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The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Phillip Brady
Conducted by Allen Richardson
Transcribed by Laura Darden

1 Allen Richardson: This interview is being conducted with Captain P.O. Brady by
2 Gunnery Sergeant Allen B. Richardson at Marine Corps Schools, Quantico, Virginia.
3 The subject of this interview is the infantry advisor to the Vietnamese battalion. The
4 subject of this is unclassified. Captain Brady, would you state your name, grade, and
5 service number please?

6 Phillip Brady: Captain Phillip O. Brady. Captain 082115 serial number.

7 AR: What were your duty assignments while you were in Vietnam?

8 PB: I was the assistant infantry advisor to the 4th Vietnamese Marine Battalion.

9 AR: What period did you serve in these billets and where were you physically
10 located within Vietnam during the period covered?

11 PB: I served in that capacity from November '64 to 1 December 1965. During
12 that period of time, I operated with the battalion in the Second and Third Corps areas of
13 Vietnam.

14 AR: Would you discuss a specific action that you participated in, in Vietnam?

15 PB: One specific action which we were involved in, a major action, occurred on
16 the 31st of December 1964. The action centered around a small pro-government village
17 by the name of Bien Xia, approximately forty miles southeast of Saigon. The village was
18 populated by North Vietnamese refugees who were predominately Catholic, anti-
19 communist and pro-government in sympathy. Several days prior to our arrival—when I

1 say our arrival, I mean the battalion—the town had been overrun by an estimated
2 Vietcong regular reinforced battalion. The town was held and although repeated attempts
3 were made to retake it by various Ranger battalions, their efforts were unsuccessful. At
4 that time we were acting as the III Corps reserve and were finally committed on the 28th
5 of December. Upon our arrival and initial subsequent operations we regained the town
6 and no Vietcong were found. However, on the morning of the 31st of December, an
7 Army helicopter which had been shot down the previous evening was presumed lost, but
8 our battalion was assigned the mission to determine whether there were any survivors or,
9 for that matter, the exact location of the helicopter crash. It was estimated that the
10 helicopter was approximately three kilometers to the west of the town located in a rubber
11 plantation. In the morning one company of the battalion went out on a reconnaissance
12 patrol to determine the exact location of the helicopter. The company was accompanied
13 by the senior battalion advisor, Captain F. P. Eller. Upon locating the helicopter, which
14 was in fact in the rubber trees, Captain Eller and the rest of the company of the battalion
15 came under the attack by an estimated battalion of regular Vietcong forces. Due to the
16 obvious superiority in men and firepower of the Vietcong, they were forced to retreat.
17 The remained of the battalion, upon hearing this both over the radio as well as hearing the
18 fire going on down in the rubber trees, decided to go down and relieve the company and
19 find out exactly what was going on. The stragglers or the survivors of the company,
20 which Captain Eller was in, rejoined us on the road leaving the rubber plantation and then
21 the battalion minus this one company which made the initial exploration into the rubber
22 trees, went into the rubber trees to one: retrieve the wounded, and two: get any bodies of
23 Americans who were killed in the helicopter crash. Having remained there for the
24 remainder of the afternoon, attempting to accomplish their mission, the battalion came
25 under attack by an estimated four Vietcong regular battalions, perhaps more. Estimated
26 strength ran anywhere from 1,200 to 1,800 Vietcong. The battalion-minus was quickly
27 surrounded in the rubber trees. In the engagement that ensued they suffered
28 approximately 60% casualties. The battalion was again—fought its way out, the
29 remainders of the battalion fought it's way out and went back into the town of Bien Xia
30 where they regrouped with Rangers and were later relieved by subsequent reinforcements
31 from Saigon. In commenting on this engagement several facets, or several things of

1 importance, exist both on our side as well as the Vietcong. One, discussing our side, the
2 intelligence estimates prior to the commitment of this battalion were inadequate. It was
3 estimated one reinforced Vietcong battalion was in the area. It soon became apparent
4 when talking to the advisors who were already there in other Ranger outfits that there
5 were at least three to six battalions in the area. Secondly, there was no artillery support.
6 Third, the air support was limited to helicopter support provided for by the Army
7 aviation. The Vietnamese Air Force provided Sky Raiders. However, upon running out
8 of ammunition in the early action of the afternoon and although requested, although
9 reinforcements as far as Sky Raiders were requested by the Vietnamese battalion
10 commander, this new strike was on its way from Bien Hoa to the town. But that strike
11 was cancelled by someone in the higher echelons of the Vietnamese chain-of-command
12 because they felt that the strike was not necessary. So the ground commander's estimate
13 of what he needed as far as ground support was disregarded completely. Third, it should
14 be noted that on a mission such as this with the known strength of the enemy, that a force
15 consisting of 326 Vietnamese Marines that was confronted with 1,200 or possible as
16 much as 1,800 regular Vietcong troops, they were vastly outnumbered. Any mission
17 which exposed them to this numerical superiority without adequate firepower or at least
18 some reserve or some type of supporting means available was sheer suicide. In any case,
19 the battalion did suffer 60% casualties. It was rendered inoperable for a period of three
20 months, in which time they did retraining and reequipping. As far as the Vietcong are
21 concerned, this was not an ambush. It was known that they were there. The Vietnamese
22 battalion commander was cautioned as it concerned security, however he disregarded
23 these recommendations on my part. The Vietcong themselves were very well-equipped.
24 They had webbed gear, they looked the part of the government soldier, steel helmets, etc.
25 They were very well-disciplined. They advanced by fire maneuver. They use their
26 supporting arms chiefly which were .57 recoil less rifles and .81 mm mortars, quite
27 effectively. They employed .50 caliber machine guns in ground fire which indicate that
28 they're willing to expend that ammunition on the ground, that they had a great deal of it.
29 When they went in to a static position or defensive position, they used were. Their field
30 emplacements were good. Overall, it was their best battalions that we had been
31 confronted with and they were well-disciplined and well-motivated. So that was the

1 result of that. Now, in an overall evaluation of the Vietnamese Marine battalion I served
2 with, I think that their chief deficiency—and I think that this could be noted in other
3 battalions I served with, along with—that their chief inadequacy is leadership. This is not
4 entirely their fault. First of all, in the time I was with them, their TO calls for
5 approximately thirty-five officers. They lost twenty-nine officers killed. This turnover of
6 highly-experienced, in many cases, officers having this casualty rate inflicts a great deal
7 of damage on their leadership capability. Secondly, their political stability, or the
8 political motivation behind an officer, is religion. Many of these things had a great
9 bearing on how much force or how much leadership he was going to exert. Most of them
10 preferred to play it safe. Third, there was an overriding philosophy. I don't know where
11 they got it. I think part of it was due just to the officers' stature in that particular
12 company and possibly their heritage. In any case, the officer found would not one:
13 delegate authority, two: displayed a marginal interest in the troops' welfare. This could
14 possibly be carryover from their tenureship or their tenure under the French where they
15 were given very little authority themselves. Or it possibly could relate to their history as
16 individuals.

17 AR: Did this leadership problem involve the officers or the NCOs?

18 PB: The officers commanded and had all the authority. It was a one-man show.
19 The battalion staff did not exist. All plans were created and executed by the battalion
20 commander. The NCOs were not given the authority to do much of anything. For
21 instance, if you wanted to go get water, the company commander formed the company
22 and he went. He took the company to get water. You could parallel this in any case.
23 They were not delegated to the proper authority, although they had the capability.

24 AR: Did you speak Vietnamese, Captain?

25 PB: Yes.

26 AR: So there wasn't any problem as far as a language barrier was concerned?

27 PB: Well, there wasn't. But I say initially there was. I attended the MATA
28 course at Ft. Bragg where I had forty hours. This has since been expanded, I understand,
29 to 120 hours of language. Any Vietnamese that I used was a result of a conscientious
30 effort to pick up the language when discussing it with nationals themselves.

1 AR: How do you feel about your training you received prior to going to
2 Vietnam? Do you feel it was adequate?

3 PB: Well, the MATA course was the only training I had prior to that outside, of
4 course, the basic school. My on-the-job-training and the division which I served in prior
5 the assignment. The specific preparation in the MATA course had some facets of which
6 were good and other facets were not. The language was good. That has been expanded.
7 That is valuable. Secondly, the background on the individual personality. The
8 Vietnamese personality, their customs, traditions, is valuable. That was included.
9 Outside of that, there is nothing else of value for a battalion advisor. It would be
10 assumed that one being assigned there has a working practical knowledge of small-unit
11 tactics, which is what he needs to know. The rest of it was an orientation for the role of
12 USOM, the role of many facets, the big picture in other words. It did not concern you as
13 the battalion advisor. I found it, for the most part, useless.

14 AR: Thank you very much, Captain, for your interview.