29 easiest to get out of after commissioning." So, I went in under what was called the
30 college opt program found for Benning. The problem – the program was two years active
31 service after commissioning or completion of the two years if you didn't complete OCS

1 [Officer Candidate School]. So, I went in as all my training as infantry and somewhere in
2 my advanced infantry training, I decided I made a mistake, and I gave up my Benning
3 slot.

4 KC: Oh, is that right?

5 VB: Yeah, so that's how a great kid who could have chosen better to wound up as
6 an infantryman.

7 KC: Where did you wind up doing your bootcamp, basic training?

8 VB: I did both basic and AIT at Fort Jackson, South Carolina.

9 KC: Well, that's not the least bit like suburban New Jersey. Tell me—

10 VB: Oh, it—.

11 KC: Tell me about your time at Fort Jackson.

12 VB: Well, it was hot and humid. Because it was July, August, September,
13 October, in Columbia, South Carolina. I—when I arrived at boot camp and it was started
14 to undergo harassment by the patrol sergeants, it occurred to me that this seemed to be a
15 combination of two things I had encountered before, one was fraternity hazing and the
16 other was YMCA summer camp. And if I deployed the skills, I had learned at the two
17 somehow, I just might survive this.

18 KC: Tell me about your routine there at—in basic. What was that like for you?

19 VB: Well, it was up at 05:30, eat, go out and march, fire your rifle, march some
20 more. I learned a very important lesson early on. I had been, as I mentioned, a half-miler
21 in high school and was a very good runner and at the end of March, I guess probably
22 about our third or fourth week there the drill sergeant turned to me and said, “Well, what
23 do you think of that Private Bary?” He just called us to stop duress, I said, “Well frankly
24 drill sergeant, I don't think it was all that difficult.”

25 KC: Uh-oh.

26 VB: At which point he called the Company to attention, said, “Private Bary has
27 requested that we march another two miles,” and I never made that mistake again. (both
28 laugh) After that was, “Oh, yes, sir. I don't know how I possibly survived it.” (both
29 laugh)

30 KC: You made some friends there immediately, didn't you?

31 VB: Yes, they made it quite clear that they expected that to never to happen again.

1 KC: In addition to the physical aspects of it, which are intense and they're intense
2 for a reason, what about the mental aspect of it? Because that's equally as important, if
3 not more?

4 VB: Well, it certainly was challenging. I mean as an upper-middle class kid, I had
5 never been treated that way. It was a demeaning experience in a lot of ways. I mean they
6 quite literally broke us down psychologically in the first few weeks, wasn't 'til a year
7 later in a doctoral program in clinical psychology that I realized that I been through one
8 of the best conditioning programs that had ever been designed. So, it was intense it was
9 separated from my college sweetheart with very little chance of getting any leave, at least
10 during basic, so it was intense.

11 KC: But you survived basically unscathed, I guess?

12 VB: Yeah, yeah, I did. I took it very seriously, I knew where we were likely to go,
13 so I listened and tried my darndest to master every skill that they were presenting to us
14 because I thought my life might well depend on it.

15 KC: So, you figured that Vietnam could easily be in your future then, given what
16 was going on?

17 VB: Yes.

18 KC: Yeah. So, after basic you stay there at Fort Jackson for AIT [Advanced
19 Infantry Training].

20 VB: Right.

21 KC: Tell me about AIT. How is it different from boot camp, and what were your
22 experiences there?

23 VB: Well, it's different in a couple things—ways. One was that now the training
24 was very focused. We were treated a little bit better. There was far less harassment. It
25 was to master the skill of the various weapons and small unit maneuvers and what we
26 were likely to do you know as a member of an infantry squad or platoon. And we also, it
27 happened to be, we happened to be billeted in a brand new, three story barracks. It was
28 brick barracks, centrally air conditioned. It was more like a college dorm only you had
29 forty roommates instead of one. That had a negative in that we were forever getting
30 people down to inspect it, which meant we missed a lot of weekend passes, polishing the
31 floors with paste wax that we had had to buy ourselves to get ready for the inspect—for

1 the people that review the billet. But I was largely impressed with the training I got. Did
2 my very best to master it, was absolutely pressed on when I missed expert rifleman by
3 one point.

4 KC: Oh, is that right?

5 VB: Yeah.

6 KC: Well, tell me about the weapons training there. What sort of weapons are you
7 (both speaking at once)?

8 VB: We were the last cycle to go through with the M-14, so I was trained on the
9 M-14, the M-16 machine gun, and the M-79 grenade launcher. We had familiarization
10 with the .45 caliber pistol, the M-250 caliber machine gun, and the 3.5 inch rocket
11 launcher. So yeah, pretty extensive. I was particularly good with the M-60, which I
12 thought was just a superb weapon.

13 KC: AIT is over, you are full trained, the Army's going to have plans for you,
14 you're an infantryman.

15 VB: Well, this is what happened, I gave up my slot at Benning probably about a
16 month before the end of AIT, and that threw a monkey wrench into the flow of orders. I
17 mean there were three groups of people in my AIT unit. There was a group of enlistees or
18 draftees who were going to heavy weapons platoons, so they did most of the training
19 separate from us, they were being trained on mortar and the recoilless rifle, the other two
20 groups who were all getting light weapons infantry training, one group was a bunch of
21 Detroit nation guardsmen doing their four months or whatever active training, NCOs
22 [Noncommissioned Officer] didn't like them very much, and the rest of us were people
23 who were going to one of the three combat arms, OSCs under the college opt program.
24 The NCOs took particular delight with us because it was going to be the last chance to
25 harass us before we became officers. Anyway, so we come to the end of that training
26 period, the heavy weapons folks get orders for their assignments to various units, the
27 OCS folks go off to OCS, I have no orders, so they kept me around 'til orders appeared,
28 which took about six weeks. Made me an acting drill corporal and I was on – assigned to
29 the cadre to train the next group of AIT students.

30 KC: Now that is, that's really different kind of approach to things, six weeks is a
31 long time.

1 VB: Yeah, for orders to catch up.

2 KC: Yeah, yeah, and perhaps they didn't know for sure what they were going to
3 do with—

4 VB: Well, they didn't.

5 KC: Yeah, well you're a drill corporal.

6 VB: Yeah.

7 KC: So now you get the chance to inflict some of that damage on other
8 unsuspecting souls, I didn't know this was part of your experience. Tell me about being a
9 member of the drill cadre.

10 VB: Well, first off, I was treated like a person, which was a great revelation. You
11 know nobody barked at me anymore. The trainees looked up to me, I certainly I did the
12 best I could to train them. I did nothing to try and harass them. And I actually, once I was
13 in Vietnam met a couple of the guys I had trained.

14 KC: Hmm. And this lasts for six weeks you say?

15 VB: Yep.

16 KC: And the whole time of course you, I guess you're probably assuming that the
17 orders to Vietnam will eventually work their way over.

18 VB: Well, yeah, and actually just as a Segway, orders did come down initially and
19 they were to go to Mannheim, Germany.

20 KC: Jackpot.

21 VB: Yeah, my college sweetheart, who is now my wife and I were thrilled
22 because we had both worked in France one summer while we were in college. Mannheim
23 was close to the French border, so we were just absolutely thrilled. The day she came to
24 pick me, the day before she came to pick me up, the orders changed, and they—the folks
25 give them to me said, "I can't tell you exactly where you're going, but you're drawing
26 green underwear and stuff and that's an Asian ATO, this is not good." So, on all the drive
27 home from Columbia to Richmond I had to—I played along with my wife as we talked
28 about all the things, we were going to do in—in Germany, in France, knowing full well
29 that wasn't where I was going, but I didn't want to break it to her while we were still in
30 the car. So, it was very long ride.

31 KC: When did you finally break the news to her?

1 VB: As soon as we got to our apartment.
2 KC: That must have been tough.
3 VB: It was tough and we obviously were both very frightened.
4 KC: So, when do the orders finally arrive, you know you're going to Vietnam?
5 VB: Well, they did that just before I cl—
6 KC: That was them, okay.
7 VB: But they were just too what turned out be 98th Replacement Battalion.
8 KC: Sure, sure.
9 VB: They weren't for any particular unit.
10 KC: All right and when—what is the time frame were looking at here?
11 VB: That's beginning of December. I had a leave. I think it was either two or four
12 weeks before I left. During that creative time she talked me into impregnating her, which
13 I told her I thought was a stupid idea because if I was killed there, the last thing she
14 needed to do was be a single mom, and she insisted if she was going to lose me that she
15 wanted something of me left behind. I eventually exceeded.
16 KC: You mentioned that you were certainly concerned as was your wife, or future
17 wife. The War's going on over there. You've been through training. You've probably, I
18 assume, run into some folks who have been to Vietnam.
19 VB: Yeah, that's an interesting point. Let me just say that for the first six weeks
20 of my AIT all the folks who were training us were—all the drill sergeants were Korean
21 and WWII veterans, and they were very honest with us that they were teaching us out of a
22 manual with no personal experience. They said, "Towards the end of your training
23 though, we're going to get some folks back from there," and they said, "You listen very
24 carefully to them because they know what they're talking about." And most of these were
25 fairly junior people. They were E-4s and E-5s who were coming back from the 1st Cav
26 and the 1st Infantry Division and the 25th—no, not the 25th. 1st Cav and 1st Infantry. And
27 we did listen very carefully to them. But I thought the honesty of our training cadre was
28 very refreshing. They said, "You know there is a difference between teaching what you
29 just learned out of a book and having experienced something." And that's certainly
30 something I made clear to the guys I was training as a drill corporal is I'm teaching you
31 what they taught me, but I cannot tell you I'm teaching from personal experience.

1 KC: What about the guys who had been to Vietnam. What were they telling you
2 guys?

3 VB: They were telling us we were in for a world of hurt. You know they were
4 proud of their units. They were proud of their service, but they said, “You know this is
5 not pretty.”

6 KC: Was there anything specific, whether its talking about booby traps, or talking
7 about jungle conditions, or how tactics will change in that kind of environment?

8 VB: Well, they talked about that, and actually they tried. They did the lesson in
9 training. We had you know. We trained in assaulting Vietnamese villages. We were
10 showed what punji stakes looked like. Later in our training they did, they actually gave us
11 BB guns and had us do instinctive firing because they realize that we were being trained
12 with the M-14 and the model of the revolutionary soldier. The individual who sights a
13 target you know a hundred yards, two hundred yards away and takes careful aim, and the
14 people coming back said, “This isn’t how it is.” It’s that you normally can’t see what’s
15 thirty feet in front of you, and you just have to immediately react to wherever the fire is
16 coming from, and that’s what they were telling us.

17 KC: Yeah, obviously very valuable lessons they’re trying to impart upon you
18 there.

19 VB: Yeah.

20 KC: All right, what about the political climate around the War, you mentioned
21 that you were not buying into this particular war at this particular time in this particular
22 area, but you’re going to go anyway. Are you paying attention to what the politicians are
23 saying, to what the generals are saying, the nascent anti-war movement that is beginning
24 to rise up? How aware were you of all of this kind of turmoil around the war?

25 VB: I was certainly hearing what the politicians and the military senior leadership
26 were saying and discounting a lot of it, but I was not aware of the anti-war movement. I
27 knew people who were anti-war like me in college, but I can’t—there were not that I was
28 aware of in 1966, any marches or anything of that sort. And so, I think once I was in the
29 military training I just you know said, “Well, I got to pay attention here and learn the best
30 I can.” So, you know I guess, I very much hope I would not have to go. I very much

1 thought that this was a mistake, but I knew my position in it and just figured I've got to
2 equip myself the best I can.

3 KC: And it must have been very difficult on your wife as well, I would think.

4 VB: Yes, yeah.

5 KC: Well, what about your parents?

6 VB: They really let me down on that one. After encouraging me to seek an officer
7 billet, when they found out that I had enlisted for infantry they said, "You do realize that
8 our neighbor's son is a West Point graduate and a major. If you just relied on us to work
9 through him you probably could've gotten a cushy booth somewhere."

10 KC: Hmm.

11 VB: This was in direct conflict with all the stuff I had heard for years about—and
12 again my father I think felt this as having a right in this country, as having an obligation
13 to the Republic, whose benefits you enjoyed. I can't say they gave me a lot of support.

14 KC: And its one thing to believe this and move through it. It's another thing to, of
15 course, have your child have to go through this. One's perspective changes of course.

16 VB: Years later my youngest daughter decided she wanted to go to work for one
17 of the federal agencies in law enforcement, came back after, and said—one day after and
18 said, "You know were going to go down to Virginia and were going to fire weapons and
19 learn how to deal with perps," and I said, "Let me tell you as someone whose been shot at
20 and someone whose been wounded," I said, "This is not a lot of fun." (laughs) "This is
21 not something I think you really want to do."

22 KC: Yeah. Well, you're going to do it. You've got I guess thirty days' leave or
23 whatever it might have been. What do you do during that time?

24 VB: Saw friends, listen to folk music, visited family. I have photo somewhere the
25 day before I left, standing out in front of our apartment in Richmond, trying to put on
26 brave faces, but they are the most strained, un-brave looking faces I've ever seen.

27 KC: That's really interesting, must be quite a photograph to look back at from
28 time to time.

29 VB: Yep.

30 KC: All right, Vic. The time comes around. You're leaving. Tell me how you go
31 from Richmond over to Southeast Asia.

1 VB: Well, we went up to Travis Air Force Base, flying through Chicago on the
2 way, dressed in our class A summer uniforms, our khaki short sleeves, freezing to death
3 because it's very cold in Chicago. And then we boarded the plane and I, you know, as an
4 11-B, there were some other 11-Bs, were sort of padlocked around together, had one
5 interesting experience on the way. We made several stops. One was in the Philippines to
6 refuel and as the planes refueling were standing out there and a couple of airmen come by
7 and a chief, said, "Hey you guys, you got some time. Why don't you jump in the jeep?
8 We'll take you to the EM club. You can have a couple of beers." I said, "Hey, that's
9 great," so we jump in the jeep. We have a couple of beers and maybe a few more, lose
10 track of time, and all a sudden one of the people from the flight comes running in says,
11 "They're holding the plane for you. You guys are in real trouble." And we just looked at
12 him and said, "Oh, what are you going to do? Send me to Vietnam as an infantryman?
13 Oh, too late." (laughs) So, we got on the plane. There were no repercussions whatsoever
14 and next we landed at probably Bien Hoa—either Bien Hoa or Tan Son Nhut. I forget
15 which—and then bussed up to the 98th Replacement Battalion.

16 KC: And when do you arrive in-country? What is this? January of '67?

17 VB: Yeah, it was January 7th, 1967. And the routine there was there would be a
18 morning formation, the trucks from the infantry divisions who'd roll in one at a time,
19 they'd call out names, you'd be directed to board the trucks. After a couple of days, we
20 had figured out the routine, that it was always the infantry divisions they called first, and
21 they would repeat the same process in the afternoon, so after the infantry divisions were
22 called and our names weren't called, we stopped listening. I think it was the third day we
23 were there in the afternoon, all of a sudden, I heard my name called along with a couple
24 of the guys I'm standing with and I turn one of the guys I said, "I wasn't listening. What
25 unit are they calling?" That guys said, "I kind of half heard it, it was the 11th something
26 or other." I said, "It's probably the 11th Armored Cav, makes sense." So, we went to the
27 NCOIC [Noncommissioned Officer in Charge] and said where is the truck were supposed
28 to get on, he said, "Wait a minute. Your transportations coming." And a few minutes later
29 we heard a Huey approaching and it sits down on the pad and he said, "Go over there."
30 He said, "That's your transportation." And we learned we weren't going to the 11th Cav,

1 we were going to the 11th Aviation Battalion, and we thought we had died and gone to
2 heaven.

3 KC: What did you know about the 11th Aviation?

4 VB: Not a thing, (laughs) but I knew it wasn't the infantry.

5 KC: Right.

6 VB: So, they helicopter took us up to Phu Loi. What the 11th was was I think it
7 was March of '66, Army aviation existed in two forms, there was the 1st Cav. Had its own
8 aviation, it had sufficient aviation to support a division, all the rest of the Army aviation
9 were individual units that were made available as needed to infantry divisions. In '66
10 they decided this wasn't a good way to do it, so they took all the aviation units that
11 weren't part of an infantry division and put them under an umbrella organization called
12 the 1st Aviation Brigade, and the 11th was part of 12th group of the 1st Aviation Brigade.
13 Where we were was one of four 1st Infantry Division Bases in the area and so the 11th's
14 job was primarily to support the 1st Infantry Division. Although you know it got tasked
15 out as needed and supported the ARVNs, the 25th, the 199th, even sent a unit up to the
16 173rd for the Battle of Dak To. And as I walked into personnel life suddenly got better
17 and better. The clerk going through my record saw I was a college graduate, asked if I
18 typed. Well, I'd taken a typing—non-credit typing course in—in high school to prepare
19 my self to be able to gen out, turn out papers in high school and college, so I said, "Yeah,
20 in fact I can type forty words a minute." I guess that was on a manual, and he said, "Oh
21 yeah, prove it," so I did. And then he said, "I've got one more question for you." I said,
22 "What?" He said, "Do you play Bridge?" I said, "Yeah, I'm actually pretty good at it."
23 He said, "Well, we've got a couple of positions I can offer you. We have a security
24 platoon. They are responsible for part of the base security were you can go and you'll
25 spend a year in bunkers defending the perimeter, or I can offer you a position here in this
26 office as a personnel specialist." I said, "That sounds pretty good to me. I'll take that
27 one."

28 KC: Wow. You kind of fell into that.

29 VB: I sure as hell did.

30 KC: Hmm. Now I wonder could you describe Phu Loi for me, both the physical
31 layout and what's going on there?

1 VB: Sure, Phu Loi it was an interesting base, it was just a single air strip
2 surrounded by a lot of ground. The airstrip had been built by the Japanese in WWII, using
3 American and Allied prisoners of war to build it. (speaking to woman in the room) Okay,
4 have a good time, love you. Bye. My wives going to the art for the day, just saying
5 goodbye. Anyway, so it was a single air strip around which were two aviation battalions,
6 ours and then a 1st Infantry Aviation Battalion, across the field we had an armored
7 Cavalry Squad of the 1st Infantry, the quarter Cav the 1st of the 4th squadron, and then we
8 had a maintenance unit down the field that did the really complex work on air frames,
9 stuff that was beyond the 67s and 20s the helicopter mechanics that were either
10 mechanics in our units or were crew chiefs. So that was it, it was a mid-sized base.

11 KC: What about the activity there? What's going on, who's coming in, who'd
12 going out, what sort of operations are coming out of Phu Loi?

13 VB: Well, the work course we and the 1st Divisions Aviation Battalions are
14 constantly running either small missions or getting involved, I was there for Cedar Falls
15 and Junction City, bigger operations, constant aircraft coming in and out, squadron—1st
16 Squadron, 4th Cav going out in the M-60s, M-113 armored personnel carriers and a small
17 track vehicle called a duster, which was a leftover anti-aircraft track from Korea that had
18 twin .40-millimeter cannons on it that. When jets came, it was no longer of use as an anti-
19 aircraft weapon, but the regular Army had called it back from the National Guard when
20 they needed a light track vehicle to break up hardened bunkers that were in terrain too
21 boggy for an M-60 to act in. So, a lot of noise, a lot of activity. At night usually, you
22 know the perimeter would periodically be lit up.

23 KC: Lit up by?

24 VB: Well, incoming fire, outgoing fire. So, we were at the foot of what was called
25 the iron triangle, which was an area up Northwest of Saigon, where highway 13 and
26 Saigon river split, it had been the head of COSV [Central Office for South Vietnam] or
27 head COSV headquarters had been since the French-Indochina War. It was a hot area.

28 KC: Tell me about coming into your unit, you mentioned that you got the job as
29 personnel specialist here, tell me about the people you are working with, the hierarchy
30 command that you're dealing with and your daily duties.

1 VB: Sure. Well the people, its funny, the enlisted men I worked with in the
2 personnel department and in the Battalion Headquarters were a collection of some—other
3 than some Army trained clerks, of very bright people who had either been infantryman or
4 helicopter crew chiefs, or mechanics, most of the infantryman men were there because
5 they had extended six months to get out of the infantry, mechanics, two of the mechanics
6 I knew who I worked with, one had been in forward officer flight training, but had
7 suffered a head injury in the punji pit and was told he'd have to wait a year to go to ward
8 officer flight school because of the head injury, and he said "Nuts to that." Another one
9 was a helicopter crew chief who after a couple of crashes, "No more flying for me."
10 Anyway, the Army and I guess its headquarters and we were a headquarters of the
11 Aviation Battalion of eighteen hundred people, needs great people to do its administrative
12 work and most of us were college graduates, know that we hadn't been trained as clerks,
13 the Army figured it needed bright people and we could learn what we need to learn OJT
14 [On-the-job Training], so that's the guys I worked with. The Battalion Headquarters
15 was—I first started working out and then they built a personnel building for us, was
16 headed by a full colonel, had S1, 2, 3, 4 located there, all the commissioned officers in
17 the headquarters also held in appointments as piolets with one of the Aviation units we
18 had on the base. I guess everything I discovered that I just want to tell you about, I had
19 never heard of a ward officer before I got there and fully half our piolets were ward
20 officers and I learned later why, I think at the time congress allowed sixteen thousand
21 commissioned officers in the Army, I once added it up and if every Aviator in the 1st
22 Infantry—1st Aviation Brigade was a commissioned officer, it would have taken twelve
23 thousand commissioned officers, so the Army very quickly began using the ward officer
24 flight program to generate half the aviators they're going to need. And these guys were
25 great, they were all eighteen to twenty years old, just glorified kids. Daddy had just given
26 them the biggest hot rod you've ever seen and they didn't consider themselves officers,
27 they considered themselves pilots, and they assessed everybody else regardless of his
28 rank as to how good a pilot he was.

29 KC: Yeah.

30 VB: And they didn't waste any time harassing the enlisted men, all they wanted to
31 be was helicopter drivers, and they were superb.

1 KC: And like you say the ward officer program of course leads to a lot younger
2 pilot cadre.

3 VB: Yeah.

4 KC: Which is probably good and bad, depending on how you look at it, but
5 certainly a lot of fearless guys come through that ward officer program. And did an awful
6 lot of good work throughout the course of the war, but you're not one of them Vic, you're
7 in personnel, tell me about your job.

8 VB: Yep. Job was the best job you could possibly have. I was AOR clerk, and my
9 job was to make sure every junior enlisted man from the E-2 through E-6 got orders to
10 his next position at the end of his twelve months and had a ticket on a plane home.

11 KC: Hmm.

12 VB: So, I mean you—you couldn't have asked for a job that you could feel better
13 about.

14 KC: Your job is basically the hope and the future of the guys coming through.

15 VB: That's right.

16 KC: Yeah.

17 VB: I'll tell you I replaced somebody who was an Army trained clerk who was
18 running stuff on the side, taking advantage of that and that was something I would never
19 had considered in my life, having you know been in the combat arms, been by the grace
20 of God given a reprieve from it, the last thing in the world I could have ever considered
21 was holding one of these guys hostage.

22 KC: Do you care to talk about what was going on there, or would you rather not?

23 VB: Well, I'll give you a couple of things I learned about later, I—there was a
24 rumor that the guys that ran our ration break down, who drove the truck down to Saigon a
25 couple times a week to get our food were selling some of it on the way back up to Phu
26 Loi. When I got back to the States, I had my final assignments, I wound up in an
27 apartment complex with one of these guys, and I asked him, "Was the rumor true?" He
28 said, "Oh, yeah. I pocketed twenty thousand dollars while there."

29 KC: Hmm.

30 VB: Now, as an E-5 at that point was housing allowance and all that I was making
31 350 dollars a month, so you could imagine what twenty thousand dollars sounded like.

1 KC: That is huge money, especially for the times.

2 VB: Yeah.

3 KC: Circumstances.

4 VB: It was rumored, but I don't know if it was true that the guy who we had a
5 liaison shed at Tan Son Nhut Air Base, one of the guys there was actually selling M-16s
6 on the black market. I can't confirm that but knowing the guys it's not inconceivable.

7 KC: Yeah.

8 VB: And I'll just give you one other thing, because I was actually bribed once,
9 but I didn't realize it at the time. I was in the office working on some stuff and an E-6
10 came up and he's got an Air Cav Patch on his right shoulder and he's from one of our
11 Aviation units, he said, "Specialist, I'm very concerned. I'm supposed to go home in
12 three days and I don't have any orders." I said, "Sorry that's absolutely wrong, got to be
13 somewhere I see you're with the Cav. Who are you with?" and he told me. I said, "Look,
14 go back to your business, were going to radio up there," I said, "I'm sure were going to
15 find your orders up there and we'll get them printed right up here and we'll have them for
16 you and you'll be on your way." And I went back to doing something else and he said,
17 "Thank you Specialist, do you like bourbon?" I said, "Why I guess I like it as much as
18 anybody else," so he comes back late today, we indeed got his orders, gotten them printed
19 up, I had them to him, wish him well, at the end of the day I get up and I fall over a paper
20 bag with a half-gallon of bourbon in it.

21 KC: Hmm.

22 VB: And I thought at the time, gee this is terrible, this is what career NCOs think,
23 that nobody does anything unless there's a quid pro quo.

24 KC: Yeah.

25 VB: It's the last thing in the world I would have done, but he was gone so we
26 drank the bourbon (both laugh).

27 KC: I was about to say I hope you didn't let that bourbon go to waste.

28 VB: Oh, but it's the only time I was ever bribed and the only time I did something
29 that could be anywhere near taking advantage of my position.

30 KC: Hmm. Yeah, well again from his perspective that's probably the way that the
31 world worked.

1 VB: It did, yeah. There was a lot of it. I learned a lot of it in the military. There's
2 a lot of side activity going on.

3 KC: Well, I wonder, you told me what your job is and kind of give me a little
4 insight here and there and I don't want to get too technical or tax your memory too much,
5 but can you tell me what sort of processes that you would go through, the process for
6 dealing with someone's forms, with their records for making sure they're going on a
7 certain time, how would all that—where would it come down from, how would it work?

8 VB: Well, actually one of the things I did there was develop a better and a
9 streamlined lined one. People would process through when they came into the unit you
10 would then you know, you would know when they arrive, so their DORs [Date of
11 Release] the date of release, return from overseas was establishes, you had them fill out
12 some paperwork, one of which was a dream sheet, where would you like your next
13 assignment to be? And there didn't seem to be a process then to make sure that you
14 brought those persons records up again when he had to do all these things, so I developed
15 a process where I had a three by five card that I had drawn up with the information I
16 needed and as I processed the paperwork, I filled out the card with this information and
17 then put them in month order so that I would never skip somebody who was supposed to
18 go home. And it worked very effectively, so once that was done I was done with them
19 pretty much other than I would you know follow the morning reports and if somebody
20 was killed or sent to another unit I would get rid of that card, I would fill out a form with
21 people's dream sheet, where they wanted to go and this was before we had any computers,
22 I would fill it out in paper and then oh probably three or four months before the person
23 was supposed to go home I would get the sheet out—back with the people who are
24 coming up and with their declared dream location, which was done with a number. The
25 funny thing is out of the whole year I was there, two of them only came back wrong with
26 the—with the numbers reversed. One of them was mine.

27 KC: Oh, you're kidding me?

28 VB: No, it said at twenty-four, which was central Virginia, became forty-two
29 which was Fort Riley, Kansas.

30 KC: Huh,

31 VB: And I corrected it, but that was what I had orders for when I DORSed.

1 KC: Well, they are considerably different places, so I bet you didn't want to
2 change that.

3 VB: Fortunately, I had been told by someone that the Army was very good about
4 taking care of returning veterans and I was an E-5 by then, so I went through to pentagon
5 to OPO and said, "You know, could you correct this because I got six months left and it's
6 going to cost you a lot of money to send me and my family to Kansas. I'm going to be
7 unhappy. You're going to be unhappy, and then you're going to have to pay to send us
8 back to Virginia when its all over." And they said, "Yes," and they offered me three
9 different postings in Virginia to choose from.

10 KC: Oh, very nice.

11 VB: That was it, I would process those records, take care of them, make sure that
12 each—that as each month approached that I had given our headquarters up at Long Ben
13 the list of people who I was going to need tickets for and there's kind of a little story
14 there. I had been on the phone to that amount of number of occasions invited them down,
15 they wanted no part of Phu Loi, seemed too dangerous for them. One day I went to the
16 personnel sergeant and said, "You know Sargent Gatlin," said, "Sometimes when I need
17 something from these guys, a drop maybe for somebody whose had a family issue," he
18 said, "I'm just another voice at the end of line," I said, "would you give me a Saturday
19 off and I'll fly up there, I'll take my college on the other end of the line out for a couple
20 of drinks." Which he said, "Sure, sounds like a good idea." And I went up and I
21 befriended the guy on the other end of the line, the drinks were paid for by me, not the
22 Army, and sure enough after that point when I needed a favor for somebody, I never had
23 a problem.

24 KC: Is that right?

25 VB: Yeah.

26 KC: Well, there's different kinds of greasing the skids and you found a way there.

27 VB: Absolutely, yeah and it was just face-to-face and you get to know the person,
28 who your talking too and I said, "You know," I told him this guy, I said, "I will never ask
29 for a drop unless there's a serious problem. I want you to know if I do ask, it's somebody
30 that desperately needs it."

1 KC: Yeah. Tell me about your daily life, you pace of life, what would you be
2 doing from when you get up in the morning, take me through your day.

3 VB: Sure. It was certainly a fairly comfortable life. First off, we slept in a wooden
4 billet, four men to a room, you know on an Army cot. We would get up in the morning, I
5 don't know, 06:00 AM something like that, go to the mess hall after we shave and
6 showered, or shaved and showered in the morning, we'd go to our mess hall and then
7 there would be a Company formation, oh, I don't know at 08:00 AM, we'd do whatever
8 orders or stuff we needed to know, and then we would do a police call through the area to
9 our places of business, and then I would spend the rest of the day in a building, not air
10 conditioned, right on the side of the airfield, doing paperwork and pounding on a
11 typewriter and that would go on from I guess eight o'clock in the morning 'til five or six
12 o'clock at night, six days a week. We had Sundays off. So yeah, really it certainly was
13 not the life I had expected to lead as an infantryman.

14 KC: Right, yeah.

15 VB: I—every, even as bad as things could sometimes be, I slept in a bed every
16 night I was there.

17 KC: Mm-hm.

18 VB: And that as an infantryman, I lived in absolute fear of either injury or the fact
19 that I was going to be filthy for a year.

20 KC: Managed to avoid those things, at least at the early stage, I guess.

21 VB: Yeah.

22 KC: What about when you were finished with work for the day?

23 VB: Usually go back to the billet, we had a movie screen behind our billet where
24 they would periodically get, about once or twice a week they would get a movie, so we'd
25 all go out and watch the movie.

26 KC: What type of movies would you see?

27 VB: Oh, it's just whatever was going on around at the time. I think I remembered
28 twenty million BC with Rockwell Welsh, I followed that movie all around the base.
29 (laughs) Just to watch her run around in her little squirl skin bikini. Go to the EM club
30 have a couple beers, you know write letters home, read, play bridge, it literally at the end
31 of the day at six o'clock unless you had interior guard duty or calls for KP [Kitchen

1 Patrol] your day was over. It was, given the circumstances it was comfortable an
2 environment as you could ask for.

3 KC: Were you ever called for KP or guard duty?

4 VB: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah so fact I was called for KP the night that I found out I had
5 signed up—there was a service called MARS where you could make a telephone call
6 home and you had to put your request in months in advance. Well, the day, late in the day
7 of the night I was supposed to have the call, or the evening I went to the board and all a
8 sudden there's my name for KP, and I can't find anybody. You know I can't find the first
9 sergeant, I can't find the Company commander to plead my case with, so I missed my
10 call home, did my KP. I was so infuriated when I came back the battalion commander
11 had recently had little banana trees planted in front of all the billets, just spruce up the
12 area, I must have seen Mr. Roberts one time too often, I went in grabbed a survival knife,
13 which was a standard equipment with helicopter crews and chopped down every damn
14 banana tree and our Company area. And the next morning there was formation called,
15 people were asked, you know, "Did anybody have any information?" And in typical good
16 Army way of handling things everyone of the guys, many of whom had watched this, had
17 no idea who'd done it.

18 KC: And they saw you did it, but still wouldn't say anything.

19 VB: Sure.

20 KC: Yeah.

21 VB: You never ratted out for anything.

22 KC: Sure, sure.

23 VB: So, end I happened to have interior guard the night our base was hit, it was
24 one of four bases hit. And it was one 22-millimeter and one 40-millimeter rockets, which
25 was the first time it was ever done in the third III-Corps. I happened to be on interior
26 guard when it started.

27 KC: Can you take me through that even?

28 VB: Sure. Yeah, it's funny in a way in that I'd been there now seven months, up
29 'til then we would get occasional attacks on the base, but they'd be mortar attacks and the
30 mortars would always go down on the flight line because that's where the expensive
31 equipment is, so we got rather blasé about this I can—we clerks, I can remember pouring

1 a drink, climbing up on the roof of the billet and watching the mortar rounds fall on the
2 airfield. Well, these things weren't very accurate, but anyway by that point I had you
3 know we'd never had anything like this and I was getting rather lackadaisical, so I did my
4 first two hours and all interior guard is walking the Company area, you're really a fire
5 watch, you're there just to alert anybody if you know a fire breaks out or if somebodies
6 too drunk to find their way to their billet you help them get there. When my second round
7 came, I think it was between midnight and 2:00 AM, after walking around for a bit I
8 thought, "Jesus, this is really boring," and I dropped into the Quonset hut where
9 Company headquarters was, where the company clerk was the CQ [Charge of
10 Headquarters] runner that night. And I'm there enjoying with Specialist Washington and
11 all of a sudden somebody sticks his head in the door and says, "Uh, hey you two, I think
12 were under attack." So, Washington and I decided its our job to get people awake and
13 headed to the bunkers, so between two of us we agreed to split the Company area in half
14 and we started running from billet to billet as these rounds were coming in, making sure
15 that everybody was up and headed for the bunker. The first billet I got to, I forgot, was
16 one where that was people buy some cooks, they used to sit out in the front of their billet
17 in lawn chairs, having final smoke before they left for work, about eleven o'clock, I had
18 forgotten all about that and I came running at that billet at full tilt with a flashlight in one
19 had and a shot gun in the other, hit those chairs and flew through the air and skidded
20 across the concrete floor (laughs). Anyway, and we did, we took some casualties as a
21 result of that of what we did, both Washington and I were put up for and received the
22 bronze star.

23 KC: Is that right?

24 VB: Yeah. Not what you expect as a clerk.

25 KC: No, no its not and again when these things happen sometimes you don't think
26 so much as react and do what you're trained to do or do what you think is right.

27 VB: Absolutely, absolutely I mean we prob—when it was finally over and I got
28 into a bunker myself I tried to light a cigarette and my hand was shaking so hard I
29 couldn't control the match.

30 KC: How long were you guys out running around getting things for—

1 VB: You know I don't think it could have lasted longer than five minutes because
2 we each had twenty billets to run into and to wake people, one of the ones that I had been
3 in thirty seconds after I had been in it was hit with a rocket and fortunately—and there's
4 ones where I had close friends, they had gotten up, moved out of the back of the billet,
5 stopped to put on their boots, which was stupid and were in it when the rocket hit it, but it
6 hit right at the seam where the concrete floor met the dirt, traveled under the concrete
7 floor or detonating, they were all injured, but lightly injured. Whereas if it had been any
8 higher or if it had hit three seconds early it would have killed them all and wounded me
9 as well.

10 KC: So, you saved lives doing this?

11 VB: Yeah, I did. I like to feel that four people lived who wouldn't have if wasn't
12 for me.

13 KC: That's got to be a great feeling even today.

14 VB: It is, it is.

15 KC: Tell me, Vic. What's it like to be under attack like that, these are 122s, these
16 are not that the mortars aren't dangerous because they obviously are, which you kind of
17 explained that situation, 122s are coming in in the middle of the night, what's that like for
18 you?

19 VB: Well it was like nothing I'd ever heard before. They hiss on the way in, the
20 propellant has gone out long before that and you're just hearing the hiss of this thing
21 coming in very rapidly and then when it hit I had lived a mile or a half mile from a
22 highway and I can remember at home as a kid sometimes on a Saturday night you hear
23 the sound of an accident and it sounded, you hear a screech of brakes and then it would
24 sound like somebody had hit a galvanized trash can full of glass, with a baseball bat,
25 that's pretty much what the sound was like when these things detonated. And it was
26 close, the next morning I picked up shrapnel where I'd been on the ground that clearly
27 had Cyrillic markings on it.

28 KC: So, you're saying Soviet made most likely then?

29 VB: Yeah, oh they were Soviet made, sure.

30 KC: Yeah.

1 VB: And I wish I'd saved it, but it had rusted so badly by the time I was leaving I
2 just checked them out.

3 KC: Hmm yeah. You mentioned that some of these guys got injured, how many
4 were injured over all?

5 VB: Well, again nobody ever tells you anything when you're an enlisted man, but
6 the jungle grape vine always has information. We had aviation units at four, three of the
7 four 1st Infantry bases that were hit and word had it that we had eighty-four casualties,
8 some of which were sever.

9 KC: This is a pretty extensive attack then.

10 VB: It was, yep. The thinking was that the 1st Infantry had been doing a real job
11 on Charlie for the last couple of months and this—it was all directed, they had Lai Khe
12 Phuc Vinh, Dao Tien, and Phu Loi, all which were 1st Infantry bases that this was just a
13 reminder from the Phu Loi DC Battalion that they were still out there.

14 KC: Yeah. What happens as a result of this, do the missions pick up, do the
15 helicopters take off, you're flying out and kind of clearing the vicinity again, what goes
16 on with the aviation there?

17 VB: Well, you know ships went up. They actually countered the battery, we have
18 counter battery radar, we also had an artillery unit on base, mostly track mounted 155
19 howitzers, they had actually located through the radar where some of this was coming
20 from and put up you know counter battery fire. The mortars were being manned and they
21 did—they found out when they looked the next morning that they had managed to silence
22 a couple of them. The rockets had all been set up on literally bamboo shoots or cut in half
23 to make a launch ram and set on a timer, so there was nobody to be hit where the rockets
24 were coming from. And my wife who has gone through 9/11 working in New York, you
25 know which is a horrendous experience, but talked about all the counseling they got and
26 you know they didn't have to go back in 'til they were ready, and I said, "Well you know,
27 granted that what you went through is much worse than I did, but I tell you know I turned
28 in at 02:00 AM and at 06:00 AM I was expected to be back on duty and nobody was
29 offering any counseling." (laughs)

30 KC: Yeah, obviously completely different situation, times, culture—

31 VB: Yeah, you just get up and you start the next day.

1 KC: Was it difficult for you? Are you still kind of shaken as a result of this?

2 VB: I was then, I didn't realize it 'til I got home, I'd never heard of post traumatic
3 syndrome, but our apartment which was on the twelfth floor of a high rise in Richmond
4 and had a railroad track that ran along the river, James River, right below us and they
5 used to stop and change cars there, so every night about two o'clock in the morning
6 there'd be a clang and the first night I was home and I heard that asleep and the next
7 thing I knew I was under the bed.

8 KC: Is that right?

9 VB: Yeah, so you did and it was for years after that that I could not go to
10 fireworks or I remember I was out with a bicycle club riding and where we stopped, they
11 were doing a civil war enactment and they start firing off the muskets and after about five
12 minutes I told the group I had to leave, that I just got fidgety and uncomfortable at that
13 kind of noise.

14 KC: Did you attribute that to perhaps PTSD [Post-traumatic Stress Disorder] or to
15 your Vietnam experience at the time?

16 VB: Well by then I certainly knew it was the Vietnam experience, I'm not sure if
17 I knew—had heard that term yet.

18 KC: A little while ago you were talking about writing letters, how important was
19 it for you to not just write the letters, but to receive the letters from your wife and
20 parents?

21 VB: Oh, it was very important. I wanted to know how things are going, how her
22 pregnancy was going, I made a decided effort to sort of underplay whatever danger there
23 might be, just told her about all the happy stuff with my friends. (laughs) Which I tried to
24 tell her I was getting a Bronze Star, she knew there was some, maybe she wasn't getting
25 all the information.

26 KC: Yeah, and well that's probably for the best and it's certainly a common kind
27 of thing to approach it that way.

28 VB: The mail was very, very important to us and they did a terrific job of getting
29 it to us.

30 KC: What's it like for you to be newly married with a baby on the way and being
31 that far away being in the combat zone?

1 VB: Well, it certainly, it did a couple of things, one was I felt I had a
2 responsibility to that baby and my wife to not do some things that I might want to, I
3 really wanted to be in spite of my luck a little bit more a part of what was actively
4 pursuing the war and our security platoon all the time I was there, there were levies
5 coming in, they were always looking for infantryman, the Army Cav unit across the base
6 from us had a long rang reconnaissance patrol, a lurk unit whose job was to go out and
7 scour the area for five or ten kilometers around the base, make sure nobody had set up
8 business there. They invited some of the security platoon people to come over for ninety
9 days at the end of which you would go back to us and you would have a combat infantry
10 badge and entitled to wear 1st Infantry Division patch.

11 KC: And that's not anything to be sneezed at, that's very import, combat arms.

12 VB: And there was part of me that really wanted to do that, but then again, I felt
13 you know it wasn't a decision I could make for myself because I wasn't making decisions
14 for me anymore. And I'd been dealt a good hand and I owed it to Brenda and to my yet
15 unnamed child to not squander that. But there was part of me that wanted to do it.

16 KC: You said that there were two things, one was that you wouldn't perhaps take
17 the chances that you normally, or possibly might have, what was the other?

18 VB: Mm, well let's see I'm not sure if I was referring this to something else, but I
19 did once talk my way into flying on a mission on a Sunday with a unit that was taking the
20 25th Infantry out on a new—on some kind of operation they were doing. Turned out that
21 while I was flying my wife had tried to get in contact with me to tell me that my daughter
22 had been born, now it actually had nothing to do with my flying, it turned out that the
23 Red Cross then sent the information to the wrong APO [Army Post Office] and they sent
24 it to a European one. They did 0979. And it took couple of weeks to unscramble, during
25 which she interpreted the information they couldn't find me, that I was missing in action.

26 KC: Hmm.

27 VB: So, it wasn't directly that my flying that day prevented any of that happening,
28 but boy when that happened and I found out I said, "You know you should never ever,
29 ever do anything like again."

30 KC: Well, it must have been terrifying for your wife.

1 VB: Oh, it was, it was. They—I—about two weeks later I got called down to
2 personnel and they said, “You’re in big trouble buddy.” I said, “What do you mean?” He
3 said, “We’ve got a congressman’s aid on the phone, says your wife has been told you’re
4 missing in action, you better get on that phone and tell that congressman’s staff member
5 that you’re here and you’re fine.” (laughs)

6 KC: Wow, word travels fast.

7 VB: Yeah. And to make it up to her the that—when the Richmond Red Cross
8 published their 1968 calendar, there was a photo of her and my baby daughter on the
9 calendar.

10 KC: Hmm.

11 VB: Were sorry, oops we goofed.

12 KC: Yeah. You’ve talked about how it affected you to be a husband and a
13 perspective father here, what was it like, what do you think it was like for your wife back
14 at home?

15 VB: Well, she lived with a lot of fear because again I think anyone who’s at the
16 other end of it, all you get is the relenting—news coverage and its always a battle, its
17 never really clear where it is so the people left behind seem to think you know are left
18 with the impression that this is the way you live twenty-four hours a day. I’ve got to say
19 if I was in danger more than one or two percent of the time, I was there that would
20 surprise me.

21 KC: Mm-hm.

22 VB: I had some incidences that were hairy, but most of the time I was safe and
23 most of the time I thought I was safe I was, so I think it’s much harder to be on the other
24 end it.

25 KC: Yeah, just the not knowing and being so far away.

26 VB: Exactly.

27 KC: And of course, were not dealing with technology like we have today where
28 you can skype or call or whatever else is available.

29 VB: Oh no, no what you’d do is write a letter and it would go air mail, so it was
30 about three or four days for letters to get over to you and back again.

31 KC: And that could be a very long three or four days.

1 VB: Yeah, if something was not so good in the last letter, yeah.
2 KC: And how often would you and your wife write each other?
3 VB: Oh, I'd say daily.
4 KC: Daily?
5 VB: Yeah.
6 KC: Okay.
7 VB: Or as close to that as we could.
8 KC: Well Vic we're at a pretty good point to stop for today.

Interview with Victory Bary
Session [2] of [3]
Date 1 April 2016

1 KC: This is Kelly Crager continuing an Oral History interview with Mr. Victor
2 Bary. Today is 1 April 2016. I am in Lubbock, Texas, on the campus of Texas Tech
3 University and Vic is joining by phone again from his home in Cranford, New Jersey.
4 Okay, Vic we left off last time discussing I guess base life, is one way to put it at Phu
5 Loi. You get there and I believe it was January of '67, you mentioned that there was
6 another story that you wanted to relate about your time there, it was somewhat unusual
7 for someone given your position.

8 VB: Yes it was, in my last month there, so this must have been in November, late
9 November, early December and I had been promoted to E-5 by then, I was sitting on a
10 Sunday then in the Quonset hut for our headquarters, I think again with my buddy
11 Specialist Washington who had the adventure with me during the rocket attack, and I
12 fellow burst in the front door and he's got an AK-57 with two fifty round banana clips in
13 it and he is livid, he is in a state of rage, so I calmed him down and I said you know,
14 "What's the problem?" He said, "Well, I'm coming back from a special leave," now if
15 you extended for six months you would get a thirty day special leave home most people
16 extended to get out of combat duty, this guy was in a state of rage though because he was
17 a door gunner with one of our aviation companies, which was the one in the worst place
18 and had the worst safety record of any of our aviation companies, he had extended
19 specifically to have six more months to fly as a door gunner with them, and he got orders
20 to go to our security platoon, and so I tried to calm him down, I said, "Look you know,
21 you had extended forward to fly with the vultures for another six months. That will be
22 honored. It's obviously a mistake, but that's got to be corrected and the personnel office
23 and it doesn't open 'til Monday morning, so what I'm going to ask you to do because we
24 have a very strict no personal weapons policy at Phu Loi is to go around to the back of
25 this Quonset hut, turn in the AK with our armorer, he'll give you a receipt, Monday
26 morning we'll go over to personnel, you'll get your orders to go back to Phuc Vinh,
27 pick up your weapon and god go with you." And I sort of forgot about it. Didn't go with
28 him to see what he was doing, just assumed he would do it. That evening I was in the
29 Quonset hut again and couple guys burst into the Quonset hut and said, "There's a soldier

1 in the EM club waving an AK around and threatening to kill people.” Well, I knew
2 immediately who it was. You got to realize now I’m within three weeks of going home,
3 I’ve got a brand new baby waiting for me, so my bit of initial bravery was to say, “Ah,
4 you know gee that’s really too bad, somebody ought to tell the company commander.” He
5 said, “We can’t, he’s in Saigon with his whore.”

6 KC: Hmm.

7 VB: “And so that’s too bad, why don’t you tell the first sergeant,” he said, “Can’t
8 do that, he’s in Saigon with his whore.” I said, “Gee well then who is the ranking NCO,”
9 they said, “You are.”

10 KC: Oh goodness.

11 VB: (laughs) So, I went over to the Quant—to the EM club knowing full well
12 who this had to be and you know I don’t have a lot of cards to play with, I’m unarmed, I
13 figured the best thing I’ve got to do is talk rationally and politely to this guy and try to
14 discuss with him that he’s on the verge of getting in a great deal of trouble, but we can
15 keep that from happening if he’ll give the weapon to me. And we will then take it the
16 armorers was discussed. Well, I go over there, and sure enough it’s this guy and he’s
17 waving the thing around. I go over to him, now he’s got it pointed at me and I said you
18 know, “We talked about this earlier today, I really need to have you check this weapon in
19 with the armorer, so far nothing has happened but if this goes much further you could be
20 in a great deal of trouble. Would you please give the weapon to me?” And I don’t know
21 how long it was, maybe fifteen seconds or so, but it’s a long time when you’re looking
22 down the muzzle of an AK-47.

23 KC: Yeah.

24 VB: And at the end of that time, he handed me the weapon, and that was it. It was
25 never any—I never told anybody about it, there was no, I didn’t do anything to get him in
26 trouble, there was no recognition by any of the senior NCOs or the company commander,
27 they were completely unaware of it. But it was you know, and again kind of unusual for a
28 personnel specialist and certainly not the kind of excitement I wanted with just a couple
29 weeks to go.

30 KC: Well anytime for that matter, certainly not being a short timer like you are, so
31 what was the story here, you already talked to this guy was he just unbalanced?

1 VB: Yeah, I think he was unbalanced and obviously hadn't done what I had asked
2 him to do and probably that evening went over to the EM club, had a few too many
3 drinks and worked himself up into a rage again. That's my best guess.

4 KC: Yeah, so nothing ever came of this, you didn't report him?

5 VB: Nothing ever came of it, I never said anything of it, I figured he was the 162s
6 problem and that he was going back to them and (laughs) you know.

7 KC: And was that indeed what happened?

8 VB: Yeah. The next morning, he got his orders corrected and went back to the
9 162s up in Phuc Vinh.

10 KC: Well, that seems like a pretty poor career choice that he made there.

11 VB: Well, yes I mean we had lots of people who came through us, we I—an
12 aviation company, or battalion has something called a path finder detachment, which is a
13 hold over from the old Airborne days and we had a path finder detachment and these
14 guys they were all jump qualified and their job was a team of two or three of them would
15 go into an LZ [Landing Zone] before the landing to scout it out and they'd also be there
16 to radio into the ships about wind speed and from what direction and what was the best
17 exit direction to go. These guys to a man with one exception were all from the 101st
18 Airborne and the other one was from the 173rd, they had all extended six months to get
19 out of you know infantry assignments. And so, we worked with another, several other
20 guys from the 199th as clerks like me who had extended six months to get out of the
21 infantry, this nut job for some reason decided he liked things just the way they were, he
22 just wanted more of it.

23 KC: Did—brings up another question here I think, in your position you saw a lot
24 of folks coming and going through your office dealing with the whole personnel red tape
25 administrative whatever, what could you comment on the moral, the disposition of the
26 unit as you saw these guys?

27 VB: I would say it was pretty good, and I remember this its 1967, there really
28 aren't organized protests yet in the States, there not much of them, were all the same age
29 group, so that means many of us had fathers who served during the second world war and
30 brought up with the belief that that was you know part of the rights of passage of a male
31 in the United States was military service and if your country called on you, you

1 responded. So by in large I would say that the moral was good. We did have one Korean-
2 American cook who kept going AWOL[Absent Without Leave] and trying to catch a
3 flight back to Korea at Saigon and of course he never could pass himself off as a civilian
4 and would just be brought back to us about every three months by the MPs [Military
5 police]. But by in large the moral was good and there was a great deal of aviation
6 companies and guess since all the pilots are volunteers, all the crew chiefs or helicopter
7 mechanics were volunteered to fly, so were the door gunners their infantryman who
8 volunteered to fly. They were very proud of their units and proud of what they did.

9 KC: What other sorts of things in addition to the moral and this other problem, did
10 you see going on in the unit? Now that's kind of a vague question, but as someone in
11 your position you're going to see—like I said all kinds of people are coming through,
12 what kinds of issues did you come across, what kind of attitudes, what kind of different
13 personalities did you meet, what sort of things from your perspective would kind of drive
14 the outfit in a personnel kind of sense?

15 VB: Well certainly one thing I saw and it had some tragic consequences in our
16 security platoon because they unlike the rest of us were required to keep their weapons
17 with them in their billets in case they were suddenly called out in mass to man the
18 bunkers and these by in large were younger, I mean we clerks who had fallen in to
19 clerking from the other training were all almost college graduates, so we were twenty-
20 two, twenty-three years old, where as our security platoon people generally were draftees
21 some were enlistees, but they were non-college graduates, eighteen or nineteen years old.
22 And we lost it was either three or four during the year who took their own lives when
23 they got a dear john letter.

24 KC: Hmm, is that right?

25 VB: Yeah, so you know I think part of it, you know part of how you responded it
26 was age and worldliness for a lot of these guys this is the first time away from home. I
27 had been to Europe in high school, and then worked in France in summer in college, so I
28 had some experience away from home and in strange surroundings.

29 KC: What would (both speaking at once)

30 VB: The other thing I commented on early although I saw a note, we weren't
31 having the race riots and stuff that seemed to come along later, the whites and the blacks

1 pretty much kept to themselves. You know they just socialized with their own race and
2 not with one another, there were a couple of exceptions, but not a lot.

3 KC: You talked about the dear john letter, what would happen when someone—
4 obviously this happened like you said what three times I guess, what would happen when
5 someone committed suicide, what would be the response of the unit?

6 VB: None that I recall, I mean this all came through word of mouth. You know
7 there was no that I recall ever any you know we were never called together as a group
8 and told about it or counseled in any way.

9 KC: Any sort of specific paperwork that would need to be done, contacting the
10 next of kin, anything like that?

11 VB: There must have been, but I was unaware of what it would be.

12 KC: Outside of your bailiwick, I guess.

13 VB: Exactly.

14 KC: You mentioned that the races kind of stayed apart and this is a difficult time
15 getting ready to get more difficult obviously both in the States and in Vietnam, but did
16 you detect any sort of animosity, any sort of anxiety between the races, and again this '67
17 and you're a combat unit and that's a different dynamic, but did you detect anything that
18 was possibly going on there?

19 VB: Not really, there were the differences, there were the special handshakes and
20 stuff like that you only saw in the infantry units and among the black troops and every
21 unit had a slightly different one to distinguish itself, but I you know, no. It was, I think it
22 was just sort of a carry over from the way life was at home, which you know wasn't
23 overtly hostile, but it certainly was you know sort of separate and distinct lives.

24 KC: What about the issue of drugs in your unit, obviously drug use is an
25 important topic when it comes to the Vietnam war among (both speaking at once)

26 VB: I never saw any drug use and again we're an aviation unit and flying and
27 drugs just don't mix well, certainly I heard about its use with the infantry units and I
28 heard about use way back in the rear areas like in Saigon, but I never saw any.

29 KC: You talk about the rear units and the combat units and there is a real
30 difference between the two.

31 VB: Oh, there is.

1 KC: And you're kind of although we like to draw this very distinct line, this is a
2 REMF [Rear Echelon Motherfucker] and this is a combat soldier and never between shall
3 meet, except that you know some sort of personnel office or something, but you're kind
4 of caught in between there, between the two.

5 VB: Yeah, there was an REMF who had been trained as an infantryman and
6 serving with a combat or a combat support unit, so yeah, I – neither one nor the other
7 really and had exposed to both.

8 KC: Can you describe what that, the general I guess feelings were between the
9 rear echelon types and the combat types in general, and then what you experienced as
10 someone who wasn't really quite either?

11 VB: Well, I know for a fact one of my buddies there was one of the two guys who
12 would come to us from the 199th Light Infantry, we'd been OCS dropouts who were
13 caught up in that unit and that unit was being formed up and shipped over as grunts and
14 they extended six months eventually and one day Foxy was one of the two guys and I
15 said, "You know, I'd like to take you up to Long Ben and take you to the 199 Light
16 Infantry bar, but when we get there let me go in," because anybody from another unit
17 shows up at their bar you know its just a bar that they've declared to be their divisional
18 bar. There could be trouble, so he said, "When we get up there, I want you to wait
19 outside. I'm going to go in, tell them you're a good guy and ask permission to bring you
20 in." Which he got and everything went fine, but I mean there was that kind of
21 cohesiveness about infantry divisions, they were very, very—I'm not sure if insular is the
22 right word, but you know they lived day in and day out with one another and had a fierce
23 pride in themselves, so there's that. Kind of a related one was somewhere at—and it's a
24 difference I always felt between the Army trained clerks and me. I had been trained to be
25 in the infantry, I had done a lot of close order drill, fire maneuver work, we were taught
26 that you know if something goes wrong, if somebody yells grenade or something you
27 drop to the ground. The clerks would sort of, "Well, you know how come he's yelling
28 that, I'm an E-4 and he's only an E-3," or "He got to yell it last time, why isn't it my
29 turn?" at one point they decided within our company that they were going to set up what
30 they called a ready reaction force, which was if – if and it never happened, Charlie ever
31 got through the wire and past the bunkers, we would have organized a defense with the

1 clerks and cooks and the like and they took those of us who had infantry background and
2 I was on of them and assigned us a group of these folks as our own. And I watched these
3 guys and I thought the most dangerous thing in the world is a clerk or a cook with a rifle.

4 KC: Hmm.

5 VB: It was stupid idea, and I was glad that we never had to put it into action.

6 KC: Can you tell me about how this came together, was there any sort of training,
7 any sort of weapons familiarization, any sort of tactical work or training to –

8 VB: Not really, it was basically thought through, I spent a little time with some of
9 them, talking about it and showing them. You know everybody had to qualify with an M-
10 14 in basic anyway, but a little talk to them about what you would do and handling of
11 weapons and security, but it never went so far as to going out to the range and live firing
12 together or anything.

13 KC: Yeah. It sounds like most of these folks you know their MOS [Military
14 Occupational Specialty] was such that when their done with basic training their going on
15 to their school of specialty.

16 VB: Yeah, they went off to clerk school at the end of seeing this stuff where I had
17 eight weeks where it was intensified.

18 KC: Hmm.

19 VB: But I also again, I was delighted to be a clerk, I love these people, but I
20 always felt that there was a difference between them and me. They seemed to lack respect
21 for the infantryman, and I had enormous respect for them and just enormous thankfulness
22 that I hadn't had to play out that role.

23 KC: Yeah. What about the infantryman and their attitude toward these clerk
24 types?

25 VB: Well, I didn't spend a great deal of time with them except you know
26 sometimes on you know flights out to LZs, but they would have thought very little of
27 them. (both laugh)

28 KC: Right, sure.

29 VB: Oh, I'll tell you the guy when I got back to the States and I went to Fort
30 Monroe for my last posting, the guy I replaced was a Spec-5 just like me from the 173rd
31 Airborne, with a CIB [Combat Infantry Badge] and jump wings and a Bronze Star, I

1 mean were like carbon copies of one another, only that he had been with the 173rd. So
2 here again, here is somebody who is sort of in that strange role.

3 KC: Yeah.

4 VB: He was definitely Airborne Infantry, but he was doing the same thing I was
5 doing.

6 KC: Maybe he got lucky as well?

7 VB: I think he must've.

8 KC: Yeah, with that assignment. What about rest and relaxation, did you go on
9 R&R [Rest and Recuperation]?

10 VB: I did go on R&R, it's a shame I was going to meet my wife and take it in
11 Hawaii, but then she was having trouble with the pregnancy and wrote me, said that she
12 wasn't allowed to fly. So, instead I went to Bangkok with a friend.

13 KC: And how was Bangkok in 1967?

14 VB: Oh, it's wonderful. My strongest recollection is running a hot tub of water
15 and climbing into it and at the third bath I had gotten all the red-letter aid dust out of my
16 skin. (Kelly laughs) It was absolutely wonderful.

17 KC: Yeah, anything else that you did, seeing the sites, anything?

18 VB: Well yeah, we had a very funny experience. We—the deal was you would go
19 to a bar, cathouse and select a girl who'd be your girl for the week, and you would also
20 hire a cab driver for the week who would be yours, and I still remember one afternoon, I
21 guess we had been there two to three days, Mr. Tim came to us and said—the cab driver,
22 “Is it all right if I take the evening off?” And we said, “Sure, that's fine.” He said, “A
23 friend of mine is getting married,” we said, “Well, absolutely you know you want to
24 attend that,” he said, “No, I've got a better idea, why don't you come too.”

25 KC: Hmm.

26 VB: And we said, “Well you know that's a very personal thing, a wedding, we
27 should have no business there.” He said, “Well, I don't really mean a wedding, it's the
28 dinner after the wedding. Its on a rooftop restaurant, there will be hundreds of people and
29 no one will notice you.” We thought, “Great.” But we went, we had a wonderful,
30 wonderful evening (laughs). That experience—of a nonmanufactured experience in
31 Bangkok.

1 KC: Yeah. Well, that's pretty cool.

2 VB: And we got to meet the bride and groom (laughs).

3 KC: That was the least you could do since you're eating their food and drinking

4 their booze I assume.

5 VB: Yeah.

6 KC: About when in your tour did you go to Bangkok?

7 VB: I must say that must have been about six or seven months in.

8 KC: Okay, so about halfway into it then.

9 VB: Yeah.

10 KC: All right, now um you were there with the 1st.

11 VB: Yep.

12 KC: Early on '67, two major operations are under way or will soon be underway,

13 Cedar Falls and Junction City.

14 VB: Yep.

15 KC: Taking place there in your AO[Area of Operation].

16 VB: Absolutely right.

17 KC: Can you talk about either or both of these operations and what—and I know

18 that you weren't involved in the actual operations as far as going out but tell me about

19 both of these operations as you recall.

20 VB: I don't, I'm trying to think. Cedar Falls is very early I think it occurred just

21 as I was arriving if I remember the order. And I remember nothing about that, I think I

22 was just getting you know acclimated. I do remember, if I'm correct, that Junction City

23 was around April, walking out to the airfield to go to the personnel office and the entire

24 airfield was covered with Huey's, with marking from units I'd never seen before and

25 nobody had mentioned the operation, but clearly, I could see that something major was

26 happening. That was the degree of my awareness of it after that, other than reading about

27 it in Stars and Stripes.

28 KC: So, there was no sort of uptake in paperwork or what's going on?

29 VB: No.

30 KC: Any new people coming in, going out, nothing like that?

1 VB: No, I'll give you one other incidence though, I guess that did, have you ever
2 heard of the book *They Walked Into Sunlight*?

3 KC: No, I don't believe I'm familiar with that one.

4 VB: It was—it's a book written about events in two places that take place over the
5 same three-day period in November '67.

6 KC: Okay.

7 VB: One is the student riots at the University of Wisconsin in Maddison, to keep
8 Dow Chemicals and others from recruiting, the other is the worst ambush of a unit in the
9 history of Vietnam, which occurred in at the far end of the iron triangle in November,
10 when a two company unit from the 1st Infantry whose lieutenant colonel battalion
11 commander was the son of famous 1st Division general from WWII, and decided he had
12 to lift the effectiveness of his unit and his awareness of him. Anyway, they bumbled into
13 a regimental sized unit which unbeknownst to them and unknown to me at the time was
14 being withdrawn back towards Cambodia to prepare for Tet, and in that our company
15 took that which is the 173rd at YK took the full complement of slicks to carry those two
16 companies out. They made the mistake led by this lieutenant colonel to think they were
17 ambushing this regimental unit, which tried its best to avoid them because they had
18 missed food points for months, they were tired, they were hungry, they were just trying to
19 get to Cambodia to refit, but when they couldn't it decimated this unit. it took less than
20 one platoon of slicks which would be eight Hueys, which is good for about fifty people to
21 carry the survivors back. And while this is going on I'm hearing about from the guys in
22 the headquarters that they've got a stranded unit on the phone, there's a Spec-4 and a
23 PFC [Private First Class] on the radio, they say they've got no NCOs or officers standing.
24 The next day there was this flurry of first division people in and I remember there was
25 lieutenant colonel chaplain amongst them and I'd never seen a chaplain above the rank of
26 captain, so I figured this must have been the division chaplain. So, I guess you know
27 that's the only other sort of major thing I can remember.

28 KC: Yeah.

29 VB: You know it's the kind of war where other than you know like the Battle of
30 Ia Drang in November '65 and the Invasion of Cambodia, there weren't—there were a lot

1 of things that were given lots of names, but there really weren't that many main—and
2 obviously Tet, major engagements.

3 KC: Mm-hm, kind of the nature of the war and especially dealing with the VC
4 [Viet Cong] down in where you were.

5 VB: And that's right, we spent the entire year chasing what was called the Phu
6 Loi Battalion of the VC. They were caught in Cho Lon in during Tet and completely
7 wiped out.

8 KC: Hmm.

9 VB: I had a friend who did extend too, so that he could get out when he finished
10 his time and he was there during Tet and told me about it later and about they were down
11 at the Phu To racetrack carrying the 199th to mop up what was left of the Phu Loi
12 Battalion.

13 KC: Hmm, so they made it all the way down to the outskirts of Saigon, Cho Lon
14 area.

15 VB: Yeah, they were in Saigon, yeah.

16 KC: Saigon yeah.

17 VB: Could—they were operating out of Cho Lon. They, I guess they brought
18 them back from the field in to Cho Lon for when Tet started, but they'd be present in
19 Saigon.

20 KC: Interesting. While were on the topic of the enemy, can you talk to me about
21 what you knew about the VC, who were these people, what kind of fighters were they,
22 what did you know about them?

23 VB: Well, what we know and again what I know being in an office, is what I'm
24 being told, but the Phu Loi Battalion, which we—which is who we were operating
25 against at the time tended to be older, they were cadre who had fought the French in the
26 '50s. so the senior cadres were in their thirties to early forties, they were very good
27 soldiers, but very poorly equipped, so without the mobility that aviation gave our infantry
28 units and without artillery support and all that, when there was a closing engagement and
29 they certainly avoided those unless they thought they had the advantage, they always
30 came out on the wrong end.

31 KC: Mm-hm.

1 VB: But we had great respect for them because they were very good soldiers you
2 know. Used to think about it you know here I am playing soldier after four months of
3 training and these guys have you know twelve, twenty years of it.

4 KC: Right.

5 VB: I'm doing what I've been told and read about, these guys know what the hell
6 their doing and thank God they're not better equipped. My friend Don, said after Tet the
7 whole nature of what their encountering changed because the VC were pretty well wiped
8 out.

9 KC: Yeah.

10 VB: In Saigon, there a number of historians that feel that this—that the VC
11 weren't set into cities by accident, that the North had felt they had to take control of the
12 war because they didn't think the VC were doing a good enough job, and he said you
13 know starting around March, he said what we were up against was regular NVA [North
14 Vietnamese Army] units, he said these guys were a whole different ball game, they were
15 as well equipped as we were, other than the aviation, they had a better artillery piece than
16 we did, arguably the AK-47 was a more—was certainly a more reliable weapon than the
17 M-16, so he said then it was just—it was very different from what you remember.

18 KC: What about their tactics, what about the way they approached the war? I
19 mean like you said they've been there, its there home ground, they've been doing this for
20 a long time, what about the way they fought the war?

21 VB: what was the last word you said?

22 KC: What about the way the VC fought the war?

23 VB: Well, I'll tell you, my final assignment was at Fort Monroe. I worked in a
24 very small unit. The company commander and the XO [Executive Officer] there were
25 both 25th Infantry Division platoon leaders. I'll tell you what they told me, he said one of
26 the things that he said was that when they encountered the VC and it was usually in an
27 ambush, the VC had dug deep trenches and fired over the top of them, frequently not
28 even looking out, just holding the weapons up and spraying the area in front of them. He
29 said the result was that we took most of our wounds in the lower extremities, he said
30 when we did shoot someone, it was invariably in the head because of the way they'd
31 placed themselves. I personally don't have a lot of experience with their tactics, I mean

1 they would you know harass us on the perimeter at night, either with—occasionally with
2 60 millimeter mortar fire on the airfield and certainly small weapons fire on the
3 perimeter. But I'm probably not the one to be able to tell you more about that.

4 KC: No, and I certainly understand that given your perspective and given what
5 your role was that obviously makes sense, but none the less you still do have a
6 perspective and something to add.

7 VB: Well, let me tell you one other story.

8 KC: Sure.

9 VB: Again, and this is in the last few—last month I'm there, I'm anxious to go
10 home. You know we've had it out bad of about eleven months of commissioned officers
11 deciding that their smarter than anybody else and don't need to be any advice from
12 enlisted men. We started getting fire on the perimeter, which was what I had been taught
13 to do as a probing attack, but defenses in the infantry and it is, part of our perimeter
14 would come under fire as soon as the perimeter responded with everything it had there it
15 would break off and twenty minutes later it would appear fifty meters down the
16 perimeter. Now I understood this as mapping defenses, what I didn't realize was this was
17 all in preparation for Tet.

18 KC: Hmm.

19 VB: And I should have told someone, but at that point my reaction was, "What,
20 that's just what you expect from a bunch of aviators, they have no idea what's going on,
21 no idea of infantry tactics, and you know what I'm tired of dealing with commissioned
22 officers. Let them find out for themselves."

23 KC: Hmm.

24 VB: And they did. Course I had no idea that Tet was going to take place and I've
25 always been embarrassed that I didn't make an effort to try and bring it somebodies'
26 attention that they were doing the exact the worst thing they could possibly do, which is
27 telling these guys exactly what they had all along their perimeter.

28 KC: Right, do you think it would have made any difference, had you told
29 someone?

1 VB: I don't know. It certainly would have made a difference I think if they knew
2 that they—that the base defenses were being systematically mapped. Maybe if I hadn't,
3 but maybe if a commissioned officer had told them.

4 KC: Might have had a little more impact probably. Yeah, well what about you
5 mentioned a couple of different occasions about being closed to going home, you're a
6 short timer, what's it like to be a short timer? Does your routine change, does your
7 attitude change? Tell me about being a short timer.

8 VB: Well first thing, every hooch or group people would have what they call the
9 short stick, which was like an English officers swagger stick, but had been hand carved
10 by a local Vietnamese craftsman and the deal was always that the shortest guy in
11 whatever the group was carried it with him and then—

12 KC: Shortest meaning the guy who has the least amount of time to serve in
13 Vietnam.

14 VB: Yeah, and there all kinds of jokes, you know "I'm so short if I stepped off the
15 end of a dime, I'd fall down," and you know things like that. And so, you would then
16 pass this on to the – when you left to the next shortest guy. They also made an effort if
17 they could, and they certainly could with me as a clerk, the last week I had there they just
18 gave me off, and we actually had a swimming pool on the base, which I had never been
19 in and I spent my last week lazing around the swimming pool.

20 KC: Not bad.

21 VB: Not bad at all.

22 KC: Yeah. Now as a clerk, its obviously again different from being out in the
23 field and often times the short timers syndrome could be a good or bad thing depending
24 on how you chose to view it, but in where you were at the camp in Phu Loi, probably not
25 as many life or death decisions depending on how careful you are doing these kinds of
26 things, I just didn't know if it would affect your daily routine.

27 VB: I've been told and read you know in infantry and it would say we'd make a
28 conscious choice if they could afford to do it to get the short timer out of the field
29 because for him it was life and death situation.

30 KC: Yeah.

31 VB: Mine certainly wasn't.

1 KC: Well, you're over there fighting a war in Vietnam, can you tell me about the
2 Vietnamese?

3 VB: yeah, I knew a little bit about them. I learned some more while I was there
4 only because I spoke fluent French and could speak to some of the older people. You
5 know I learned the usual pidgin French that ever—or pigeon Vietnamese every GI
6 learned, but you know they were just short phrases and like. But I found with some of the
7 older people, given time if I spoke French with them they would open up with me a lot
8 more. I went through a rash of feelings, initially sympathy, I had traveled and lived
9 abroad, so I was sensitive to being to understanding the people I was with. I'd have to say
10 as time went on and we became frustrated with the fighting performance of the ARVN
11 [Army of the Republic of Vietnam] and not being able to engage the VC because the
12 village the fire was coming from was quote friendly. I can remember at one point
13 thinking, "Damn, this would be a great war if only we'd get the damn Vietnamese out of
14 the way to fight it." There was a girl in the local bar downtown who I would chat with
15 who was very bright and she had told me, I asked once, I said you know "Why didn't she
16 go to the University," said, "You're very smart," she spoke English and French both, she
17 said, "Well, I'm Buddhist," and said, "The ruling elite in the country is French educated
18 Catholics, there's no place in the University for me." And it the longer I was there the
19 more I began to feel that the local Vietnamese and where we were there were all Buddhist
20 or maybe some Cowdye further West of—were just caught in an impossibly position. We
21 demanded loyalty from them and the joke was we controlled the day. Charlie controlled
22 the night. Charlie who would be in their villages at night would demand their loyalty and
23 they just had no place to run and hide. And somebody was always angry with them for
24 not being loyal enough to him. But I just saw them really as horrible position.

25 KC: You mentioned that you were often times less than happy with the
26 performance of the ARVN, can you elaborate on that?

27 VB: Yeah, and again this is all word of mouth from the air crew, infantry who'd
28 been with them, but whenever the ARVN were brought into what turned out to be a hot
29 LZ, the performance was terrible and generally American infantry were sent in. We had
30 within the Huey companies examples of the ARVN soldiers debarking the ship and then
31 turning around and firing on it, to where in some units the crew chief would carry an M-

1 79 wood canister round and would make it very clear that nobody turns back towards the
2 helicopter after you debark it, or I open up on you. So, they were certainly considered to
3 be at the very best poorly motivated, poorly lead. Sometimes their ranks were infiltrated
4 by VC, so we had a very low opinion of them. Now I have to say one of the things I
5 learned there was we had a house maid as everybody—you know every billet did, well I
6 think we chipped in ten dollars a month, so I think she made forty dollars a month for
7 washing our clothes and sweeping up the billet. Her husband was a master sergeant in the
8 ARVN, a career soldier and she was out earning him at forty dollars a month as a maid
9 for the US. You know some of the lack of enthusiasm and professionalism with the
10 ARVN was how poorly they were paid and that many of their officers and certainly was
11 true for regional commanders, were political appointees who were properly trained at all.

12 KC: Yeah, well what about this leadership, I mean obviously these things start at
13 the top and work their way down and you mentioned that some of these are political
14 appointees and that there's going to be corruption taking place, that's obviously well
15 know fact of what took place there and a lot of its cultural, it's not completely black and
16 white—

17 VB: It goes on today in China (laughs).

18 KC: Yeah, and always has and probably always will. Um and big units like that
19 you would expect that to happen.

20 VB: And part it again was and I had sympathy for—a little bit more sympathy for
21 it later when I realized what urban civil servants made. Essentially, they were in a system
22 that under paid them and they were supposed to supplement their income by you know if
23 you wanted anything that you were entitled to as a citizen you know like a license,
24 permission to do something, money had to change hands before that request was filled.
25 And you know it seems to have been an accepted way of doing it, a lot of the Middle East
26 and Southeast Asia that a little bucks used to make things happen was just the way the
27 system worked and everybody was aware of it.

28 KC: Mm-hm. What about the American at the top, and you've mentioned the
29 ARVN just a little bit, I'd like to get your thoughts on the top leadership in the United
30 States, and you take that from the political leadership all the way down to field grade

1 officers, but what was your opinion of the military leadership in particular there in
2 Vietnam?

3 VB: Well, some of I thought was pretty good, the infantry division commanders,
4 we all worshiped General Westmorland, even though in retrospect his successor was
5 much better, but Westmorland just looked the part. I think that – well first off, I thought
6 we never should have been there when I arrived, I arrived feeling that. As time went on
7 and I read—was reading it was clear that there really didn't seem to be a commitment by
8 our leadership. Now its hard now to distinguish how much I learned later and how much I
9 learned from reading at time, but we felt we weren't being given the equipment, the
10 commitment to allow us to win, if that were indeed possible. But you know we were
11 always short on material. I didn't have a set of jungle fatigues for the first five months I
12 was there. I wasn't sure, but I looked at a photograph of myself a while ago and I knew
13 what month it was and I was still there in those heavy cotton fatigues. so we didn't think
14 we were getting the logistical support that we needed, and we didn't really see a
15 commitment to on our leadership, political and that then translates to what the militaries
16 can do. A desire to win rather than to just you know let the Soviets know that we can't be
17 pushed around.

18 KC: Yeah. Often times we hear, or I hear Vietnam veterans talk about rules of
19 engagement—

20 VB: Oh yeah.

21 KC: Do you care to talk about that?

22 VB: Again, second hand but I have—I roomed at one point with the battalion
23 commanders crew chief, so I had roomed with a number—with a new number of crew
24 chiefs and their complaint repeatedly was that you know we would come under fire and
25 we would radio in for permission to return fire and we've been told you can't, that's a
26 friendly village. At which point our reaction was, how can it be friendly if they're
27 shooting at me. There was great admiration and I'm missing the word, but we wanted to
28 be like the South Koreans, who were a take no prisoners, don't mess with us boys unless
29 you're ready for it because they didn't treat anything that shot at them as friendly.

30 KC: Mm-hm. Certainly a common refrain that you hear, especially with the war.
31 Well, as you're winding down your time there, what did you think about the progress of

1 the war, you went with some very serious doubts, you've been there for a year with the
2 1st Division in the iron triangle, and you've seen a years' worth of stuff—

3 VB: Well, I followed an absolutely perfectly bell curve on that, I arrived anti-war,
4 certainly not the kind of anti-war that is speaking up or making you know making life
5 difficult for anybody, somewhere after about three or four months, I got so carried up in
6 the mission of this aviation unit and so proud of it, I actually started to lose that and just
7 you know got—I lost sight and I just was caught up in the tactical picture, then
8 somewhere after about six, seven months it occurred to me that we were going back to
9 the same areas and losing people in the same places we'd told we pacified earlier, and the
10 reason was we never took and held ground. And so, I started swinging back the other
11 way, you know again if we were not serious about this, we shouldn't be sending people out
12 there to give their lives.

13 KC: And the bell curve that you describe makes perfect sense. I mean once
14 you've been there with these people and you see what effort is going on, how hard these
15 people are working and the sacrifices taking place and you see the ground or the war on
16 the ground firsthand, you know that's some very powerful visceral images that come out
17 of that, that are bound to influence who you are.

18 VB: I had gone out once at night on a Sunday. My way into flying with one of our
19 aviation companies it was doing a some—I don't know what operation it was, it was the
20 25th out of Cu Chi and they were working all the way to the Cambodian border and I had
21 wanted—and we were doing a number of things, we were taking sling loads of 105
22 rounds out, we were also taking fresh troops out, picking troops up in the field, these are
23 in Chinook, so you could literally take a platoon in one of those. I had a camera along
24 with me, I was taking lots of photographs, so I would have you know real war
25 photographs when I came home. I wanted to take a picture of these guys that we were
26 extracting from the field who were filthy in rags and had the thousand yard stare, I
27 couldn't bring myself to do it because I felt like I would be invading their privacy.

28 KC: Yeah.

29 VB: They just looked so worn out.

30 KC: And that's after a year?

31 VB: Yeah, mm-hm.

1 KC: Or in less in some cases.

2 VB: Yeah, yeah.

3 KC: Well, your year is drawing to a close here, were in January or excuse me
4 December '67 getting into I guess close to January '68, take me through your last days
5 there in Vietnam.

6 VB: Well, my last days I said I spent my last days at the swimming pool. I oddly
7 felt somewhat guilty about leaving before the job was done and leaving friends who were
8 staying on longer than I was. Then I realized I'd never seen anybody going home
9 volunteer to stay longer, so he could be beat. So, I figured I better get over that.

10 KC: Sure.

11 VB: I do remember very distinctly when I was on the plane home, the guy in the
12 seat next to me was a young fella about my age, a 1st Division patch on E-6 stripes and a
13 distinguished service cross ribbon. And this guy for the however, eighteen hours,
14 whatever we had all together we had sitting next to each other, never looked left or right,
15 you know never made any attempt to engage me in conversation, I tried once or twice
16 with him and all I could think of seeing that distinguished service cross is and this
17 promotion to E-6 is, "What must your year have been like?"

18 KC: Yeah.

19 VB: Then I got home, had a very nice leave. As I said I went up to OPO to get an
20 offer, to see if I could get my orders changed from Fort Riley, Kansas, was given a choice
21 of units or assignments, one was at Mt. Monroe, which is the headquarters for continental
22 Army command and was a small public information detachment. I chose that one, they
23 said go down to Fort Eustis, take this authentication, have them actually print up the
24 mimeograph to orders and went to Fort Eustis. Sent into room to meet personnel
25 lieutenant there and it's a guy I went to school with, he was a swimming partner, my
26 debate partner, best friend, we always knew him as Tree and so I said, "Tree! I mean
27 Lieutenant Tree," you know, "How are you?" (laughs) And here's a guy you know who I
28 knew as a guy my age, suddenly he's an officer so you know, and yet I want to
29 acknowledge that we knew one another. And the unit I got sent to at Fort Monroe, I had a
30 very lovely experience there. The unit was called the 38th Public Information
31 Detachment. It's job was to cover Core Army area or bigger for public relations. The

1 TONE called through a lieutenant colonel, a major, an E-8, an E-7, and we had as our
2 company commander, one of these two lieutenants that's back from the 25th infantry who
3 had just been promoted captain, his XO was at 25th Infantry Division platoon leader who
4 would shortly be promoted to captain. We had an E-6, was our highest ranking NCO who
5 was our supply sergeant, also back from the 25th, and I was the only other NCO, also
6 freshly back. So, they couldn't send us out of country because you know you were
7 supposed to have a period off, so basically, we were a unit without a function that we
8 could fulfill, so my last five months of the—in the Army consisted of coming in the
9 morning, typing up the morning report, going through the mail to see what new regs had
10 to be filled, brewing a pot of coffee, and then three of the officers and I would sit down
11 and we'd play bridge 'til five o'clock.

12 KC: Is that right?

13 VB: Yeah.

14 KC: Well, welcome home, Vic.

15 VB: All right, yeah. So, there's a complete symmetry in the arc there.

16 KC: Hmm, how about that?

17 VB: It was a very nice assignment at the Fort Monroe, its beautiful, it's a part of it
18 is the Civil War era star fort. Very nice grounds and obviously a very unchallenging final
19 assignment.

20 KC: Yeah, did you get back, I guess its what January of '68 correct?

21 VB: Yep.

22 KC: And at the—

23 VB: Actually, December 31st I flew out, I remember because we landed, when we
24 landed in San Francisco it was just past midnight and I thought, "Oh great, you've just
25 had thirty-six hours of new years eve and now the bars are closed."

26 KC: (laughs) Yeah, that really stinks.

27 VB: Yeah.

28 KC: Probably could've used a drink by the time you got off, off the plane. Here in
29 early '68 of course, end of January into February of '68 we have the infamous Tet
30 offensive of that year, um this is different from what you've seen in the year you were

1 there, can you tell me what you knew about, what heard about, and thought about the Tet
2 offensive in '68.

3 VB: I read about it in the papers and subsequently heard all about it from Don and
4 of course immediately before this we had Khe Sanh. And I read about that avidly, so
5 reading about all this its clearly night and day from what we were aware of, but unlike
6 anybody else I'm following it in the newspaper.

7 KC: Mm-hm. What was the coverage saying?

8 VB: Well the coverage you know again its hard to distinguish what I was hearing
9 then and what I have ever since, but the general phone as I recall it was that the US was
10 caught completely by surprise, but in the ensuing four to six weeks what had initially
11 appeared to be a Viet Cong, North Vietnamese victory although it appeared to be a public
12 relations victory, was a military defeat of the Viet Cong ceased to be a functional entity
13 and Vietnam had to send more and more regulars in to carry the task.

14 KC: Mm-hm, yeah.

15 VB: Well, you know this is at this point, I'm just watching the tellers and I do
16 watch it avidly and I keep you know looking because I still felt very connected with it, I
17 was wondering what was happening to you know guys I knew, my unit.

18 KC: You spend what, five more months in the Army at this point?

19 VB: Yes, mm-hm. I went in on January 20—June I mean, June 24th, '66 and I was
20 out on June 24th, '68.

21 KC: What did you hope to do after your stint in the Army, you have a degree, you
22 have two years in the Army?

23 VB: Well, you know before I went in, I had interviewed with IBM, I had a job
24 offer from them. They told me it would be there when I got back, so about two months
25 before I was due to get out, I contacted them. And they said, "Oh, were really sorry, but
26 all the records you're refereeing to were destroyed in a warehouse fire in Patterson." said,
27 "But you know come on up and you can go through the same two days of testing,
28 interviews. If they're good, you're good." Well, I was really annoyed that this was their
29 reaction. One of the four officers we had in the unit was a fellow by name of Bill
30 Rodgers, he was reserve lieutenant just doing his six or four months of active duty. And
31 Bill had gone through a post college training period with the life insurance company.

1 They had a program that lasted nine months and he sold this to our company commander,
2 Dick Steinhausen is to me is well worth the look. So, I applied to them and got into that
3 program. I was just really ticked by the idea. I wasn't sure I wanted to go back and spend
4 two days with them.

5 KC: Well, that's too bad they weren't a giant computer company that could have
6 had that in a data base somewhere.

7 VB: Yeah absolutely. That was a few years away.

8 KC: Right, right. Okay.

9 VB: That's what I wound up doing, I wound up going to work for an insurance
10 company.

11 KC: Mm-hm, well what about the war, it's still going on and I know that you
12 don't put this behind you?

13 VB: No.

14 KC: You're still paying a lot of attention, that's going to lead to another aspect of
15 your Vietnam experience—

16 VB: I'm paying a lot into it. The year that I was training with the equitable out in
17 Fort Wayne, Indiana, I literally put it behind me. I just wanted it not to be there. I'm not
18 sure whether I mentioned, my ex-wife had saved all the letter that I'd written her when I
19 was in Vietnam. When I found them and they were in two shoe boxes in our closet in our
20 tiny little apartment I somehow convinced myself, and I convinced her that we didn't
21 have the physical space and demanded that they be thrown out. which she did, I found out
22 after we divorced, and she sent them to me that she had saved a few of her favorites. But
23 I literally, once I started to work, I was back in the world and I didn't want to visit that at
24 all. And I remain that way until the invasion of Cambodia and Kent State.

25 KC: Mm-hm.

26 VB: At which point I became re-involved at this time from an avid anti-war
27 standpoint. I joined a group called Vietnam Veterans Against the War. I went in April of
28 '71 to Washington, turned my decorations in suddenly the center of our relations comity
29 when Jeff Carry made his famous speech. But for a couple year there from that 1969
30 through '70 I just tried to disappear entirely.

31 KC: What accounts for the transformation?

1 VB: Anger, that seeing the invasion of Cambodia, Kent State's going on, you
2 know clearly were continuing at this thing that is going nowhere but downwards fast and
3 people are continuing to die. My ex-brother-in-law who I loved and who I'm still very
4 close to at that point was the last forward artillery observer at the top of Nui Ba Den, the
5 volcanic mountain out in the iron triangle, which was completely surrounded. And he
6 wound up at Phu Loi and we were in correspondence. I'm thinking "Here's Tom on the
7 same ground that I was on four years earlier, and its only getting worse." So, I returned
8 my decorations, I returned them in his honor.

9 KC: So, all these years of just going no where with the war, finally it spills over in
10 '70, course Ken State was obviously related and as big a part of this, but different
11 circumstances that lead to it, do you think that um you were on both ends of it, you were
12 in the war and then you came back as were the Vietnam Veterans Against the War, do
13 you think that most folks in the US and perhaps most war protester, active protester were
14 aware enough of what was going on?

15 VB: I think a small group were, the others it kind of reminds me when we had this
16 baff of self-righteousness after 9/11 and we got troops in Iraq and again later in
17 Afghanistan and people are declaring themselves patriots by putting a metallic blue,
18 magnetized, yellow ribbon on the side of their car and thinking that they've given their all
19 for their country. No, I think a large part of the population was, if you weren't directly
20 involved or you weren't a particularly aware or sensitive person, I think a lot of it was
21 just—my wife went through college four years later than I did, and I sometimes see the
22 stuff she and her friends were doing and the anti-war was sort of I don't know, a social
23 thing that college students did, but I didn't see real commitment in what they were doing.

24 KC: Yeah. Tell me about the people who you were involved with in the anti-war
25 movement, who were these folks?

26 VB: Well, what had happened was after we invaded Cambodia, I had written a
27 letter to the White House. I'm sure there's an FBI file on me somewhere and I heard a
28 guy interviewed on the New Brunswick radio station, they had a talk program at night,
29 and it usually one of the guests would usually be this local DFW [Dallas-Fort Worth]
30 commander who would you know just, it was just knee jerk patriotism and one night I
31 head a guy who was a graduate student at Rutgers, who'd been with 101st Airborne and

1 he's telling a very different story. And so, when its phone in time I called in, I said "Well,
2 you know I spent some time there and I really think that Ken Burnant knows what he's
3 talking about, about this war and your DFW guy is just giving you knee jerk pablum." I
4 end up getting connection—getting connected with the Rutgers University VPAW
5 chapter as a result of that phone call.

6 KC: Mm-hm, well tell me about belonging to the chapter, how was it organized,
7 who was in charge so to speak, what were—I assume there were committees coming
8 together.

9 VB: Very loosely, there were some national people and regional people who are
10 aware and they periodically you'd get contacted you know were going to have, were
11 going to march in the veteran's day parade in Jersey city or something, or once they did
12 something where they actually did a march from northern New Jersey, doing political
13 theater along the way and wound up at Washington Square Park in Pennsylvania and I
14 remember we went, I couldn't get the time away from work for that, but that weekend I
15 did go down there and join them. You know there was a newsletter, in my estimation
16 poorly written and edited, I'm a newsletter editor for a historical society, and some of it
17 was spot on, some of it was equally knee jerk anti-war you know. No better thoughts than
18 the DFW commanders' line of reasoning.

19 KC: What other sorts of activities would be involved with this chapter, anything
20 else y'all had going on or was it—

21 VB: No, it was just the newsletter, you know I got to know the members at
22 Rutgers and we became you know social friends, but you know that was about it. and bit
23 by bit it started pulling in other concerns.

24 KC: Such as what?

25 VB: I wasn't sure that I endorsed for example, there were some dedicated
26 Communists in it who wanted to rightly or wrongly thought that we'd get involved in
27 wars because of the Capitalist system, and I'm going you know, possibly you're right, but
28 I think the more you layer things on the less likely you're going to find support. And so, I
29 guess after certainly 1973 I went to Graduate school and then lost all—went to
30 Philadelphia and lost all contact with it.

1 KC: Well what you're saying is certainly not unusual, it was, the Vietnam war
2 tended to be or seen as a catalyst of sorts, but a lot of other movements are taking place at
3 the same time, whether it's a social justice thing, or civil rights thing, or women's
4 movement thing, or whatever it might be, and they—the more things like you say are
5 piled on it seemed like more it fractured things that the Black Power, Black Panther
6 movement as you've got the weather underground and these kind of things you know all
7 fellow travelers to a degree, but then kind of splintering off as those things do.

8 VB: It's kind of funny my ex-wife and Fred's wife used to you know support us
9 in what they did, they were also becoming about Feminist, so I had to get that message in
10 the stuff and our vision of what a woman was sort of like the an American legion
11 woman's auxiliary, you know you're supposed to be there to support us. You know we
12 don't want to hear about any of these other concerns.

13 KC: Right, pay attention to me, not to you.

14 VB: Right, exactly.

15 KC: Right, let's not forget why we're doing this ladies.

16 VB: Right, exactly.

17 KC: Well, you mentioned '73, and of course '73 is the year the POWs [Prisoners
18 of War] come home, that the United States withdraws its combat forces, although the war
19 is going to drag on for another two years.

20 VB: Right.

21 KC: Tell me about the decision of the US to withdraw from Vietnam.

22 VB: Well, I in one way it was a bug out because regardless of what we said it was
23 clear once our forces were out the level of support was going to tumble drastically. I
24 didn't feel that badly about it because I frankly felt it was an unwinnable war, that it
25 was—you could argue both sides very convincingly was North Vietnam Communist? Yes.
26 Was the Viet Cong Communist? Yes. Were there people in South Vietnam who did not
27 want to live this way? Yes. A million of them came from the North. At the same time, it
28 was largely a political argument being waged in a country that had been a country for
29 over a thousand years, who saw us just as the latest European invader to also be added to
30 the Japanese and Chinese. I didn't think it was ever winnable because I couldn't see—

1 like I said we couldn't see the commitment from their own military to win it. and so I'm
2 on a tangent here.

3 KC: No, that's okay.

4 VB: I sure was, but you know I wasn't surprised when 1975 happened, I wasn't
5 terribly upset by it.

6 KC: You mentioned that you were married and of course in this first marriage did
7 go south on you, did you attribute that at all to your Vietnam experiences?

8 VB: I think its all together possible that it had something to do with it. My ex-
9 brother-in-law saw much more combat than I did, said it ruined his first marriage. He
10 came back and his father had been—his grandfather was a retired policeman, and he got
11 his service revolver and slept with it under his pillow at night, so yeah, I think, I don't
12 think that's the only reason that the first marriage ended in divorce, but it certainly was
13 an impact. My ex-wife told me that when I walked in the door to the lobby of our
14 apartment where she was waiting with my daughter and friends were waiting there, I
15 thought I looked happy and relieved, she said you looked dark and angry.

16 KC: Hmm.

17 VB: I looked dark because you know it was January and I had a tan, but –

18 KC: Sure.

19 VB: Said you were frightening looking person when you walked through that
20 door.

21 KC: Maybe different kinds of dark, I guess.

22 VB: Yeah.

23 KC: And not just in skin tone in this case. What do you think there was about that
24 that could have impacted someone's marriage, whether it was your brother-in-law's or it
25 whether it was yours, what is it about the experience that could lend itself to it being a
26 contributing factor to the demise of a marriage?

27 VB: Well, you certainly had certain issues become lots, lot less communitive, I
28 certainly I did not after that like crowds, being I if we were shopping or something, there
29 were too many people around I would get fidgety and I attributed that to I had you know
30 when you were training in the infantry it was always where is the escape route.

31 KC: Mm-hm.

1 VB: And so, I think we were much more difficult people to live with.

2 KC: Well, tell me—

3 VB: I have to say once I met the guys from Rutgers who you know are now in
4 undergraduate school or graduate school in 1969, '70 I got introduced to the world of
5 recreational drugs.

6 KC: Hmm, is that right? That something you care to talk about?

7 VB: Well, just used nothing more than marijuana and some hash, nothing and
8 never any opioids, but you know it was a different world then.

9 KC: Yeah.

10 VB: And the stuff that I'd never seen when I was overseas and it was an escape,
11 and I used it as an escape.

12 KC: Well, give me brief kind of thumbnail sketch of the rest of your career and
13 any other important events in your life.

14 VB: Sure. Well, I mentioned I was in graduate school, I had started to work with
15 that insurance company, it was in an administrative position. As I got further into it after
16 a couple years, I started getting bored. I thought the kinds of people that administration
17 attracted and retained were not very interesting or what's the word I want inquisitive,
18 going to take risks. And I was shopping around for something to do, my ex-wife also was
19 shopping around for a way to start becoming active out of the house and she had
20 successfully entered a PhD program in clinical psychology at Temple University. We had
21 a couple of friends who were psychotherapists and they looked to be having a wonderful
22 life. So, I went, took some night classes after work at Rutgers as I went through, we had
23 moved down to Pennsylvania, just Northeast of Philadelphia so she could commute to
24 school and I wound up going into the same program. got a complete NIN NIMH Grant,
25 full tuition from the University and I realized when that lined up that I was knocking
26 myself out in something I didn't like for \$16,500 a year to support three people.

27 KC: Hmm.

28 VB: Four people at this point. That I could live just about as well between that
29 money and the G.I. Bill money and try something else.

30 KC: Sure.

1 VB: We did. And after a couple years, both the University and I concluded
2 although I was a bright guy who was very good with statistics and experimental design, I
3 wasn't Mr. Rodgers or you know I had the wrong temperament to be a psychotherapist.

4 KC: Hmm, yeah.

5 VB: I came from a long line of medical doctors and engineers, I – as far as I was
6 concerned if you gave me a problem to solve, I would look at it, tell you what the
7 solution was, and then tell you okay implement it and don't come back until you have.
8 So, they went mmm, so at that point when I'd left the program I've had a background in
9 the insurance industry, I have a background in academia, and a lot of experimental
10 design, that kind of thing. I left with a masters and sixty hours toward my doctorate. And
11 I got hired by the American College in Brinmar, Pennsylvania, which was a distance
12 learning facility for the insurance industry. They granted the CLU [Containerized Living
13 Unit] designation and some other things and so it seemed to be a perfect marriage of the
14 two things and I ran a distance learning program where CLU chapter members taught our
15 courses and that hung together until the advent of computer administer exams, which
16 point, because before that you held a class for four months, you had two of them and then
17 it was time, the national exams were all given on the same day everywhere in the country.
18 When computer exams came up that program started to fall apart. I had decided, "Oh,"
19 and I was task force with a couple other younger members by a new President of the
20 college who had brought in McKenzie and so I spent some time working with the
21 McKenzie team on documenting the way we did business and how we could improve,
22 and had stated an MBA [Master of Business Administration] program at night and when
23 it's all done the President said, "What would you like to do?" I said, "I'd like to get into
24 marketing for this institution," so for three years represented it and its programs to about
25 twenty different companies. And eventually because it was an academic institution still,
26 we had gotten accreditation, there really was no path beyond that, without a terminal
27 degree, so I went out and applied to the New York Life Insurance Company to be from
28 the marketing there annuity business, got that job. I really the rest of my life academically
29 or professionally rather was either in strictly marketing, strictly market research or some
30 combination of two for mostly for insurance companies, briefly with a Big Five

1 Accounting Firm and the insurance arm of a British bank. And one of the things I felt I
2 learned is along the way is, that narrow definitions with things are limiting.

3 KC: Mm-hm.

4 VB: When I was a marketer and I considered myself a research-oriented marketer,
5 as a researcher I considered myself a marketing sensitive you know researcher. I found
6 that nothing I had learned including how to write well at William and Mary and put
7 together an inquiry and put together an analysis, nothing I had ever learned has done
8 anything but stood me well, and I just tried to use as much of it as I could regardless of
9 what the particular position you know was called.

10 KC: Mm-hm.

11 VB: And that's about it, at sixty-six I retired. I continued at cycle actively. I am
12 active with our historical society where I'm the curator of collections and the newsletter
13 editor, I'm active with a committee to township government called Historic Preservation
14 Advisory Board and play a little guitar on the side.

15 KC: Hmm. And of course, remarried.

16 VB: Remarried, remarried a wonderful woman who I had worked with at the
17 American College and then she moved on and after I had been divorced and I'd go on
18 with some friends who were single or pretending to be single to the bar scene for a while,
19 thought this was hideous (Kelly laughs). And they said, "What about Marie? Did you
20 ever consider dating her?" So, I called her up once and she decided to have fun with me,
21 she pretended she knew nothing about the divorce and so wanted to know why I, a
22 married man, was calling her for a date. (Kelly laughs) And so made me swing for a bit
23 before she led on that oh, she knew all about it, she'd stayed in touch with all the people.
24 An extremely bright woman, she has a Douglas College Undergraduate in MLS (medical
25 laboratory science) from Rutgers and later while she was at Drexel where her ex-
26 husband, not ex at that time was pursuing a Ph.D. She took an MBA at Drexel.

27 KC: Hmm.

28 VB: And we do all this stuff except the guitar and the bicycle together. (Kelly
29 laughs) Oh, were also active with a regional chapter with people who own first
30 generation corvettes.

31 KV: Oh, your one of those people?

1 VB: Yeah, I'm one of those people. I got my first one when I was fifty years old. I
2 had just put the last one of my children through college and then a graduate study and
3 while she was away on vacation, I found the one I want, and she was away on a business
4 trip rather, secured—all this happened while she was away, and she was sure I had done
5 that laying in wait for her to be away. Subsequently, she got involved with it and is
6 actually more involved with it than I am.

7 KC: Oh, is that right. (both laugh) Well, I've only got a few more questions for
8 you Vic.

9 VB: Yeah.

10 KC: One is, I'm kind of interested, what do you read anything Vietnam related
11 anymore, do you watch any Vietnam related movies?

12 VB: Yes, I do. I read books where I think it's someone, I've read a number of
13 books by people who were involved in either the infantry or aviation so I do. One of the
14 things I learned when I was in the VVAW [Vietnam Veterans Against the War], I came
15 back in 1968, having served in a particular place at a particular point in time with a
16 particular type of unit and I thought I knew everything about Vietnam.

17 KC: Mm-hm.

18 VB: I started running into people—I'll never forget one day we were doing a
19 protest thing, so we were wearing our old fatigues and this guy there with Air Force
20 fatigues on. I said, "Ah, what was your MOS? What'd you do there?" and he said, "I was
21 a combat weatherman," and I said, "oh this is rich, tell me what a combat weatherman
22 did." He said, "Well, they would chopper us across the DMZ about thirty or forty
23 kilometers, put us in there and we'd sit there with a radio to radio weather conditions into
24 the route packs flying into North Vietnam. But oh, you know so you were a real warrior
25 then. Boy there were a whole lot of things going on that I was entirely unaware of.

26 KC: Right.

27 VB: And I ran into another guy who was with the Navy, with the Riverine Force,
28 so I discovered—I knew in detail a lot about a very small area at a specific point in time.
29 And I guess a lot of the reading has to been either to confirm what I thought about units I
30 knew there, or to learn about things I simply didn't know about.

31 KC: Mm-hm. What about movies? Do you watch any Vietnam related movies?

1 VB: I have, I recommended that one called *The Odd Angry Shot* I think there are a
2 couple superb ones. Oh, *Platoon*. I was flying with the—flying the 25th Infantry at the
3 same time the author of *Platoon*, his name escapes me at the moment. For all I knew, I
4 flew him on a mission.

5 KC: Oliver Stone, I believe.

6 VB: Yeah, Oliver Stone, maybe Oli Stone was one of those people, I don't know,
7 it was the right time and the right place. and so I think a couple of good movies. There's
8 an awful lot of trash out there like *Full Metal Jacket* with *The Deer Hunter*. The notion
9 that an E-6 could fly anywhere in the country to look for his best friend is just pure
10 nonsense.

11 KC: Mm-hm.

12 VB: I guess that's about it. I would recommend if anyone who wants to see it,
13 PBS [Public Broadcasting Service] did something called *Dear America*, which I think
14 that and something they also did called *Vietnam War Story* are two better things that have
15 been done about it.

16 KC: Yeah, well you mentioned those couple of movies there and one in particular,
17 *The Deer Hunter* there is one of our national consciousness, even if were not familiar
18 with it or really aware of it, its kind of wormed its way into a long with a number of other
19 Vietnam War related movies of the genre into what Vietnam veterans are or who they
20 were, so it leads me to ask you, what do you think about they way the Vietnam veteran
21 has been portrayed over the years in American society and American culture, and it
22 changes through the years as well, so what's your opinion of that?

23 VB: Well, a lot of it was not very good. I mean you were sort of presented as the
24 group of crazies. drug addled crazies, they were child murders. Interestingly I read years
25 later that there was a prejudice against hiring Civil War veterans at the end of the Civil
26 War because they had what was known as soldier's disease and that was because that war
27 was the first time that opiates were used and apparently a number of Civil War veterans
28 were opiate addicted, so they were you know there was a distrust about hiring them. my
29 experience there an awful lot of stuff I think that's out that was wishful thinking for
30 example I had heard the stories when I was there of prisoners being taken up in a Huey
31 and you know interrogated and thrown out. I have talked to countless crew chiefs and

1 when I heard about them, talked to some of them, everybody knew the story, nobody had
2 ever done it or knew someone who did it. I think what it was reflecting the degree of
3 frustration we felt about the limits put on about what we could do, and so it was a fantasy.
4 You know there might have been an example of that somewhere, but all of this stuff that
5 got talked about predated. I think it's fantastical—I think, in my personal experience
6 where I experienced it was, I think I got coarsened during it to the degree that when I first
7 got there referring to somebody as a gook or a dink or a slope, I found offensive, long
8 before that year was up, I was using all those terms.

9 KC: Mm-hm.

10 VB: Never treating anybody badly, but you know falling into a lot of this not
11 good behavior, at least mentally.

12 KC: Yeah.

13 VB: Yeah so, I think by in large the—there have not been a lot of very accurate
14 appraisals I thought the young guy, the Shen character in *Platoon* is very playful, very
15 whereas the two sergeants they're great fictional characters.

16 KC: In place they're basically kind of the archetype—

17 VB: You're right.

18 KC: Of what's right and what's wrong.

19 VB: Yeah, there's white and there's black, the yin and the yang.

20 KC: Yeah.

21 VB: And just like you know, oh, what is his name? Oh, it's nothing but Heart of
22 Darkness.

23 KC: Right. Well just a couple more questions for you Vic and we can wrap it up.
24 Um looking back on your year in Vietnam and everything that meant, which includes
25 your time on Capitol Hill in '71 and all of your activities and all of this, looking back on
26 that year and everything Vietnam meant to you, how do you think it most influenced your
27 life, how did it most affect you?

28 VB: Well, it certainly I've learned to distrust what I hear from my government a
29 great deal more, I would be where I still think we have to have military, I have a lot of
30 respect for people who choose to make it a career. I think we have to be—I would be
31 very, very slow to say all right send the boys and girls, the boy and girls now, because we

1 were lied to in Iraq, we were lied to in Vietnam, with the destroyer that was never fired
2 upon. It has made me much more cautious. It has made me aware that you know every
3 one of them receding is somebodies son or wife or daughter or husband you know. It's
4 made me much slower to wave—to rattle sword.

5 KC: Mm-hm. Finally, a very broad question, but I like to ask it of folks who were
6 there. The Vietnam has been a political football in a lot of ways, well this is what it was,
7 this is what it was, this is what it meant, this is what it means, these are the lessons, all of
8 that and we could you—that's ad nauseum. If we continue to discuss that, but let me ask
9 you since you were there, a thoughtful human being, um when we look back at it what do
10 you think will be the lasting legacy of the Vietnam War? And that's a monsterly huge
11 question, but I'm going to ask it anyway.

12 VB: Oh, I would hope that one would be caution in about gauging in armed
13 conflict, making really sure what is going on and probably the biggest one, have an end
14 game. And the end game has to make sense, you have to go in because your national
15 interests are deeply involved and potentially compromised, and you have to know how to
16 pursue it and where do you declare victory and get out. We've had far too many of these
17 things, starting with Vietnam but then you know we had Iraq, where that wasn't done. I
18 think increasingly that it's been recognized that it was a major mistake, now I know some
19 people, I know a couple of infantry veterans, this one guy keeps trying to get me to
20 touring with him visiting high schools because he thinks there's a lesson for them, but
21 when I listen to him this is a clinically depressed individual who really has no particular
22 message, but is still reliving this and I know some people who have lost brothers or sons
23 and it's—I can understand why someone may wish not to confront the fact that their
24 brother in the case of one person or their son died for what in retrospect was a
25 misadventure. I can understand that it someone that deeply.

26 KC: Mm-hm.

27 VB: But that doesn't then mean that it was something that should've been
28 pursued.

29 KC: Sure.

30 VB: Again, I say that I'm proud of the caliber of the service I rendered. I did my
31 very best, I took some personal risks, I'm justifiably proud of them. I actually have all my

1 medals back because a couple years ago I went to go get my New Jersey's license and
2 I—my copy of the—I had a DD214 which when I first got home and it was in Fort
3 Wayne, Indiana, they are doing something at city hall and they convinced me that it was a
4 valuable document that for safety they should make a copy with a seal, give it to me and
5 keep the original one on record there. When I went to get the license first a very nice
6 woman there said, "First I want to thank you for your service, but second, this is not an
7 acceptable document."

8 KC: Hmm.

9 VB: So, I wrote whatever address you write to the federal government to get a
10 replacement DD214 apparently the request was misunderstood because about eight weeks
11 later a box full of medals arrived.

12 KC: Is that right?

13 VB: Yeah, every one I'd every had including my sharpshooter badge.

14 KC: I'll be darned.

15 VB: And then they went back in and requested the then and got a correct
16 replacement DD214, but actually wound up getting all the medals back and enough
17 distance has come and gone that I asked my wife to have a professionally done shadow
18 box made with them.

19 KC: Is that right?

20 VB: Yeah.

21 KC: Well, good. I'm glad that um that you kind of looked at this in a different
22 light after a couple of years.

23 VB: Yeah, what I did in 1971 was out of sheer frustration with a government that
24 seemed to not pay us any attention and kept insisting that all those who opposed the war
25 were obviously either commies or cowards and a group of us came forward and said, "No
26 there are those of us who served well, did exactly what you asked us to do, and we think
27 it's wrong and we want to put a light to this that everybody who is involved supports it,"

28 KC: Mm-hm. Well Vic, is there anything else you would like to add before we
29 close out the interview?

30 VB: No, I say everybody likes talking about themselves and so had a lot of fun.

31 KC: Well good, that's my business.

- 1 VB: (laughs) You do it very well.
- 2 KC: Well, thanks. All right, this will end the interview with Vic Bary.

Interview with Victory Bary
Session [3] of [3]
Date 1 April 2016

1 KC: Okay, this is still the first of April in 2016 with Vic Bary. He came up with
2 another story about thirty seconds after we ended the first recordings, so go ahead and
3 pick up that story.

4 VB: Okay, yeah. I never tire talking about myself (Kelly laughs). When I went
5 through induction, they gave you a number of tests. They gave me a language aptitude
6 test and told me I had done very highly on it and if I wanted to extend my service from
7 two year to four years, they would send me to the Army Language School in Monterey.
8 They also said, “You speak another language?” And I said, “Yes, I speak French.” And
9 they gave me a French test. Well, you know, this is induction. Nobody—they’re
10 collecting this information for their purposes, not yours, so I never heard anything further
11 about it. After I’d been with the 11th for about four months or so, we had a French
12 Kanuck in our unit, who I worked with, Paul Binnacle and one day he gets notified that
13 he’s on twenty-four-hour notice, twelve-hour notice have your gear packed and yeah, be
14 ready to go and Paul disappears. It’s the last we hear of him, but the rumor mill starts
15 generating information that Paul is now living in a hotel in Bangkok. Geez this is pretty
16 good, so I went and told the personnel officer, “You know, I took a French fluency test. I
17 never heard anything further,” so they looked in my records said, “Yeah, the Army
18 considers you French fluent.” So, I said, “Would you have that language designator put
19 on my MOS?” He said, “Certainly.” Well, the call never comes for me and about four
20 months after that I get a postcard from Paul who’s now out of the Army, says, “I guess
21 you wondered where I’ve been. Well, I’ve been in Laos flying Air America, but since
22 we’re not there I wasn’t allowed to tell anybody, but not I’m out of the Army, I don’t
23 care. I’m telling you.” And I thought, “Thank god the call never came.” (both laugh).

24 KC: Well, isn’t that interesting. Wow.

25 VB: Because I figured you know if I died in Vietnam my family would be told,
26 but if you died there nobody was every going to know anything.

27 KC: Yeah, well that is really interesting. All about timing Vic.

28 VB: It sure is. (both laugh)