Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Peter Faber
Conducted by Stephen Maxner
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Transcribed by Sherri Brouillette

NOTE: 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.

Steve Maxner: This is Steve Maxner, conducting an oral history interview with Mr. Peter Faber. I am in Lubbock, Texas. Mr. Faber is in Connecticut, and it is the 19th of July, 2000 at approximately 9:15 Lubbock time. Mr. Faber, would you please begin by giving a brief biographical sketch of yourself?

Peter Faber: Okay, my name is Peter [Von Luidwig] Faber, born 1940, April 25th, 1940 in Staten Island, New York, lived with my parents and grandmother until about eight years of age. After my grandmother retired as a school teacher in the New York City school system we moved to Monroe, New York, which is in upstate New York where I lived with her. My grandmother and my aunt raised me. My parents both worked in New York and came up on weekends. I went to high school at Monroe Woodbury Central High School in New York state, drifted around to a couple of schools and ended up at the University of Rhode Island, 1960, graduated in 1964 with a degree in agriculture. I went into the Army at the conclusion of school. I was an ROTC candidate. Married life, I got married while I was in college, my wife had already graduated, and we've been married since 1963 and are still married to the same person, two children; a daughter in Madison, Wisconsin and a son in San Francisco, California. Their age is like 37 and 35 or something like that. I life in Winchester Center, Connecticut right now and that's basically it. I'm still a member of the Connecticut Army National Guard. I am a

pilot. I just got a two year extension to fly past age 60, and have been involved in the Guard since I got off active duty in 1972.

SM: What do you fly currently?

PF: I fly a C-12, a BE-20, commanding staff plane. When I – especially when I got out of college – funny enough I was not what most people consider a great ROTC candidate. It was a land grant school and your first two years were ROTC. I basically played football at Rhode Island and track and ROTC you had to go to, and you always could get an easy excuse from drill because you were hurt from football. There was a bunch of…none of the football players hardly ever made Wednesday drill, you had to go to class but the Wednesday drill you never went to because you were too hurt to walk, to parade, but of course you could go to football practice that day, it didn't matter. Actually, and don't ask me why, I've often thought how in the hell I ever stayed in the ROTC but I applied for ROTC and got accepted into the final two years. I suppose I figured if I was going to go in the Army, because the draft was going then, it would just as well go in as a lieutenant as a private, so I went ahead and did it. Besides, as it turns out, being married the $38 bucks a month was a significant portion of our monthly income; like perhaps 50% of it! I mean, you could rent a cottage, we rented a cottage back then on the shore for $25 bucks a month, a furnished cottage so you can see what prices were, and that was pretty good. Anyway, for some reason I didn't go to summer camp between my junior and senior year so I had to go to summer camp after I graduated and they withheld my diploma until I completed it. But I actually was looking at my transcript just a couple of months ago and I probably have to be the only ROTC student that's ever graduated with less than a C average. I actually had two Ds in there when I was a sophomore. But, I ended up graduating as a Distinguished Military Student and Distinguished Military Graduate because of my performance at summer camp where I came in…I got second or third in the class and did really well. To this day I can remember I went back, I had to get my diploma from the military department and it was the PMS, a guy by the name of Colonel Hammerk I think or something like that, he wouldn't come see me. He sent somebody out with my diploma and just sent me away he was so mad that I was a distinguished military student graduate! I still laugh about that. Anyway, I went to infantry officer basic at Fort Benning in November of '64. I was

there until perhaps March or April, it was like a three or four month school, and I was assigned to the 1st Division at Fort Riley, Kansas. We couldn't find…housing was full out there. We couldn't find housing. My wife and I had dogs and she was pregnant at the time. We couldn't find any housing any place that would take the dogs so we ended up buying a house trailer and had it moved out to Fort Riley, and she went out there with her mother and I joined her from Fort Benning. It was March or April, I'm trying to remember, and our daughter was born in May. Fort Riley, 1st Division, I was assigned to 2nd of the 28th Infantry. I was assigned to the headquarters company where I was the anti-tank platoon leader, which was the wire anti-tank, wire guided missile made by the French. SS-10 and SS-11 were other versions of it. It was interesting, interesting experience, a lot of funny stories out of that.

SM: Let's take a step back real quick, and I noticed on the questionnaire that you filled out for me, you put that you went to Fort Devens. Was that for your summer camp?

PF: Fort Devens was summer camp. That was the summer of '64. I was at Fort Riley and it was like perhaps July. The division was getting ready to do some big joint training maneuvers on the Atlantic coast with the Marines for an amphibious operation. Back then they were still stuck in 500,000 men assaulting rocky shores in small boats, and I was sent out to San Diego, California to the Navy Embarkation School to learn how to back load troop transports with equipment and men, so you offload them onto the landing craft and get them onto shore, and I was going to be the loading officer for the…I guess it was the brigade.

SM: What year was this, now?

PF: That would have been '65. While I was at San Diego, Vietnam was just sort of cranked up. In fact, I remember right before I graduated from college there was an ROTC graduate from Rhode Island was one of the first people killed in Vietnam, whether it was a sniper or a land mine or something in a truck, but anyway, he was one of the first people that were killed. But at that time, in 1964, Vietnam was basically Special Forces and advisors, Rangers in there, and it was nothing else. When I was at San Diego though I got a fax in…not a fax back then, I guess it was a twix or whatever they stood for that the 1st Division had been…was set up to go to Vietnam. The 1st Division alerted and

were put on standby status, all leaves were cancelled. That was in the last week of school so I finished school but I came back straight away to the…the whole division was packing up and getting ready to go to Vietnam.

SM: I'm sorry, I'm going to have to ask you to take one more step back.

PF: That's okay.

SM: With regard to…you mention in your discussion you graduated from IOBC at Fort Benning?

PF: Right.

SM: What did you think about the training you received at Fort Benning and the Infantry Officer Basic?

PF: I found it to be very easy. I mean, I was an honor graduate there. Basically it was academics. I found the whole Army educational experience essentially to be…well, for two things, I liked it. I liked the shooting, I liked most of what you did I liked, and the bookwork that you had to do was relatively straight forward. I think the Army assumes that you're an idiot and teaches down from there, but certainly the class I went through was not to qualify you in tactics so much or anything else, but really was to qualify you…to get you sort of Army-ized I guess. Most of us were ROTC, we had no idea how to salute or anything. We didn't know rank. I mean, I knew rank, but I can remember one of our first classes was teaching us how to tell what the rank was, the officers. Probably one of the funniest stories I've relayed over the years came out of this. There was a sergeant that sort of looked after our company and he got us on the bus in the morning and ran the administrative office and took care of all that stuff, and he also was in charge of giving us quick little Army briefings and he reminds me of the sergeant in MASH that drove those guys around in Japan whenever they were doing an operation on a kid, "God damn Army". This old crunchy guy, but he gave me the best advice I ever got in the morning, and it was in terrible, absolutely terrible, English and he said…he stood up in front of us and now, "If you guys don't remember nothing else, you's remember this; don't ever go in no joint that ain't got no windows." And I'll tell you, that was the best advice that I ever got because I've never seen a joint with no windows that I wanted to go in! But it was really funny. I thought that probably the training got us ready to go into our units. We came out of there…by the time we came out of there we

were definitely squared away as far as military procedures. We'd learned the basics but our training started basically when we got to the unit. I think it was an orientation as much as anything. It got us in shape because some of the guys were not in shape, so you got a lot of running and PT tests and a lot of field work and a lot of guys slept in pup tents for the first time in their life. I mean, it probably was a worthwhile experience and it was a good way to get ROTC guys, college guys, into the Army, I'll tell you that. I mean, I guess if I was go do it now, if I was to be a teacher in one of those schools, I would feel sorry for the Army and tell them to take these ROTC guys and make them something military. It was pretty tough. But, I guess I would…I don't know. I always found military education relatively easy, the academic part of it. I never…I don't think I ever took an Army school I didn't finish in the top percentiles on the written exams. Now that doesn't mean my physical performance was up to…there's always some guys better than that, but as far as the academic stuff I always find their…I've always found their education to be relatively easy. It didn't matter what school I went to and didn't matter if it was the Navy, the embarkation school, other school's I've gone to, flight school, I found the academics to be fairly easy. It's just all the way through, and I don't think I'm an overly smart person, either. I don't know, maybe it just…everything was always multiple choice, and some of them were pretty obvious multiple choice. Maybe I'm lucky and not smart, which I'd rather be anyway, right?

SM: Uh-huh. I'm sorry, one more question about your IOBC: The emphasis in terms of what you did learn about tactics and strategy, how much did they talk about counterinsurgency, counter guerilla operations, and things like that?

PF: Very little. We did a little bit of it because Vietnam was just…there was the first experiences coming back and some of the instructors were in Burma and places like that so they had that, but for the most part it was really typical military strategies, retro-grade, forward battle area, tank divisions, armies, all that stuff. It was basically what you would see today which really is not being used today at all. It's essentially…it was very formal. Insurgency and guerilla operations, you talked about it and we actually did a couple of patrols where you tried to infiltrate but that was about it, and that was more to do with small unit operations that it was to do with counterinsurgency. Most of that you got as you went along in various classes.

SM: Now when you went to Fort Riley and started going through…did your commander at Fort Riley have any kind of I guess a training regimen, or did he hold classes or give instruction on different types of warfare and things like that?

PF: At the time, when I first got there essentially you were in a battalion that was…you sort of got your unit and your unit training and did field training; in fact, when my daughter was born, back then when kids were born the Army…a father was not allowed anywhere near the hospital. You were met at the door and your wife was taken from you and you were advised, you were told, to go back to your duty and you would be advised when things happened, and I was actually on the field making a rope ridge for our training field. I dropped my wife off at the hospital, thought I was going to stay, and they sent me off. So, I went out to the field and the mess truck came out and took me back in to see my wife and daughter. Essentially I did unit stuff, unit training. I was, as I said, the anti-tank platoon leader, and I had my hands full. They had made the platoon the dumping ground for all the people that were having trouble every place else because they didn't…they never did anything and it was…and why I got that, I don't know. I hoped…I was looking for an infantry platoon and I ended up with those guys. But, as it turns out it was a pretty good experience and we ended up doing fairly well. As soon as I discovered that my platoon sergeant could neither read nor write, I understood why we were having problems.

SM: So did you instruct him at that point in terms of literacy?

PF: Yeah, it was interesting, the Army considered it a missile and they had all these missile log books that had to be maintained which were very difficult, very…I mean, it was worse than any vehicle log was - in fact, it was worse than an airplane log was – and all these special forms and this and that and of course they were all screwed up and I actually ended up going over to an artillery unit and getting a lieutenant that I'd met who helped us get our logs squared away and then I took care of the logs after that because there was no way that Sergeant Cotton was going to be able to do that. We got some training going, and actually it was a small unit. I would guess I had maybe 10 or 15 guys, and we got some training going, and we started to have some fun. Actually I got to the point that we requested and got some missiles to fire. As soon as anybody heard we were going out to the range every colonel in the world had to go out there and most of

them, of course, they wanted to shoot it themselves. Well you get three missiles for five guys to shoot and two colonels take two of them to blow up on the ground 20 feet in front of you, you get sort of annoyed, but it turned out it was okay. We had a pretty good time. I look back and we went over…we were going to become…I forget what, I think they were going to make us the recon platoon when we got to Vietnam but that never happened.

SM: Now you're saying this is an N tank, as in November?

PF: E-N-T-A-C, E-N-T-A-N-K, I forget, but it was a version of the SS 10, SS 11 which they actually use in helicopters and it was a wire guided anti-tank missile and it looked like sort of a little fat thing that had a trail of wire behind it and you flew it with a joystick. So, you have visual contact with the thing, and of course it was great if you flew it across desert but the minute you got through any brush, of course, the wire would snag on something and the brake and then of course that was it. It did what it wanted to do. Actually, it usually went into the ground immediately. It was sort of a strange little thing the Army had for a while that I am sure in combat conditions would be absolutely as worthless as tits on a boar hog. I mean, it was just terrible.

SM: You said there were some humorous events that took place while you were in this platoon. Did they involve the actual missile?

PF: No, they involved people. We had Sergeant Cotton, was quite a lady's man, and I'd get these phone calls, "Hi, is Candy Man there?" and I'd say, "Candy Man? Hey, Sergeant Cotton, it's for you!" and he'd talk on the phone and he'd say, "I'm going to lunch early, sir," and I'd say, "See you later!" I guess I always…with the guys I've always had my unit. My approach has always been "look, we've got a job to do and we get our job done and if we're done, I don't want to know…I just don't want you to get me in trouble." So, it worked out pretty good. Everybody looked after everybody else, and it was really pretty decent. I can remember, we were taking our missiles out to the range and somebody told the MPs or somebody that these were nuclear capable and I mean, it was…honest to God, next thing we know we have all these cars coming around us and they weren't aware…where's our movement plan, and where is the guards, and I'm saying, "What the hell are you talking about here?" We have these four [trunks] in the back of a three-quarter ton going out to the range, and it was…God, it was just…we had

a guy that used to be [always going to hide] and actually we ended up getting the guy out of the unit, but he would disappear, and we used to play a game. I used to buy a six pack of beer for the first guy who found where he was, and these guys would scatter. He'd be in some other guy's barracks up on the top floor sleeping on a bunk someplace and these guys got pretty good at tracking them down. That was back in the 1st Division, but once we got back, this is before I went to the embarkation school, and once I got back from San Diego in the Navy school of course the whole thing had changed. I came back to a division that was on alert status, all leave had been cancelled. They had the flat car and box car after box car lined up on the railroad side in case we went down to Topeka, and everything changed. At that point in time, this had been like June or July or something like that, late May maybe, we really started getting counterinsurgency and at that time the ENTANKs, we're not going to go to Vietnam, they knew that, and they gave me…they put me in charge of the aggressor platoon and I became the brigade aggressor platoon. I had to learn a little bit of Vietnamese which I promptly forgot, and of course our job was to be the guerilla and work out there in the field and do the attacks and everything else and the ambushes, and suddenly I discovered from doing that, that that was a far more effective way of fighting than anything else was because we had a wonderful time doing it, and we got…they boosted the unit up to about 35 guys, my platoon to about 35 guys, and more like a company then, and it was mostly some guys that were either not going to be deployed in the division or were [newbie] and we wore Vietnamese-like uniforms and we had our own barracks away from the place, and we had a good time. That's when we started getting the classes and you really did a lot of work on the whole thing at that point in time. But, most of the time, really, as far as your day went was spent in packing and drawing supplies and doing inventories and getting everything set to be shipped over to Vietnam because we basically took everything we had and packed it up and put it into boxes and conex containers and loaded it on flatcars and it went to San Francisco to be shipped to Vietnam. At the end it got pretty frantic of course, but I ended up getting assigned to the division advanced party, and I never understood how I ended up getting all these sort of what I considered neat things, but I ended up doing that. Let me digress just a little bit; while we were…two of the platoon leaders that was in my company was a guy by the name of Keith Fish and Hibbs, and I want you to remember these names

because we'll get back to them later on, but these two guys were…one guy, Fish, was an OCS guy, came up through the ranks, and Hibbs was an ROTC guy, and these guys were absolutely fanatic, gung-ho. I mean, they went out and they bought all kinds of special gear and they put scopes on…we had M-14s then and put scopes on the M-14 and spent hours at the range, and they were gung-ho guys. We'll get back to those. Hibbs ended up getting the Congressional Medal of Honor in Vietnam, post-humuously unfortunately, but that's how most of them get them anyway. So we were sort of packing up and getting set to go, and I got selected for the advance party, so we were to go to Vietnam in a 130 and it was essentially the brigade was in a 130, it was a couple of jeeps and a three-quarter ton pickup truck, and about 25 or 30 of us, and we island hopped across- we left out of Topeka, I guess that was Forbes Air Force Base and flew to Washington state and then to Hawaii and then to Midway and then sort of took forever to get over there. It took us about five or six days to arrive in Vietnam. We arrived, landed at Tan Son Nhut Air Force Base. I can remember that we had all our combat gear and we were locked and loaded and the C-130 taxis in and pulls through the spot and the colonel had us all charge out and set up a perimeter, and we all run out the back of this 130 of course with our M-14s and run out into the weeds and flop down and guard the airplane, and here's a bunch of Air Force load masters lying, sunning themselves in the grass, and looking at us and laughing like Hell. Here we were at Tan Son Nhut Air base. We ended up going over and setting up the staging area at Saigon University which is just right near Tan Son Nhut…not Tan Son Nhut, Bien Hoa, we landed up at Bien Hoa. I'm getting my years confused here. Saigon University was just across from that and we set that up as the base camp. I guess it was maybe five or six or eight miles or so outside of Saigon on Highway 13 I think, setting that place up as division headquarters and where the staging area was going to be, and then they moved the various battalions out to their bases. We were there for a couple three or four weeks before the division arrived. They'd gone by boat and we'd stayed around and shut down the base for various units, turned the keys over to the permanent cadre and then we went over and flew over. They came in by aircraft from Nha Trang, that's where the boats landed, and flew them into Bien Hoa and then we would haul them over…well, not we, but trucks were arranged to take everything over and then pick up the machinery and organize the convoys to get the equipment up and all

that good stuff. I guess we were around Saigon for not very long, maybe from the time the division arrived, maybe a month at the most, probably a couple weeks, and then the various battalions were sent out and most of the equipment that came in went directly up to the battalion sights. My battalion was sent to Lai Khe which was about 18 or 19 miles north of Saigon in a rubber plantation, it was really a beautiful sight. The facility we took over was really all the buildings, the main house and everything else for the rubber plantation. It had a little air strip there. The two battalions, the 1st and the 2nd of the 28th, moved in there. Our battalion had the west side and the 1st of the 28th had the east side and that became the base camp. It was set up, we dug our bunkers. At that time I was in headquarters company for the battalion and I was trying to get an infantry platoon, but because I was doing all this administrative stuff when I went with the advance party they sort of kept me there, and I wasn't particularly happy. I mean, that was not what I liked to do. I'm not a detail guy. My office here would clearly show you what kind of a guy I am. I hate the paperwork and all that stuff and I do it poorly or late usually, but they were really…because I'd been doing that I became sort of…they made me the payroll officer and the currency exchange officer and all this stuff, and I really hated that. So, within a couple of weeks of getting up there…and I was on fairly friendly terms with the battalion commander, a guy by the name of Eisner who was unfortunately…he was in the famous photographs in the news that came back, one of the magazines, he was killed by a sniper and he was really…God, he was a great guy. He was somebody that I really admired. So, I went to see him anyway and I said, "I really hate what I'm doing. I really want to get infantry platoon," so he said, "I'll put that out," but things didn't happen. I was a good scrounger. I would go down to Saigon and I'd scrounge up ice boxes and things like that for them, and I mean, I was probably more useful to them doing stuff like that than anything else. Well, it turns out I finally went to see my company commander and said, "Look, I hate this. I want a platoon. I've got to get a platoon," and there were a couple of guys that were not doing well and they didn't like it, so I ended up getting a platoon, Charlie company, and I was really very, very happy. I liked it. I hate to say that, but I never once considered myself in danger, I never worried about being killed, it wasn't a possibility. I wasn't young. I mean, I'd been around. I was older than most people there because I'd taken a six year or seven year route through college, like my son

did to me, which now I know how my father felt! So I was like 25 and I really enjoyed it. I wanted to do it. Now I'll get back to my two fellow platoon leaders, which was this guy Fish and Hibbs, and of course these guys were…I honestly believe that they were trying to see how close to the edge they could get. They would volunteer for everything. I've never been a volunteerer. So, for example, while my platoon always pulled their rotation and stuff, the old man would ask for something and one of these two guys would be jumping up before the sentence was even out of the guy's mouth, you know. It's like hitting the beeper on one of those quiz shows before the question is done and they would volunteer their men for all of these weird missions, so I never bothered to do that and my guys thought I was great. They really thought that was wonderful. One of the first things I did as platoon leader, everybody thinks the Marines were the first people into Vietnam; well, they weren't. The 1st Division basically was, and we went over to Nha Trang for the Marines to secure the beach for the Marines to do an amphibious landing on the beach, which they did, and of course they came wading ashore and all the cameras were there and all the news people were there, and we were sitting watching this whole thing.

SM: I'm sorry, when did the 1st Division get there? What month and year did the advanced party arrive?

PF: We arrived…it would be late summer in '65, late summer in '65.

SM: So July-August '65?

PF: I wasn't in the Army a year yet when I was in Vietnam. November of '64 I went on active duty and by late summer of '65 I was in Vietnam.

SM: The whole division arrived about the same time?

PF: Yeah, we actually…the people who spent the 30 days on the boat, and we went by plane after they'd left so we all pretty much arrived…we were only in country a couple of days when…let's say we were there a week when the boats come in and we started gathering and moving up.

SM: That's when they arrived at Nha Trang?

PF: Yes.

SM: Real quick question; when you stormed off that plane to set up your perimeter at Bien Hoa, what was your first impression? Here you are, this is your first view of Vietnam. What were your thoughts?

PF: I mean, I suppose we all expected that we were going to be shot at. I mean, we all were pretty dead serious. We had out our steel pots and field gear and everything else and then when you get off there and you find that there are these Air Force guys lying in their T-shirts in the weeds sleeping and drinking cokes, smoking and joking and laughing and telling lies and laughing at us, you look around and after you were there you realized there was nothing happening. You could look out and there was farmers in the rice paddies and it was hotter than hell and I'll tell you what it was like; after we got set up you turned your weapons in to drive into Saigon for an evening, and we used to do that. I mean, it was great fresh [?]. When we drove into Saigon and it was like driving into…it was a beautiful city and it was clean and it was…all the restaurants were going and they had of course the Rex was there, but you'd go to have a great little French meal and then walk around and go into these joints and it was still pretty much a cosmopolitan city in 1965. It was like that for probably, well, for a good deal of the time that I was in there the first trip over, it was just pretty.

SM: How did you understand your unit's mission and what role were you playing in Vietnam? What was the goal?

PF: Well, we felt…I believe that we were over there to stabilize the country and allow it to become a democracy, that in fact the south Vietnamese government was being threatened by the north and it was sort of pretty much as you would think like Korea, and in fact our job there was to stabilize it and to help the south Vietnamese people set up their democracy and that was it. Quite honestly I've always liked sort of banging around places and my impression was of the Vietnamese people that really what they wanted to be was left alone. The average Vietnamese person was agricultural oriented. They had their little farms, their little places that they lived, they had a lifestyle that they'd had for hundreds of years or thousands of years if not, and essentially to the average Vietnamese it didn't matter who was in power, who was there, they just wanted to be left alone. That was basically why I sort of carried…now to this day I have no…I do not believe that the decision to go there to start with was wrong. What I believe was wrong was when the military was not allowed to run it militarily. To give you an example, in Lai Khe we had a 175 battery and they fired H&I, harassing and interdicting fire, and they would use intelligence to pick up these places that there was movement, okay. First of all, they

were dealing with old data, which probably meant their chances were less than 50/50 that they were going to find anything there. But anyway, essentially H&I was supposed to be arbitrary and fixed and the commanders could choose where they wanted and the design was that it was arbitrary and unknown. Well turns out that after a while because it was becoming a problem to other people too that you had to do several things in advance; you had to submit your coordinates of where you were going to fire H&I, you're H&I fire and how you were going to…at what time, and how many rounds, and then you sent that up through chains. Well it went outside of the US military chain and went into the Vietnamese chain, and essentially…well, I don't know whether this was true, I was told that eventually it had to be approved by whatever the province governors were, the military staff of the province that they were shooting in. So it would take three or four days for you to get approval of your H&I. Of course by that time every person in the world…I mean, I can…no matter what we did everybody knew it. We were doing secret three o'clock in the morning departures and we'd go out through the gate and there'd be mamma-sans standing there selling us Coke; now you tell me they just happen to spend 24 hours a day there? Bullshit, they knew what was going on, and so in essence, I think that had the…in the beginning there was a military solution I believe, it was not allowed to happen for political reasons, and I've got the unique – maybe not unique – but certainly I have the perspective of having been back to Vietnam in the late '60s and again in the early '70s, so I saw the process through a long period of time including the destruction of the country and other things, and by the end certainly I felt the only reasonable solution was to get the hell out of there because it was obvious that it was never going to turn out the way it was supposed to, and I really believe that was a very high probability, had they been allowed to do what needed to be done early on. But then it just became a war of attrition and it was a shame. I felt sorry for the country even though I don't really know that I want to go back or not now, but I felt sorry.

SM: Let me ask you a quick question about what you just mentioned.

PF: Yeah?

SM: You said that you'd have early morning departures I guess to go on patrols or missions?

PF: Yep.

SM: And the mamma-sans would be outside the gate waiting for you to sell you Cokes on your way out?

PF: Yeah.

SM: Were there Vietnamese working in your compound, in your base camp?

PF: Yeah, but most of these things were really…we didn't have a lot. In the early days, you didn't have a lot inside, and they were not allowed to remain inside at night. Most of these things we wouldn't hear about them. We'd know we would have a movement and we wouldn't know about them until I went in for my briefing for the next day at say six o'clock at night, and we'd sit down and we'd get the briefing, and "Here's where we're going, here's what we're going to do, and we could be leaving at three in the morning and we could be leaving at nine in the morning, it depends, or we could be being lifted out someplace from the air strip," and so you really wouldn't know where you were going until just before you went. You knew that you were going. Now some of the bigger things we did you planned on them forever. I mean, you talked about them for weeks before you did them like some of the big operations that we did, and I forget their names now, but most of the patrols, the day patrols we did, you were really told just before you left, and but these were all…every place you went essentially you were being…this was at the end of that year, the first part wasn't that way. In the end they always knew, somehow everybody knew where the hell you were going and if they knew, who else knew?

SM: This is the end of '65?

PF: That would probably be towards the middle of '67…end of '66 I mean. I was in-country from I would say August of '65 to August of '66 basically.

SM: When did you take over Charlie Company?

PF: That would have been…

SM: Not Charlie Company, but you took over a platoon in Charlie Company.

PF: That would have been probably in well, hang on a second. Just hang on a second.

SM: Sure.

PF: Say that was a bit about maybe October of '65.

SM: Do you know what platoon it was?

PF: No, I don't. I could find out but I don't remember what it was. I just don't remember that.

SM: October of 1965?

PF: Yeah.

SM: What kind of operations did your platoon conduct in '65?

PF: Basically search and destroy and sweeps. The first thing we did was with the Marines. We did a joint – when they came ashore – we did a joint thing. Actually that generates one of the funny stories too. There was a guy that was…we were sort of this Marine platoon and a shot was fired and everybody thought it was a sniper and it was a little village there. These Marines, they went into the village. They were all trained, they were trained for all the stuff, they were ready to go, and they threw a hand grenade into a grass shack because they thought that's where the person was and there was nobody in there except the grass shack didn't stop much of the shrapnel coming through the walls, and these three guys were carted off with purple hearts. It was a riot, we all just laughed at them. They went up north, they traveled up the shore up to Danang where they ended up. We went back and we finished our sweep through there which was over the shore just sort of north of Nha Trang, and that's where we had the first confirmed battalion kill. Up to that point we really had not seen anything. It had been virtually nothing. We had a lot of landmines, we had guys killed already, but really there was almost nothing…a few odds and ends, some people wounded, but we never knew what we did because everything was at night. It was strictly harassing stuff and it was this guy Fish who got the first confirmed kill with his M-14 and his scope on it, and we picked up a lot of stuff. Anyway, another story comes out of this thing which was this guy…sometime at that point in time, and I may be losing months here or so, but I mean, the city of Birmingham, Alabama adopted the 1st Division and this guy Hibbs, in part of the stuff that they'd gotten out of this little village they got into, they got a hell of a lot of really good intelligence information, supply lists, all kinds of stuff. Of course among it there was a North Vietnamese flag, so he scarfed up this flag for himself, but that's something that you just don't keep. I mean, he hung it up in his tent, so the word got out. All that stuff was supposed to be turned in, right? Well, the papers and stuff were, but he kept the flag. Well the word came out that this guy had this north Vietnamese flag and at that point in

time the sergeant major of the 1st Division was retiring and he was being sent…and one of his duties on his way out was to go by the city of Birmingham and bring back a truck load of momentos from Vietnam for the City of Birmingham museum or whatever, whatever they're doing there for the 1st Division. So the word came on through to this guy Fish that it would be very nice if he would give this flag to be sent back to Birmingham, of course he told them to pound sand. Then the word came down a little more forcefully that not only would it be very nice but it was actually mandatory that he give this flag to be taken back to Vietnam. He had no option actually because it was supposed to be…it was intelligence material. We ended up having a little ceremony. We had this sort of nice officer's club that was one of the older buildings on the plantation so we had this little ceremony where he gave the flag to the company commander who gave the flag to the battalion commander who gave the flag to the brigade commander who gave the flag to the division commander who gave the flag to the sergeant major and saluted him and said, "Sergeant Major, take this flag back to the City of Birmingham with the best wishes of the men and woman of the 1st Infantry Division." Then we had a little reception afterwards, and of course this guy Fish was getting a good snoot full of beer because it was free. If it was free, you drank a lot. He's over there sort of chuckling to himself, and I said, "What the hell are you laughing about? You gave up your flag which you swore you never would!" So he says, "Go over and look at that flag. Go look at the corner of that flag and you're going to see," and over in the corner of that flag was this little initial sewn in there and I came back and he said, "That's a phony flag. The real one I shipped home. I had that one made in Saigon." So apparently the flag in Birmingham is a hand-made flag from Saigon he had made for the occasion, but…

SM: That's funny.

PF: It really was. The mission we had was essentially search and destroy, just sweep missions.

SM: What were the rules of engagement as they were presented to you?

PF: If you were shot at, you shot back. But, it was not…it happened so rarely. I mean, I say…and it's the same, I'm sure it's the same for everybody. I mean, here are all the great fights. The 1st Division had a hell of a good fight, we had a hell of a good fight in our battalion, but essentially you're out there walking through the bush. Most of the

casualties we had were land mines and things like that. You would go out…It was sort of alternated, you'd spend a couple of days doing day sweeps, come on back, and then alternating in there you'd get some night patrols where you'd go out and set up a listening post or something, and then you would do a couple of days out. The day trips were usually in the form of platoon sized operations, sometimes a company minus type thing, maybe two platoons or something, and the overnighters were usually company and larger. We probably spent about half the time outside the base camp and the other half inside. Longest trip that we had was about 35 days, maybe 40 days. We went to the Michelin plantation and was on the road for about that time. We did have a week or so on an artillery base camp where we'd sort of be rested for a bit, but most of the time we spent walking. You'd do 20 clicks a day, 25 clicks a day. You carried your food. Usually we would get a hot meal every day, at either lunch or dinner time, lived on C-rations. My platoon sergeant, my first one was Sergeant Lynch, he lived on beer. He didn't like C-rations so he had his socks filled with…you always carried lots of socks, that was the only thing you really cared about was your feet. Underwear, you'd always tell the new guys, they'd go out with a pack and they'd have a change of underwear and stuff. Well you never bothered with underwear. You may put it on when you walked out the first time but after four or five days you just put it into the cathole with your daily dump and left it buried. But you always carried socks and you always washed them, changed them a couple times a day, and washed them in a stream or something and you'd hang them on your pack to dry, and the guys really…what you'd end up doing was you'd keep your C-rations stuffed in your socks, and they would hang off the back, and then when you stopped you'd have C-rations. Well he kept his socks filled with beer. We'd stop for lunch someplace and Sgt. Lynch would drink a couple of cans of beer and off we'd go. Most of the stuff was just sort of sweeping through.

SM: There wasn't any concern that that might impair his judgement?

PF: No. Not a bit.

SM: There weren't any regulations against that?

PF: Yeah, I'm sure there were, but he was a good sergeant. He was a combat experienced in Korea. I don't ever remember him being remotely impaired in any way,

and it was something that I had no problem with. He ate too, but essentially he did not…he liked his beer and that was it.

SM: How about the other soldiers, how did they respond to that?

PF: No problem whatsoever. It was much different. It was…I mean, beer was very common. That was not considered anything. I'm sure there were Army rules but I don't say he drank. Probably in the course of a day he maybe only drank four or five beers but that would be over the whole day. It's not like he was drinking…you couldn't carry that much. When we got someplace, that was basically it. He used it instead of water basically. That never entered my mind, and Sergeant Lynch was a good person to have around. My next sergeant was Sergeant Humfords and he was a good person to have around, too.

SM: When you'd come across, or did you ever come across a Viet Cong soldier or group of soldiers that didn't fire? You said the rules of engagement were if you were fired upon, fire back?

FP: No, no we never…actually, the truth is that we never…only one time in my trip over there did we run across organized units of any kind. Most of what we ran into were snipers and things like that. The 1st Division…probably our battalion's greatest action if you want to call it, that's not the right word exactly, but the most involved action was one we had just north of our base camp, close enough so that the 175 could reach us, so it's whatever their range was just barely, we were too far for them to safely shoot to the side of where we were and we had A-1Es in there doing their thing and F-100s but for the most part, it was within 15 or 20 miles of base camp where we woke up. It was pretty much the same, in large units, you'd set up a perimeter, and in the morning you all dig in and then in the morning you'd get up and the helicopter would come in and drop off whatever they had to drop in for the day and they'd leave and then you'd fill in your fox holes and you'd pack up and get ready to move out for the day, and this is the event where Hibbs got his medal of honor. He had volunteered—his platoon had done a night patrol and when he came in through the perimeter in the morning, we don't really know what happened, we thought that he'd probably miscounted his troops, forgot to count himself or something, anyway, he went back out. He thought somebody had fallen asleep and he left them back there, so he went back out himself and what was really happening

was during the course of the night the Viet Cong and the regulars had basically surrounded this basically almost a battalion size perimeter and was just waiting for us to fill in our fox holes and the minute we filled in our foxholes and had no place to go—remember this is out in the [latter right flats] we were wide open—they were prepared to attack, well when Hibbs went out, he stumbled on to a patrol moving up and open fired on them and sprung the whole thing early and we were all, the whole battalion, was still all dug in and the fire fight lasted into the afternoon and amazingly, to the best of my knowledge, there wasn't one single American killed in that whole thing. I don't where this fit into the scheme of things, but to my knowledge, it was the first time that we had run up against… the regulars, and when we finally found Hibbs, he'd killed just a whole bunch of them, he was surrounded by them, and he'd gone out with a blaze of glory for sure, for sure. But if that hadn't happened, I don't know what would have happened. I believe, myself, that if he had not miscounted and gone out there and stumbled on these guys coming up into position, and open fired on them by himself, that we probably would have been massacred because they were totally surrounded and it went on for the whole damn day. Fortunately the 175s could reach it and the A-1Es, of course they got about four hour over the site which was fantastic and then they just disappeared and that was it, it was over with.

SM: How large was your unit there?

PF: A battalion minus.

SM: Two companies, three companies…

PF: Yeah, three companies, four...plus we probably had a few of recon platoons things like that.

SM: Did you have a confirmed enemy kill?

PF: We did. I never believed them anyway, but it was a lot, it was the first time we really got into it.

SM: What about at the platoon level. When you would go out on your patrols, your search and destroy missions, what was the largest unit you, as a platoon leader, ever encountered?

PF: It's hard to say the exact number. I would say that probably five or six. I would usually have maybe twenty of us out there or something like that. It was almost

always total insurgency type thing, a few shots, maybe a couple mortar rounds and then a few shots. It was really very, very spotty and you might go along for ages and have absolutely nothing. I always described it as hours of boredom separated by moments of stark terror, which I guess that's a pretty common description, but it was very interesting…back then it was really a beautiful country. There were a number of things… for example, they did this thing…and I believe the word they used was "levitate". They used CBUs and of course you had the elephant grass, it was really tall, I mean it was 8, 10, 12, 14 feet tall. Of course that was great hiding place, and they used to go in with these CBUs and they would drop them—CBUs are those little cluster bombs, you know—and they would just drop them over this area and it would mow it down. It was like some giant, humongous lawn mower went through there. Of course, they failed to calculate that a goodly percent of those little buggers don't go off so nobody in their right mind wanted to walk into the damn place. But they used that to open up like a fire break almost where they could…and then what would happen is you would have a couple of platoons from each battalion would sort of start a sweep and they were, kind of like driving pheasant and you'd sort of sweep toward this area that was opened up and the other people would be sitting up on the other side or something. You know, they'd do a lot of stuff. They'd lift you back and forth with helicopters and what have you. But we never saw a whole lot. The worst small action that we saw was, this was up in the mission plantation, and our recon platoon had called in they were under attack and then we lost contact with them and they sent my platoon out to relieve them and we could hear the firing after we'd been walking for a while, maybe a half hour or so, we could hear it and then it stopped and we ran into some light sniper fire but essentially there was nothing and we found the recon platoon, all the guys had been killed. They had all jumped into the same…plantations had these trenches that ran down through the trees for drainage and they had taken a sniper fire in front of them and they all dived into the same trench and at the end of the trench was a guy with a machine gun, apparently, and they had no place to go, it was just brutal. But it was…nine or eleven or something like that. Actually, that was the first time that we had ever really…we had the odd guy killed, but that was first time we ever saw what you would consider a line up of casualties. Probably the most sobering time I had over there and something I don't remember about very

often, which is fine, cause that's what you don't want to remember, you want to remember the funny crap that goes on. I had a machine gunner—you talk about the funny things—and he was from Detroit and he was a big guy, I mean he was a big, muscular guy, and he had the largest penis that you'd ever seen in your life. I mean, you took a shower with him and you would look at him and you'd look at yourself and you'd say "is God making a joke of me," you know. Anyway, he was out taking a dump in a CAT hole and a sniper shot him and the sniper shot and it went, and the round went through the calf, not the calf, the upper thigh of his legs and when it went between right and left or left and right, whichever way it went, it just nicked the head of this cock, and we hear this "Ahhh" this terrible scream and this guy comes running up, holding onto his cock in his hand screaming that he's been shot "I've been shot in my dick, I've been shot in my dick," and we jump on him and of course the back of his legs are a mess, and this guy is one big guy, and we hold him down, we get him sort of bandaged up and get the helicopter to come in, and we load him on and off he goes, and we didn't expect to ever see him back. Well, apparently it was like a lot of things, it looked much worse than it really was, because he was back in about four or five weeks. Well anyway, where this thing went through, where it just nicked the head, it grew this knob of scar tissue which the Army said they were going to take care of, but anyway this guy, we had this little company club, it was just a GP medium with an ice box in it and a couple of tables and you could sit there and drink sodas or beer at night, and we'd get these new guys in and at the drop of a hat, he'd pull this sucker out and slop it down on top of the table and say "yeah man, they're going to love me in Detroit, the only guy on the street with a built in French tickler." I mean it was, I had this other kid that came in and he was a really, really nice kid, but there was just something wrong with him. First of all, we'd go out on a day trip and by the end of the morning he'd be perspiring profusely and would be limping and we'd end up carrying him back. So the first couple of times we carried him back and I went to see the old man, and I said "we can't do it. We just can't do it," I said "first of all I don't know how the hell he got in the Army, he's got this deformed leg and he's limping and we can't be taking him because I can't be carrying him around for the whole damn day when he passes out. He can't take the heat and everything else." So we got the doc down, Doc Kline, and he interviewed the kid and he came back and he said

"look, I don't know how this kid ever got in the Army, he's probably got an I.Q. of about 90, 85 or 90," he's barely…he had a broken leg as a kid and it had not healed properly, it was off centered, so he said "my recommendation is to just have him do something up here in the company and leave him alone and keep him away from sharp weapons, from any weapon, that includes sharp weapons like knives and forks." Cause he was always losing his gun, he'd forget where he put his rifle down and so he ended up being the permanent garbage can guy and he was happy as could be. We had a guy by the name of Lewis who also carried an M-60 for me and he'd get an award for bravery and he'd be busted at the same award ceremony practically. When we came into base camp, he would disappear, and he'd go out and he'd be shacked up with somebody, but he'd always show up in time to leave. He probably got it from his mamma-san, the lady he was living with, but it was … We did a lot of hops around the helicopters, getting kicked out. We went into one hot LZ where I ended up getting my Purple Heart. We lost my company, pretty much my company…I was the only officer left, everybody else was carried out. A CO was killed, a few guys killed, this guy Lewis was killed, he was my radio guy and he was standing in front of me and he took a round right through the radio and if he hadn't been…I don't know, it's really just amazing. What I got was just purely….I never left the field…a couple of bandages and I left, I mean I stayed there. When we got back in they pulled a bunch of shrapnel out of me, but nothing that was more than four or five stitches or something, but that was the only time. What had done the worst damage to the company was we got air strikes coming in and we used colored smoke and we used purple smoke for the Medevac and you use whatever else you have to get the air strikes in on you and an F-100 was coming in and the guy was told the wrong smoke or he got screwed up, whatever it was, and he came in on our Medevac smoke and dropped his load on top of us. Actually, that was a very bad day there. But after that, we sort of regrouped. Got a lot of new guys in, of course, and you had to start to training because by that time we really hadn't had any mass casualties in the company at all. So suddenly everybody else came in new, you had a new CO and all kinds of new guys in and you started from scratch again. We did a sweep where we ended up going through a village and we had taken all kinds of rounds out of the village and we ended up spending the night outside of it and waiting for somebody else to come up and help us out. Of

course by that time, everybody was gone, the place was empty, we found a little pig and the little piglet was in a jar. I also got a Vietnamese crossbow and sling shot that we carried around. But this was one of our big long sweeps, we were on the road probably for three weeks and of course, we had this pig and we decided we were going to make this pig our pet—this little black and white piglet—and so we started carrying him and we fed him C-rations and during the day we'd take turns, everybody took a shot at carrying the pig, and of course by the end of the three weeks this pig had gotten bigger than he was at the beginning and he got to be pretty damn…and by the end we were thinking about not getting him back to base camp, but we got him back to base camp. We named him George after our CO, George Daly, which is the guy that was killed, and he lived up by the mess hall and he grew to be a good sized pig. Anyway a couple drunk guys came back one night and they were farm boys from some place, they decided that George needed to be castrated and they tried and we caught them, but George had been cut up. So we called up Doc Kline, the battalion surgeon, who was a nice guy and he came down and he didn't have the faintest idea so we got the division vet on the phone and he told Doc Kline what to do and he stitched George back up, and when I left, George was still there. Big pig. George was not a Vietnamese pot-bellied pig, he was a big pig!

SM: Take a quick step back and ask you a question about…you mentioned the hot LZ where you were injured., when you got the Purple Heart. What was the purpose of that operation and how long did you actually end up staying in the field?

PF: We were going into a search and destroy…I'm trying to remember…we were being inserted by Hueys into this…it wasn't rice paddies, it was a dry area, and we were going to be the hammer of a search through, this is sort of just towards the river, the Cambodia side of the Michelin Plantation, and it was just sort of a routine thing we'd been doing off and on the whole damn time. The first ship went in and he was ahead of the rest of us by a bit and then he lifted off and there was probably three or four ships that were on the ground and just as they were touching down, they just opened up on the LZ and two of the helicopters stayed there, they didn't get off the ground and the rest of them couldn't land because the LZ was pretty much was blocked up. They got one more ship came into the side and they kicked some more guys out, but basically you had six Hueys

had dropped off—and you carried 8-10 guys in a ship—so you figured you had many 25-30 guys on the ground and we had to cover overhead, so we called that in immediately and the old man was already on the ground so he had been hit right away. He was one of the first guys that had gotten hit. That's when we called in the F-100. We had two of those guys up above. The first guy came and dropped their load out just where we were looking for, out on the perimeter and in the meantime we also had the Medevac coming in—they'd gotten space cleared. There was one helicopter that couldn't fly but they moved it away and the other one was shut down and sat there, so there was room to get the Medevac in and that's when the second bird came in and dropped his load on top of us, CBUs if I remember, and thank God it was, thank God it wasn't Napalm or something. That was just a full cover of whole LZ practically and you know it was pure blind luck whether you got it or didn't get it. It was like being shot at with a shot gun and not having any pellets hit you, you know, it's lucky, but by that time the Medevac left and he didn't get hit, it was a strange thing, too, and they got the hell out of there and they got a couple more helicopters in, but by that time it was over. It was basically over when the F-100s showed up. I felt sorry that the F-100 pilot…apparently he ended up going to the hospital and seeing everybody that was in the hospital and writing to everybody that was killed, and I don't know whether he ever flew or not again, that was tough on him. I guess that would have probably been in May or something of '66, sometime back in then.

SM: Do you remember, or did you ever ascertain the size of the enemy unit that had attacked you?

PF: No, never idea. I doubt it was humongous, it was probably just scattered out should have…they did have some heavy stuff, they did have some .50 calibers or something like that. By that time we were carrying 60 millimeter mortars and everybody carried four or five rounds on their backpack, so we had that going by then, too, we just shot out of the helmet, you know, put the helmet on the ground and put that helmet in your hands and just dropped the rounds down in and you got pretty good. The guys that did that got damn good on where they put that sucker, it was amazing. A little 60 millimeter mortar, we used that a lot at the end, that was something we carried around and everybody took a shot, myself included, carrying the tube and you just sort of rotated

off. The only guy who didn't carry the tube were the two M-60 guys, they figured they had enough to carry, cause we made them carry a lot of ammo. But I guess, you know you think back at some of the funny things, I can remember I had this old sergeant and he talked with this gravelly voice and he'd been in Korea and he'd call me up, the land-line would crank and I'd pick up and he'd say "lieutenant Faber, they're coming through the wire" and I'd say, his name was Smokey, "what do you mean coming through the wire?" "Coming through the wire" he says "they're coming through the wire." So we'd crawl up and we'd pop a flare and they'd be nothing out there. Pretty soon you hear some shooting going on and you'd run down to the perimeter and you say "what's going on?' and he says "they're coming through the wire, we drove them off." Actually he sounded like chicken little, you know. Finally he called one night and he said "there's a tiger, there's a tiger in front of us" and everybody laughed. So we hear a round goes off, and damn we go down there and there was a tiger. The tiger was gone, but there was blood and there was tiger fur where the guy had jumped off. Smokey ended up going back and we ended up getting a monkey at the time and named him Smokey because, I don't know, we all liked the guy. But Smokey used to take a fancy to the old man's tent. He'd go up there and crash the old man's tent and one day we got told that if he ever caught Smokey in his tent, he was dead, and one day one of the guys came running up and said "Smokey's gone, Smokey's gone" and we headed for the old man's tent and we heard a round about half way up there, and that was the end of Smokey. At night we got a fair amount of mortars towards the end. In the beginning there was none of that. On the fields we would occasionally get mortars at night. Not often.

SM: How about friendly fire incidents?

PF: The F-100 would have been the only one. We had a couple of short rounds from artillery, but nothing that was…I guess you'd call that friendly fire, but it was really just a short round. A lot of accidents, fair number of accidents. You know, guys tripping and shooting a gun off and things like that, but no, really, with the exception of the F-100. That's the only experience that I personally had with friendly fire. That wasn't happy to see, suddenly we got close I was very happy to see him. And yet again, you say that and except for that one time where we got sort of surrounded, I doubt if we ever had huge numbers that we were facing, probably no more than we were.

It was just in the bush, you know, they'd shoot a couple rounds and you'd return fire and the guys got pretty good at moving around. I never recall anybody that was worried or anything, and they did their job and you'd go there and you'd find where they had been, and they were gone. The most common thing was these stupid…was land mines, things like that. We were doing a patrol along this abandoned railroad and we had our positions set up there and I bet you all of us had walked up and down this one little trail fifty times, and one day, I mean we were only there for two days, and nobody had gone in and out, we were there and there'd been this mine there, nobody had stepped on it until we were leaving, and one guy stepped on it on the way out and I bet you we'd all stepped within two or three inches of it at one time or another, but anybody in the platoon could have got it. That was the biggest problem you had, a few booby traps, you ran across these primitive things that really… you wonder if there were just for effect, they never expected to get anybody, spike things sticking out and what have you. But overall it was pretty boring. You think back, I mean it was, I can remember we were at this fire base up in the Michelin Plantation. We were playing cards on top of a bunker. In fact, it's the only place I have a picture of me, out of all my trips to Vietnam of being…the only picture of me that's there and suddenly the guys I'm playing cards with, they got this expression on their face and they just jump off and run like hell, and I look around and there sitting up looking at me by…I mean it could have reached me, was this humongous cobra probably about thirty feet behind me. Of course I took off, too. Then we tried to get it, it took off like a shot and was gone. We had one snakebite over there and that happened in the base camp and the snake had got into a guy's boot and he put his boot on and he got bit.

SM: What kind of snake was it?

PF: No idea. It took off. It was a small snake and they had two kind of anti-venom they gave him and the guy didn't even leave Lai Khe. I mean he did, the next day when they hauled him down, but he wasn't even gone, but he was back in a couple weeks walking. There were fire ants, you know, they used to have these ants that made their nests in the trees and they would kill you. Somebody would snap a branch back and it'd have a nest in it, it'd hit you and it'd come down on top of you. You'd end up stripping your clothes off to get the damn things out. They'd chew you up like mad. I don't know,

I look back on it and I gained weight. I loved C-rations. I gained weight, I can remember we were out some place and a helicopter came in and it turns out it was the [DePugh] at that time he was the assistant division commander, and we're sitting around, of course we hadn't seen a general in the time we'd been over there right, so we all jump up and he looks at me and he asks how long I've been platoon leader, and I told him. He said you're pretty big to be…I said, "I like C-rations!" I was on a mission and we were being resupplied at this little air base by Caribous and the guy who was on there with the stuff they were bringing out was looking for me and I had orders to go back and take my flight physical, I was supposed to go to flight school from the first division, but my orders were more than 90 days from the deployment date, so they canceled my flight school orders and sent me to…I was ROTC flight and so the deal I had was I got my [Priv] out of college and I was going to go to flight school, but it got canceled, so when I came back from Vietnam, I went back to flight school. Most of the officers ended up bringing private sidearms with them, I had a [Walther] PPK and most guys carried private sidearms, but very shortly after arriving there, we turned in the M-14s and we got the M-16s.

SM: What did you think of the M-16s?

PF: It was a good gun. Some of the early ones didn't have the follower to seat the [bolt], that changed very quickly. They had a thing about automatic weapons and we were never allowed to have any ones that could fire automatically, not that it really mattered. It was good, we had no problems, we had more problems with the M-60 but that more depended on the gunner than anything else. If a guy looked after it, if he cleaned it…everybody carried after a while we had the plastic bags over the muzzle to keep the crap out of the muzzle, but I don't ever remember having one misfire on me. Carried the M-40 grenade launchers, had a couple of…we had two or three of those that we'd scrounged up. You ended up carrying a lot of stuff that wasn't [TO&E] and you didn't carry many clothes. You carried basically socks and that was about it, as far as clothes go. You wore what you had on your back and you washed when it rained and you smelled after a while and nobody bothered you, you smelled the same as everybody else, it was fine. Some private sidearms [??] we had the .60 millimeter, a few guys had traded for odds and ends that they had. We didn't have flak vests back then, you didn't

wear a flak vest. You wore a steel pot which actually…one guy got a horn shot right into what would have been his forehead, but it had to be slightly off, and the round went through the steel, but stayed between the steel and the liner and splintered up things and the guy had some superficial cuts on his forehead and the side of his head, but he lived. We're talking about superficial, and that guy wore that helmet from that point on. He got a new liner for it and he wore that helmet with the hole in it. You talk about the guys, and I had a bunch of good guys, you know men, I think we all got along, there was a fairly normal mix of black and white.

SM: Any racial tension?

PF: Not that I ever recall. If there was I was oblivious to it. My guy Lewis, was my RTO, he was…I mean we lived together. It was really, I don't recall any problems like that. Essentially the deal was that everybody looked after everyone else and everybody just wanted to go home. There was two things you looked forward to, your R&R and going home and the goal was to see that happen. That was my goal. That's why I never volunteered my men for anything I didn't have to. I didn't put them any more in harm's way than I wanted to put myself in harm's way. Yet, when we ran into situations, I can't remember where I found anybody that I thought did something that was stupid or wrong. They all knew their job…a sniper went out, I didn't have to tell anybody to do anything. The guys that were doing the wings were immediately moving with their partners, it was all pretty good. Nobody moaned about doing what had to happen and we were all grateful for Hibbs and Fish, they were …the time I look back at it, I could tell little stories that I remember forever about the things. I did my R&R that year… the major that had been my instructor in ROTC was in Thailand as the advisor to either the king's or the queen's [Cobra's] which was an elite unit in the Thai Army, and I went over and basically spent my R&R not living with them, but seeing them everyday. He was a nice guy and we knew each other. Most of the guys in my unit they wanted to go either to Singapore or Hong Kong—some place close and quick where they could spend their money in a real big hurry and get back there right. For the most part, my turn over, I guess I probably had five or six guys that were killed and maybe another…I probably rolled my platoon over, while I was the platoon leader of it, maybe twice. It may have been as far as count goes. But there were three of us that were in the platoon

from…they were there when I arrived in the platoon and we went home together and this the whole time and that was fairly common. I probably lost as many guys probably to VD as I did to death.

SM: What would happen to those guys?

PF: I don't know. They would go…we had a brigade commander, was a guy by the name of Broadbeck, I think or Broderick or something like that, I think it was Broadbeck and this guy was religious and he decided that there was too much sin and sex going on and that our VD rate was too high. Our V rate was like six percent. Which wasn't too bad at all actually. They had higher rates than that in Europe at the time, I think. Anyway, he decided that if the men couldn't buy rubbers in the little PX store, that they wouldn't engage in sex. Now it has to be one of the greatest military intelligence stories you want to say in your life. So of course, our VD rate to, you know, just skyrocketed. He pulled them out of the PX. Most guys got treated and that was it and came back. We had one guy that got something that nobody knew what it was and he never came back, but I mean, he fought that for ages and they finally sent him back, but I personally was always worried about something that uncurable and I didn't want...I never really…I was abstinent for my time there. I didn't want to bring anything home. I understood. Certainly, you go out of the country R&R and you're a grunt and married or unmarried you think you can always…I say that and I never once thought about it, I could possibly be killed, it was never a possibility. I know when they went on R&R they'd do whatever they wanted to do with whatever they wanted to do it with because they came back and more than one would say "well, I can die happy now." It was sort of black humor, I guess. I don't know, I think the time I spent as a grunt, I thoroughly enjoyed it. I didn't begrudge a second of it. I'm glad I did it. I know some of my friends that stayed in the headquarters companies thought that I was nuts to make an issue to become a platoon leader, but I wouldn't have traded that year for anything. I really liked it. And of course, I went and took my flight physical and that brings one last story up as I remember. I got in this Caribou and I landed at Tan Son Nhut and I'm wet out of the field and this is one of the longer trips we're on so I'm grungy, I've got .60 mm mortars on my packboard, I've got smoke grenades and hand grenades hanging on me and I smell really bad, and they dump me off in Tan Son Nhut and I'm standing there, I haven't the

faintest idea where I'm going except that I'm supposed to fly this medical detachment there was going to take me to the hospital. And while I'm standing there looking around, these two colonels walk by me in their Saigon outfits and look at me, and one said "Lieutenant, do you always come to Saigon looking like that?" I looked at him and I say "Sir, I just came out of the field" and they walked on mumbling to each other. But I went and took my flight physical and then the next day I was thrown back on a Caribou and taken back out to the unit. When we got back in I heard that the flight physical was satisfactory and that was it. So when I came back from Vietnam, my time, my ROTC commitment was over with, so I had orders to rotary wing school, and I had spent my time there getting out of helicopters. I didn't like anything that helicopters did. I didn't want to do it myself. So I ended up telling infantry branch, "Look, here's your choice I'm getting out or I'm going to fixed wing school" and they sent me to fixed wing school. Stopped at Forth Riley to see my wife, long enough to father my son, I suppose, that's what she says anyway! Then I went off to Fort Stuart Georgia for the first half of flight school and I was assigned to Fort Benning from Fort Riley, so as soon as I could get Lizzie moved down, I got her moved down to Fort Benning, with the trailer moved, so all through flight school, the first six months was at Fort Stuart, the last was at Fort Rucker, I'd drive home every weekend I could to see Lizzie and Annie, our daughter, who at that time thought that "Daddy" meant a helicopter, that's what Lizzie would do was take her outside and point out a helicopter that would fly over and say "Daddy" and so as far as Annie was concerned, "Daddy" meant "helicopter". I went to fixed wing school, went to Fort Benning as an operations officer, a training officer, for a third aviation group which was basically a training unit. The job at that time was to pick up brand new [Chinook] helicopters from Boeing, bring them down to Fort Benning and then train whole company units at one time, maintenance and everything on the Chinook and then they would take the Chinooks and fly them to Sharp Army Depot in California and they'd go on and take their unit to Vietnam and the whole unit would go together. I did that for a while and then I got orders in, right before Jamie was born, I got orders sending me to rotary wing qualification course and back to Vietnam to a helicopter unit. So second tour I called up Branch and said "look, my son's going to born and the rules are for the second tour I can stay for my child to be born." So they said "OK, we canceled the orders." So it was like

they were in the delivery room with my wife, I wasn't, I was sent home as I was the first time. Within a week of my son being born, I get virtually identical orders—the unit changed, but everything else was the same. It was a rotary wing school in Vietnam to a Huey unit, which I wanted nothing to do with. So I called branch up again, I said "look guys, I really don't want to go to fly helicopters. I did it and I think you can help me out here, I'm second tour" and that time there were very few second tour people and they said "what do you want to do?" I said, at that time the brand new plane was a U-21, I said, "I'd like to fly a U-21!" So we both got a good chuckle at that, right, "Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!" and he said, "what do you really want to do?" I said, "I don't care, I don't want to fly helicopters." I said, "I'll fly bird dogs." He said, "You'll fly bird dogs?" I said, "I'll fly bird dogs." He said, "Ok, consider those orders canceled, we'll cut new orders for you and you'll be flying bird dogs." So fine, I was looking forward to that, that would have been fun, and it was fun. You met most of those guys there, those guys flew bird dogs in Vietnam and good stories come out of there.

SM: Before we get into that, I need to ask you a few more questions about your first tour.

PF: Sure.

SM: I want to take one step back a little bit to the recon platoon that you came across that got hit. When you came upon them, I was wondering, had the Vietnamese unit that killed them, had they processed them in any way? Had they taken their uniforms and their weapons or did they just leave them like they had killed them?

PF: There was a couple of weapons missing, but other than that, they just left them. But we were coming up on it when that happened.

SM: So you were very close…

PF: We were within…actually we could still hear shooting and we were there within thirty minutes of the shooting stopping. So we were fairly close and there was nobody alive, they were all dead. There was nobody twitching, there was nothing. That was it. So we secured the perimeter, we called back in, and of course, that was probably the worst thing that happened to the battalion, to the brigade. So it was a big deal. So very quickly we were relieved and when we left another unit was in there and they had come out with Jeeps and an APC and we hoofed back and they brought the bodies in and

we had a ceremony then and they shipped them out at that point in time. They hadn't at all. They were just there. The minute you got there and saw what happened, there were two or three of the guys that were not in that trench, but there was enough…we found at least four sites where they had been shooting from, they walked right into a classic ambush.

SM: What was the most important lesson, or what were the most important lessons you learned during your first tour, that you took away from that?

PF: Oh dear, this philosophical stuff. This is not laughing and telling lies, you know.

SM: Not philosophical necessarily, but practical, that served you well.

PF: I suppose that the lesson I learned was that you could do things that were, that most people found, wouldn't do. And everything you found you could find some humor and some fun, and that's pretty much what I carried back from that, was that from that point on I suppose, I always looked for the humor in a situation. That's probably for me, that's what I came out of it with and I've carried it to this day—you probably saw that anyway. That's probably the most important thing and certainly it was the first time in my life, other than playing football, where you trusted somebody in the real world. Football's not your real world. Don't tell that to anybody at Texas Tech, now! Where you actually trusted somebody to do their job and didn't worry about it getting done and were actually disappointed when it wasn't done right. But really I think, probably the humor part, that was what I carried away from it.

SM: And what was the most difficult thing about being a platoon leader, an infantry platoon leader in Vietnam?

PF: (long pause) I didn't find it at all difficult. I think probably what…I suppose you have to get the guys to trust you; that you're not going to do something stupid. I mean most of the other guys in the other platoons wanted to come to my platoon because they knew, they thought their chances were better. I didn't find anything hard about it. I mean I found things I didn't like to do, but I didn't find anything hard. I guess I probably can't answer that question at all well. I'll think about it as we're talking.

SM: When you came back to the United States to go on to flight school what kind of reception did you receive when you first landed in the United States and got off the plane. Where did you come in through, and was there anything going on?

PF: I came in through San Francisco. There was nothing going on. This was 1966 so the worst of it hadn't even started yet. I just simply, you know, was in uniform. I was processed through, I forget where I was processed though. They found some of my contraband, but not all of it. I got my crossbow back and a few things like that my slingshot they did get my AK-47, but for the most part that was it.

SM: Did you get in trouble for that?

PF: No. He took it. They knew it was there. They probably found it in Vietnam and they just didn't want to hold up the line getting out of there, so they knew it was there and they just said "we need to take any weapons you happen to have." There was nothing said at all about, it was just straightforward. From there I went straight away to the airport and got a standby ticket home. That was it. It was sort of really, really strange. You got through the processing center. I forget where that was actually. We came in…how did I come back? I think I came back civilian, charter. I went over 130. I think I came back civilian charter. I know it was San Francisco and we went through a processing center and that was basically it. They checked your…some guy gave you an eyeball and that was all and you were off and you were home. Cheap airfare, military standby, and you went home. I don't recall anything. In fact, I personally, in all of my time, never had an unpleasant experience from a civilian. I had some times that I thought it was going to…I can remember one time I was walking in New York City in uniform and I realized that there was a car, was sort of trailing behind me on the street. I got to a corner, this is lower Manhattan, I got to a corner and the car turned partially across the corner and two guys got out and I really thought, "oh, shit." And they wanted to thank me. But I never really…I got my first job in insurance because I was in Vietnam. I really personally never ran…I've learned to more interesting experiences in the last ten years, than I have ever before then. I really never had any bad experience at all. I mean it was just like coming back from any place and going home with your suitcase. You know, that's all it was.

SM: You didn't have a hard time adjusting going from Vietnam back to your family?

PF: I didn't think I did, but you should ask my wife that question!

SM: That's a good point. What did your wife think about you going in the first place?

PF: She's a relatively stoic person. I don't remember…she was of course worried. Of course at that point in time, it was the first division, she stayed with the other wives. My aunt came out and stayed with her while I was gone. She had a lot of support going on. And other wives…the trailer park that we were in was a pretty mixed group and Liz had friends there. So overall, I think there was a good deal of support going on. Now what she really was going through I don't know. I could tell you that when I married my wife she was a relatively dependent type person and when I came back from Vietnam the first time, there was nothing she couldn't cope with. I mean, it was really…she just looked after herself. I don't know, I think the worst transition we had was once I got out of the Army. That was very difficult. In fact, I think probably everybody in her family, and myself included, didn't think that we were going to stay together, but we managed to work it out. Keep in mind that if you look at my time in the Army, if you go from November of '65, November of '64, I go three or four months to Fort Benning, Fort Riley, then I'm straight away off to San Diego, back for a couple of months, Vietnam, back six months at Fort Stewart, six months at Fort Rucker, a couple of months we had together at Fort Benning, Fort Campbell where I'm forming a unit to take to Vietnam, so I'm just gone all the time. She goes home, I go back to Vietnam for a year, come back to a Lakehurst Naval Air Station. I already own the house now that I live in right now, so Liz is living there and for three years at Lakehurst with a thing in the middle there where I went back to Vietnam, I'm going home on weekends when I can get home on weekends. So I'm in the Army for almost eight years and we probably didn't spend a grand total of seven months living as a normal life and that's making you the assumption that living as an Army wife is anything remotely normal to start with. Ok, so certainly that's why I say clearly I didn't have to deal with any transition really. I mean, everything was new and was happening, it was gone and back and it was like…it really

wasn't. The first time I had to deal with any transition, really myself, was when I got out of the Army. So that was sort of a unique thing. Anyway, that was it.

SM: Why don't you go ahead and talk about…I'm sorry…

PF: I didn't realize it was that long.

SM: Yeah, time flies!

PF: This is the first time I ever talked like this about Vietnam. It really is. Anyway, so I go to flight school—I go back to Fort Benning shortly and then I get a U-21 transition. Which I am flabbergasted…I mean my son is born at Fort Benning, I get my new orders in now where I'm supposed to be assigned strictly to fly bird dogs and the orders come in and I'm sent off to learn how to fly the U-21, and then I am assigned to Fort Campbell where I'm going to form a U-21 unit. It was called CPAK. I have no idea what CPAK stood for, but it was OK. I went up to Fort Campbell and I was flying the U-21, went out to Wichita and we picked up our brand new U-21, got a transition out there on that plane, and then I had a beaver assigned to me and we had a couple of fixed wing guys come in to fly that, and we had a Huey and I had three, four guys that flew the Huey and a very small unit. Then after we pretty much got our equipment in, we got a National Guard Major volunteered for active duty and he came in either from Tennessee or Kentucky, and I forget what his name was—Stuart or something like that—and he came in and became the CO and we sort of packed up everything and headed for…flew our planes out to Sharp and loaded them on an aircraft carrier and that was it. We went over by boat. Now of course, having been to Vietnam before, and this was a small unit, we had like three or four connexes that were ours to fill up and we had a huge account that we could spend at the company store, in theory we were supposed to buy supplies for a year—well I knew that we could get anything we really needed in Vietnam, but things that we really wanted was going to take special deals so we spent our money on room air conditioners and fans and screen and sticky acetate, rigid plastic, and all kinds of paint and fasteners and all these things that I know that once we got to Vietnam I could trade for somebody's mother if I wanted to, it was no problem at all. Get somebody's wife for a year for some of this stuff. So we showed up in Vietnam, we were assigned to {Long Tan] which was brand new being built at the time, that was just north of Bien Hoa. And I went over by boat on that trip and it was a great trip over. We went over on the General

George Pope and it was my little unit and a whole bunch of hospital units and veterinarians and what have you and I spent my thirty days going over there playing hearts with a bunch of dentists. It was a good thirty days over. Arrived in [Nha Trang], our airplane had not arrived yet, that went by aircraft carrier, went up and we were assigned up to [Long Tan]. So I knew that the unit was going to be DEROS-adjusted and that was a new process. So I hot footed it right down to Saigon because our planes were being put together at the time and we were going to have to pick them up in a couple of days. Hot footed right to Tan Son Nhut to see if I possibly knew anybody at all from before, and ran into somebody who I knew and who vaguely knew somebody else, and that person really knew somebody, and I got introduced into the personnel system, the U-21s were brand new, so the guy took care of me. So I knew that they were already working on the unit and I said "Look, I volunteer for DEROS adjustment because first of all, I was sort of annoyed that I was no longer the CO, and secondly the mission we had was night courier mission which was nothing I wanted to do. So I went back up and I said "Don't worry, things will be looked after." We went and got our planes and brought them up to [Long Tan] and because [Long Tan]…we were living in a tent and the engineers were building stuff. Well our Conexes arrive, so I went to see the engineers and I said "OK, what's it going to take get our hooch built right away?" And the guy looks at us and he laughs. I was a captain at the time, and this other captain should of laughed at me so he takes off and I go the old sergeant in his room and I said, "sergeant, I got a fair amount of stuff here. What do you really want to change the building schedule?" and he says "Well, what do you got?" I said "Well, this is what I got." Well his eyes got bigger and bigger and bigger. So for a couple of air conditioners and some screening, and a few other odds and ends we ended up getting our hooch built next and then the orders came in and I got DEROSed out, as I had planned on, and I got assigned...at [Long Tan] there was the command airplane company was there and that was the headquarters of the flight detachment for MACV. However, they also had a specialty detachment down at Tan Son Nhut that flew basically for the headquarters of MACV and my orders came in assigning me to that detachment which Colonel Ferris was the CO and he was madder than hell because that was a plumb assignment he wanted people…when I got there I was the only company grade officer—it was all old majors and crotchety old warrant officers. They

just got U-21s in and I was qualified, so I ended up being stationed at Saigon. We had a house just off base about fifteen blocks, there was six of us in the house. We had three houses actually. I ran this one house and it had guards and a couple of maids. Because we worked weird hours, we didn't have to stay in the BOQ, we could have our own facilities, which was sort of a unique thing and ended up flying for that detachment. Just as I got there they were rotating a lot of people out and I got interviewed and was approved as one of the four or five pilots that flew the Commanding General and I flew Westmoreland. Westmoreland was just going at that time. He was gone within a month of me arriving and then flew Abrams when he flew, about half the time he flew I flew him.

SM: What did you think about Westmoreland?

PF: I didn't like him. I disliked the man intensely. He was arrogant, he was demeaning, he treated people relatively poorly…plus, by that time, I was sort of blaming him for most of the problems about the military side of it. It really wasn't his fault, but for the most part, my personal experience with him was that he was a difficult person and I'm glad that he wasn't around there for long. Abrams, on the other hand, was exactly the opposite. In fact, I truly liked the gentleman and if I could have had the two of them switch places, I would right now, with no question about it. Abrams was a very…he frequently drove his own Jeep when he came out the airplane. Smoked his little cigars, he had smoked these little smaller cigars. He was pleasant to people. He was always in control, but always pleasant. I think most of the people around him generally liked the guy. He was…everything I had to do with the guy was great and I saw him in action. I mean we flew him enough that he was, you got to see him working with different people in the airplane and things like that and he was a first class person, all the way. In fact I have on my wall in my office right now an autographed picture of him that he gave me when I left Vietnam. He did that for all the people that flew him, but I really liked the guy. He was nice.

SM: Now just out of curiosity, what did you think about the strategies and did you see any changes and in particular when you were platoon leader—before you went to Vietnam you went through that phase of being the aggressor platoon leader, then you got to Vietnam and you saw the types of tactics that infantry platoons were employing and

companies and battalions. So what did you think about the tactics compared to what your training was, and then did your opinion of tactics and did you think it was appropriate over time?

PF: Well, certainly the tactics that the Army was applying, the Marines, the Americans were using, all it did was guarantee that particular square of the ground you were standing on at that moment was secure. Maybe not even guaranteeing that, but at least there was no Viet Cong on it with you. Essentially I could not see where the tactics that they were using could achieve the goal that they were looking achieve, which was Democracy. Because by that time, by the time I was back over there in let's say, now we're talking '68, '66/'67, we're talking '68/'69, or maybe it's, well, anyway. Of course things had changed dramatically. Yet, I'm saying at that point in time the country had not been totally destroyed. Saigon had changed dramatically. But flying around and flying the people that we flew which was basically the brass and entertainers and things like that country wide, you got to see a lot of the country and it was obvious that I think the feeling was, and again I may be applying some retrospect here and not speaking what I thought at the time, I think the assumption was that now it had moved into a more conventional type with the North Vietnamese regulars and all that stuff and when I got back over there it was just after Tet, so you can time that. I personally missed Tet by a month or something. By the time I got back there of course, cause all shit had broken free at that point in time and things were swinging dramatically, but I basically saw it as an infantry person that the normal restrictions that we had when I left as a grunt and then going back over and seeing it, that there was little if any chance that the way that they were going about it was going to reach the goal. And certainly, the hearts and mind crap was exactly that. There was no real attempt to win the hearts and mind of anybody, and that was probably the saddest thing about it.

SM: Do you think if a more concerted effort was made to actually win the hearts and minds that would have been effective?

PF: I think, yeah. I think Vietnam is, keeping in mind you have to look hard to find where anybody has learned any lessons from Vietnam, but if you go forward the way several conflicts since then have been handled where there's been…I think that Vietnam basically brought home the truism that there's no military solution to a political

problem. Whatever solution there is to it is going to be temporary if it's imposed by winning a war or winning something. I think that's probably a truth that's come out of Vietnam and we look at any of the conflicts that have been handled since, I think that's sort of the underlying concern, fears, values, however you want to put it. Not that I think that they've applied things correctly over the years. I think not. I think it's still too politicized, but I think that's probably it, on what came out of that. But certainly by the time I was flying over there…when I first went over there I probably felt that by that time it was either at peak or damn near peak and at that point in time I probably felt in the beginning the numbers would prevail, but by the time I left that year, it was obvious that numbers were not the answer, that the restrictions that I knew of two, three years before were identical. The military was basically not allowed to make military decisions the way they normally would. In fact, everything was pre-planned. Every event was pre-planned and by that time I think corruption was so wide spread, I mean we flew that General Zut you know DCU around all of the time. He was the head of the, it turns out, the black... He was basically doing black market. That guy was basically wherever we went, you knew, because he was sort of the head of the regional police forces, and whenever you went with him, within a month there'd be an operation in that province. So give me a break. What brains does that take anybody? It's like having a guy who throws only two pitches—high fast and high low. Give me a break. Everybody in the world knew what was going on. So I don't think much changed.

SM: Would you talk about these types of issues with general Abrams?

PF: No. Any conversation I had with General Abrams were purely pleasantries. And anything that he talked about in the airplane, I wouldn't particularly talk about. No, no way. Our relationship is as it is today when I fly anybody, you're strictly a truck driver. That was not the forum and General Abrams had any misconceptions, it was never conveyed outside of his staff office. I can say that. He was always professional and straightforward, but no, that was not an option. I don't know what would happen if I'd even tried to bring it up with him. That was still back in the days…he was a four star and I was a captain and that's a… you know. He may have called me Peter, but it was in the airplane, but that was basically it. It was no. But still

that tour was a great time and certainly my previous tour there made my life much easier on this one because I knew the ropes and it was a good time.

SM: Now, you were in country before Johnson made his decision not to run for re-election, you missed Tet by about a month, so you must have gotten there just before he made that decision.

PF: I'm trying to remember and I don't have, I have no recollection of that all in all honesty.

SM: You don't remember when that was even mentioned?

PF: No, I really don't. I was pretty pro-military. I was in the Army, in fact, I actually wanted to stay in and would have stayed in probably if I…had two problems: the Army didn't want me to stay in and after Vietnam they didn't want anybody to stay in and my wife didn't either. But I was still pretty pro-military and probably I would have been, at that time I probably would have felt betrayed or something, but it was obvious I think that it was going the wrong way and numbers were not the solution. You know, it was not going to happen.

SM: Now by numbers do you mean…

PF: People.

SM: The attrition policy, the attrition strategy, the body count…

PF: Yeah. That just wasn't going to solve the problem. First of all, by that time I mentioned earlier, that the average Vietnamese person just wanted to be left alone by anybody, by everybody. Certainly by…when I went back over there the second tour flying the U-21s, the issue then was that they really at that point they really wanted people to go away. I mean we had the two maids we had were two sisters and they both had husbands in the Vietnamese Army. One was an officer there and one was an enlisted guy. And they spoke reasonably good English and I talked with them a bit and at that point in time, they felt that there was hope and I often wonder what happened after I left because they felt that for the most part, I was told by them, that the average Vietnamese wanted to be free, did not want the Communists to take over, but that they were worried about the government people and that there was too much corruption. I think the peasants certainly wanted everybody to leave and if the reason the Vietnamese were there was because of the Americans, so they wanted the Americans to go as quickly as

possible. But for the most part, they were not involved, they were just pure, innocent civilians. I don't think that most of the people…you know, conversations. I don't ever remember having a serious…even when I was back there in '71, did I ever recall having a conversation with anybody, drunk or otherwise, about should we be in Vietnam, or hearing anybody say that it was…they may have expressed their opinion, they may have wanted to get the hell out of there, but I don't ever remember being involved in a debate with one or more other people about the involvement or leaving or anything else. I really think that most people, most of the G.I.s in Vietnam were there to look after themselves for a year and get the hell out. I mean, it's…most of them were, for every grunt there was ten that never got near a gun—I don't know if that's the right ratio, but a hell of a huge ratio—and most of those guys, I mean I can remember the only other time I ever talked at all about Vietnam was a few years back when they were having their latest revival, not the one that's going on now, but the last one, they had a little talk show on local cable and they asked me if I would sit on it. I said virtually nothing on it, but there was the guy that was actually getting it cranked up was a Marine and I listened to him talk freely and it's a good thing I didn't find this out while the show was going on because I couldn't have kept my mouth shut—I'm a relatively blunt person—and I thought after doing my little half hour little show, that this guy had been in on the big Marine things up by Da Nang and had seen guys blown away and carried out a whole bunch of bodies and everything else, well hell. He never even carried a gun in Vietnam! He was in supply or something! After, when he tells me this thing, I couldn't believe it. I mean I'm sure my mouth just flapped, and this is the kind of guy…he's back now and he's claiming all sorts of horrible psychological problems and everything else, and I don't understand it and I'll be honest, I have absolutely no sympathy for people like that. I made one trip to a Vietnam Veteran's thing and I said OK. Somebody called me up and asked me to please come and I said I would. Well, it was essentially what it was, was a bunch of guys looking to find some way to get something for nothing out of the government—they had some entitlement because they'd been in Vietnam and that they're owed something for this thing. I just, I have very little compassion, I guess, for that sort of approach to anything. But like I say, I don't ever remember…even lately, I have a…my wife's cousin married a guy who likes to debate stuff and takes great pleasure in

playing the devil's advocate and the only conversation I've ever had about the pros and cons of Vietnam was with him and he's basically a very sympathetic person about that. But I don't ever recall, I don't ever remember sitting in a joint or a bar or the stateside or anything talking about it. And of course in the Guard, the guys that are still in the Guard that were in Vietnam, there's not many of us left, we mostly laugh and tell lies. All of us can think of things like throwing the M-80s into the shit can for somebody in the toilet, that sort of stuff. Or these rubber snakes you'd buy, I mean all the funny things that you did, the jokes you did and the X-rated movies on the cable that you plugged in and some guy would say it was the AF TV station and your R&Rs and your fooling around and the picnic trips, flying…I mean, the things that we did, you sort of remember those things. Certainly by the time I left Vietnam flying, it was obvious that the wind was changing dramatically. But still I can say too at that point, I don't recall and problems being a grunt with any of my men. There was never a discipline problem, there was never people saying, refusing to do anything. There's always the odd guy who'd try to get out of it—went limping around or saying he had a cold or something, but for the most part there was no hostilities and my relationship with my men was always cordial. I honestly believe that we were friends and I think they all understood that I'd do whatever I could to see that they stayed alive and I never had a problem with that. Even when I was flying the U-21 in Vietnam, out of Saigon, it was…those kinds of things were few…you rarely heard about. They were not openly discussed, unlike the last time when I was in Vietnam where I mean it was actually sometimes open hostility between the enlisted and the officers you saw some of the places you went into.

SM: Before we talk about that, I'm going to have change CDs. This is about to run out. So let me end CD one of the interview with Mr. Peter Faber.

This is CD number two of the interview with Mr. Peter Faber. With your second tour. You mentioned flying both General Westmoreland and General Abrams, did you fly other commanding officers or other celebrities?

PF: Flew all kinds of people. Flew Marcos once when he was President of the Philippines, a lot of generals, entertainers, congressmen, senators, most of those guys when they found anyone from you weren't from their state, they didn't want to talk to

you. Funny, you have some people you remember, like for example, I flew Jimmy Stewart.

SM: Did you really?!

PF: And his wife around. You would think at that time he was a brigadier general in the California Air National Guard, right, or reserves or something, he was a pilot. He left me with such a horrible taste in my mouth that to this day I can't even watch him in any of his cute movies! The only thing sad about it was he was inconsiderate and he treated us like dirt and the only mitigating factor at all was his son was a Marine and he was up in Pleiku I think. Well, he was an officer anyway, well when we flew him it couldn't have been Pleiku, it had to be [Wai Fubai] or someplace like that because we had to stop in Da Nang for gas and we flew over there to see his son and then we were on the way back and were with him a couple three days—he was doing a tour around Vietnam—and shortly after he left Vietnam, his son was killed. So that was...but he was really he was…everybody we had that we flew generally you were either leaving them and coming back, but if you were waiting return, you know, stayed with them, arrangements were always made to make sure that number one we had security and number two that we knew everything, what the times were and what have you and he thought nothing about keeping us waiting for hours. He made no provisions and the people with him made no provisions for us. For example, we were told what mission was, and it would be changed arbitrarily, which was their authority, but it would mean that we were going to be no place where we could lunch or anything. It got so we started carrying food with us because we knew that whatever was going to happen, we were going to be screwed. On the way back, because he had deviated, we didn't have enough fuel to get back to Saigon so we had to stop at Da Nang for fuel. I mean, he was a pilot, and he knows that the mission has been changed, he's kind of done it himself. I mean, what the hell! So I tell him, we're flying and I go back and I say "Sir, I'm sorry, but we deviated from our mission, we're going to have to stop and get fuel at Da Nang before we head down to Saigon." He was mad, and then once he got back, he tried to get us in trouble! Ever since then, I have no use for Jimmy Stewart. He really treated us like sacks of crap. We flew Martha Rae a lot and Joey Bishop and Sebastian Cabot, Gypsy Rose Lee—a funny story out of that is she gave us an autographed postcard which I sent

home and Liz had it held up on the icebox with magnets and our daughter came in and said "Mommy, come look." She dragged her there and she said "Look, this lady's popping her magnets!" The thing had curled on the icebox and the magnets were popping off on the floor. And congressmen and senators and visiting generals, a lot of Filipino generals and Korean generals. Flew the Aussie guy one time when he came over. It was great duty, I was scheduled…I tell you, flying this guy [Zou] around…nobody liked to fly the Vietnamese much because it was a problem, there was always something going on. So here we've got this new guy, this guy [Zou], and we're going to a rinky dink little airport up in the middle of nowhere, outside of, oh dear, I can't think of the name, a coast town just north of Na Trang where they had the..

SM: Hoi An?

PF: No, no. They make good [Nuoc Mon] there. Not the best which came from [Phu Quoc], but anyway, whatever this little seaside village was, we landed at an airport about six or seven miles inland from there. But anyway, nobody wanted to go because it was going to be a Vietnamese wait and return. So I said "OK, I'll take the mission." So I assign myself on the mission. We land and this guy gets out and he takes off and immediately though I see that we're totally surrounded by good guys so I'm very happy about that because this is not the greatest airport in the world and this lieutenant comes over with a Jeep, a Vietnamese, speaks great English, says "I'm here to show you around." It could have been [Qui Nhon], because I'm just trying to think, I mean it's…so he said "We've secured the airplane for you. Lock it up and then I'm going to show you around a bit and then we're going have lunch with the general." So off we go and he takes us down…and that's the only time I've seen them making [Nuoc Mon] in these big huge vats, fermenting all the garbage in there…and then we come back and we show up at the province statehouse, or the Governor's house, or whatever it was and there's this big banquet table laid out and myself and I'm guy I'm flying with, we have a table, right there we are, we're sitting at the end of the table. There was probably, I would guess, if I remember, probably twenty people at this big long conference table. Of course everything was Oriental and we all chopsticks, but the food was wonderful and there was plenty to drink, which we couldn't partake in, but it was really a hell of a good party and we fly him back to Saigon. Ever since then, as soon as I saw his name come up for a

mission, I put my name on the flight and I probably flew the guy a half a dozen times. Second time, though, that I flew him, which was the next time he flew with us, when we got the…cause I knew we were going to get lunch…when we got to the place for the luncheon the two place settings for myself and my co-pilot had a knife and fork on it cause the guy had seen that we both struggled with chopsticks. Of course by then I had learned how to use chopsticks cause I figure I'm not going to pass up on a good meal like that again! But it was good, but this guy actually ended up being executed for black marketeering. But a lot of guys like that we flew and we flew a lot of common people. Aiden's wife was over in Saigon, so on major holidays we would fly him over. His son was a second lieutenant up in Pleiki, I know he was up there and on Christmas, Thanksgiving, he would get leave or he would get some time off and we'd fly him over to see his mommy. We actually made a second lieutenant star plate for him and he thought it was funny. We picked him up and we forgot about it. We got back to Saigon and the second lieutenant star plate was sitting in the window of the airplane, and my boss, who was the detachment commander, saw it and went absolutely ballistic. I think if Abrams had seen that he would have laughed because he knew. He was a pretty straightforward guy like that. But that's the people, a lot of guys we flew around and I've got a lot of pictures I took of these people, I wish I could find them. I had one of Martha Rae I did find. She liked the Special Forces. We would pick her up and fly her from Special Forces camp to Special Forces camp and she was always…she lived just like the Special Forces guys lived, so she'd get on the airplane and you could tell that she was using no-bath to hide the lack of showers, sometimes it was really so it would give you a headache. You'd fly with your window open. I remember one time, really a rough too, she really had to take a leak and all we had were these little funnels that go through a venturi tube, right. So, she really had to go and there was no way she was not going to use that tube and it was rougher than hell. I mean it was so bad…but some guy stood there and held a blanket or something up. She fell down two or three times and finally she said the hell with it and she took her leak in the piss tube and that was it. Yeah, I took…I was probably the last Army airplane out of Que Son when they were shutting that thing down. After that they shut the airfield down and then that's when they got beat up pretty bad and abandoned the place. Took one round over there. I think I was the only one who

took a round. I was flying into a little coastal airport someplace and I heard…I was carrying a couple of American colonels and some Vietnamese guys and they were in there web gear and they were loaded with everything and I heard what sounded to me like a hand grenade pin being pulled, sort of that pop sound, like that. I looked to the back, we were just on short final, and I looked in the back and I see everybody's in two pig piles, one pig pike in the back of the airplane and one pig pile in the front of the airplane, and I figured for sure, one of these dumb jerks had accidentally pulled a hand grenade of their web gear and had popped the thing. I'm sitting there, well I said, that's it, what am I going to do. It didn't go off of course and we touched down. By this time, one of the colonels had extracted himself. A sniper had shot up at the airplane. He must have been laying right at the end of the runway because he shot straight up and went through the belly right between the legs of a Vietnamese and right through his notebook and right through the brim of his hat and out the roof of the airplane. Of course, everybody totally panicked in the airplane. So that was the only round our unit took in Vietnam. Now that one, that was my last flight because I…the deal we had, we knew the people at Shell Oil Company and they had this sort of this compound in Saigon with a swimming pool and we had a couple of rooms they gave us there that were right on the pool and when you were rotating out, your last week, or last two weeks, you didn't have to fly if you didn't want to—you could go spend five days at Shell. If you look at my records, I had 988 hours of combat flight time and I thought it would be nice to get 1000 hours. So I scheduled myself. I figured, that's only twelve hours, I could do that, and I picked the missions. I could fly three days and at the end of it I get my thousand hours, I go back and say I had a thousand hours. Well, look at my record, I have 988 hours because that was my last mission. I flew that and I was scheduled to fly the next day and I took that round and I landed and I said "Guys, I'm taking my two weeks!" So that's the end of that! I figured that's the only round the unit took in the whole year I was there, and it was me, that I wasn't going to be the second round that unit took! So that was the end of that!

SM: How did you avoid getting shot at for a whole year?

PF: Well, the mission we did was strictly, and we went into some pretty interesting…we got shot at, but we never took a hit.

SM: OK, so if you were flying over to Special Forces camps, you were flying over bad country.

PF: Oh yeah, but I'm talking about being hit.

SM: OK. So you were fired at, but they were so pathetic…

PF: I'm sure that we were fired at a hell of a lot more than we thought we were. We went into a lot of unsecure shit. When we flew this Admiral House around, Admiral House was the leader of the Riverines, he was the commander of Naval Special Operations in Vietnam, and I forget whether he was an upper case or lower case guy, but there's no such thing as a one star admiral. They are always, at least that's what I understand, they are always two star and its upper case, lower case. A lower case admiral is a one star, but he wears two stars, the upper case guy is a real two star. But this guy, we used to haul him out to these weird little laterite strips out in the middle of the Delta where the Riverines would have their…this guy was a big guy. I mean, I don't know how big, I'm sure he's grown two or three or four, five inches in the years since I last saw him. But my recollection of a guy that was well over six feet, big chested, narrow waist and he carried a side arm which was a sawed off shotgun and he carried like a little dispatch sack and this guy, I can remember one time where the Jeep didn't show up for him at the airbase at the airfield, so we're sitting there, I said "So why don't we just sort of take off and fly around a bit and…" "No" he says, "I'll see you in the afternoon" and off he goes walking down the road. In the afternoon we picked him up, that was it. We flew into a lot of weird little places and I know of two times I know we were being shot, we were being mortared and one time we had mortars landing on the airfield when we were taking off but that was sort of on the perimeter, not exactly on the runway. The mission we did was basically you flew 9/5 up country, 10/5 down country—9500 flying up and 10,500 flying down—and you made your landings and that was it. Most of the airfields you were going into were secured. I can remember, I have a picture of me someplace asleep on an airplane wing with the *Feminine Mystique* on my chest. Now, I'm sure that brings glad feelings to every feminist on the face of the earth, that was a little laterite field where we spent the whole day there, just two of us, not a living soul around! I look back on it and say here I am sleeping and reading and I had to be out of my mind. I was the only guy that flew that carried weapons. Very few other people

carried weapons and I had a Swedish K and an M-40 with a bunch of AG rounds and my issued sidearm and I had the Walter PPK, too. So when I was on the airplane I had this little sack I carried and I put it on the back of the…I mean I was the only one that carried anything like that and people used to make fun of me. I never had to use it, but I think back on those things and it was really strange. It was really a good duty. We had the hours, we flew a lot, but you flew weird hours. You might have to get up at 4 in the morning, we had a driver and a Jeep that took the crew so we always scheduled early crews so they came out of the same house, I ran my house and I got $35 a month from everybody and that paid for three meals, open bar and laundry, dry cleaning, cleaning and everything else—boot shine, brass shine, the whole nine yards. I did a lot of trading. I had friends in the class six store and I would get, I guess you could say I was always sort of a wheeler dealer, but it was friends in the class six store and I would go there and I'd use up ration cards on liquor and I'd pay off our maids with Johnny Walker Black and Bourbon. So I paid three dollars a bottle for it, that would be good for a week of work and they would probably get like 130-140 bucks for Johnny Walker Black off the black market, I knew that but I figured that we had a good deal. While we were there we had a baby born and we had a lot of…we had a good time. We had a little Honda scooter that we had for the house and we'd go shopping, we'd go to [Cho Lon] to the Navy exchange for the stuff for the American-type food. They had a commissary there, a very nice commissary, and then the rest of the stuff came off the economy. If anybody wanted to [?] you off from the house, you made sure they got big prawns, flew into Da Lat, you made sure you came back with a box of vegetables, again, it was by chance. I landed there and Da Lat was where they had the military academy for Vietnam and I land with this general in the back and he's climbing out and I see this major come walking up and I'm looking at the guy and I'm saying God, does he look familiar, and I look at his nametag and it was a guy that was a fraternity brother of mine from Rhode Island. I had only known him for my freshman year and then he was a senior that year, so I hop off and I said hi to him—his name was Pevo Menendez and we chatted and he was one of the advisors at the military academy and he also had something to do with the ration point, where all the fresh vegetables were. So we shut up there and we hopped down to the ration point and they would see us coming and they'd holler and one little Vietnamese

guy would say "mixed box?" and he'd go running off to the bins and we'd come back with a big wax box full of fresh lettuce and stuff and throw it in the back of the airplane. Plus my boat trip over with the veterinarians and the dentists—most of the veterinarians were there for food inspectors—and one guy was a guy that actually lived just through the woods, two hundred yards from my house was a veterinarian in a local veterinary and now he's back in Connecticut again, so I'd go see him or one of his friends and we'd go down to the docks with his official veterinary Jeep and he'd condemn a couple boxes of meat or something for veterinary inspection, food inspection, and that would be that. So we lived a pretty good life and that was right up until as I left. They shut the houses down within a month of my leaving.

SM: Why?

PF: They were starting to have problems in the city. That was when the city was starting to break down a bit really badly. This would be like '69, towards the middle of '69, and of course, we had the only deal…the only person who lived better than we did in Vietnam was Abrams, and it was creating a problem. Really what the biggest problem was that we were a detachment from this outfit up in Long Tan, and those guys up there used to come down and they got stuck in Saigon, they'd stay in one of the houses and they'd go back and they'd raise all kinds of hell about how they lived like crap and we lived so good and why are we down there for a full year and nobody rotates through it, so they finally, things were falling apart then, but I got the full year out of it. It was a good time. After Vietnam I came back and went to Lakehurst Naval Air Station which was…the Army had a big aviation test facility there for electronics and I was operations officer there and one of the project officers. There was a bunch of civilian pilots for continuity because the Army guys would come and go so there was always on every project there was one civilian and two military pilots, or one if it was a short one, and you'd fly this avionics stuff. I got involved with the inertial navigation system there and flew all of the hours on that myself. All of the test flights, it was out of Canadian Marconi or Canadian Litton made this sucker and it was, I'd say it was marginally reliable but it was great new stuff. This would be like a computer almost, it was beyond, it was fancy, it was state of the art, and the Army didn't do anything state of the art. So as it turns out they were supposed to have a training of some people from Vietnam, this is

going into the RU-21s under, I think the project was "Laughing Eagle", but it was an inertial system that would give you immediate Lat/ Long read out of where you were. Sort of like an underachieving GPS system, a GPS is a million times more reliable and more accurate, but this at the time was it. So it turns out whatever the problems were the people that were supposed to be trained for this thing didn't show up or couldn't come, so I ended up getting a third tour to Vietnam with this thing. I went over as a new equipment training team, a one-man team and flew over first class on Pan Am because this thing had to be chained to me and have its own seat, it was a good trip over. I was over there for about five or six months. I was going to be there longer, but by that time, they were winding stuff down and they just called it off.

SM: So this is 1971?

PF: This was '71. While I was over there the pull-out date was decided on. Everything by that time was winding down, I shouldn't say, winding down is not the right word, collapsing is a better word I suppose. But what I was doing…the first thing I did, I went to Lan Tong which was a big RU-21 headquarters there and I trained all the SIPs, the standardization pilots on the system and then what their job was going to be was to standardize the procedures and then I went and trained all the IPs and I flew all over the country training the IPs to train the pilots to use this thing.

SM: These were all Americans?

PF: Americans, yeah. It was all the RU-21s. There was basically four majors bases in Vietnam for these things. There was the [Long Tan], there was [Hue Phu Bai], there was Da Nang and there was Na Trang and that's where most of them flew out of. They basically were the guys that all the weird radios…they were mostly listening posts, but a lot of them were doing IR and things like that, so I was back at [Long Tan] for setting up what was going to be the last three or four month training phase where I gave the check rides to the IPs on the system and I was sort of sitting in the club—I mean the guys were always giving me a hard time because I was TDY and I'd been there for a fair amount of months, you know—and the guy came in and said "The old man wants to see you," and I went to see him and he said "We're going to call this thing off. We're just going to keep the people trained that we have," and that's when I found out that—this was early probably late summer, early fall of '71 and of course '72, the basic thing was

over with and I was out of the Army in '72. I came back from Vietnam, came back on a 141 and I went back and forth to Vietnam. I went over on a 130, came back on a civilian charter, went over on a boat, came back on a military plane. I went over first class and civilian all the way and then I came back, I don't know, it was military and civilian. Every possible way you could go I went back and forth to Vietnam. I came back and at that point in time, my wife, she told me to get out or get out so I put in my paperwork to get out of the Army and I got a phone call from this same Major Swift that I had seen when…who was my ROTC guy. He was a full colonel now and I'd stayed with him on my first R&R in Vietnam, and he was now either Chief of Infantry Branch or number 2 guy and we talked on the phone and he told me that I should withdraw my resignation because he said, "Look, I'm going to tell you right now, voluntary indefinate company grade officer," which I was, reserve officer—I did not opt for RA—there'd be none left in the infantry branch by the time I got done. So he said "I almost guarantee you that you'll be rifted and if you're not, you can always get out then." So on the last rift they got me along with everybody else—the one's that were left—and that was April '72 and that would be my birthday, April 25th of '72. That day I signed out of Fort Riley, I mean Fort [Monmouth] and drove up and signed into the National Guard and I've been in the National Guard since that day to this day, basically flying fixed wing. The Army, the Guard finally got me to go to helicopter school and I flew helicopters for a while in the Guard, which I didn't particularly like, I liked the Loch but I didn't like the Huey at all, but I went back to flying airplanes and at this point in time, as far as I know, I'm the oldest guy flying in Connecticut. I think I'm the oldest guy flying in the Army , actually, active duty guy.

SM: What was the hardest thing about transitioning from the Army, active duty, to civilian/ reserve or National Guard?

PF: Actually, that was fairly straightforward.. The unit I was in well prepared me for the National Guard. It was totally loosed because you had all these projects going, everybody was doing their own thing and the old man's attitude was you do your job and they let the operationals who had happened to me at the time, control what was going on and his attitude was just what mine was—if you embarrass me, you're dead meat! You get one strike and you're dead meat with him. So the operation we had at the Lakehurst

was when we had all these civilian pilots flying for us, military guys going, airplanes all over the country, projects going all over the country, guys going to Canada, guys going to Mexico and it sort of really was more like managing a flight department of some airline than it was anything else. So when I got out of the Army going into the Guard, the biggest transition was cause I big in the Army I was still rank conscious, ok. I was a captain, and the biggest transition going into the Guard was the fact that rank became almost, it became only important if the guy you were talking to signed your OER, that was the only time it became important. But other than that, I think that it was a very easy transition. Not granted, you didn't go to the Guard everyday, but certainly as I spent time in the Guard I actually probably found myself more comfortable. I will tell you that in my opinion, at least in today's Army, back when I was in active duty it wasn't quite the same because…maintenance of the reserve facilities is superb, you have the same people there for years at a time, which is not the same in the Guard. Of course at that point in time, this is probably the probably the most interesting or probably the most important thing, the Guard was basically, the Army aviation part of the Guard was basically Vietnam guys. All these guys were coming back from Vietnam and entering the Guard. When I joined the Guard they didn't have their first Huey yet. They got their first Huey about a year after I was in the Guard. So it was like 23s and 13s and I was flying a Beaver and a Bird Dog, some H-34s, so we had old stuff. So all Vietnam guys and while I was fixed wing only, one of the rare fixed wing only guys, most of these guys knew people in common, had been in the same area or knew…it was really, drill was a time you looked forward to and I would say probably in retrospect, it was wonderful therapy for all of us. I mean it was that weekend a month where you went off and you had guys that had an extremely strong thing in common, Vietnam time by flying. So you've got first of all the camaraderie that pilots also have with each other and then you had this Vietnam thing. So really you got there and I tell you, I felt sort of sorry—about ten years ago it started to change—but up to about ten years ago, I felt sorry for non-Vietnam pilots that came into the Guard because they really were not treated particularly well because they had low time, they weren't competent their war story was what happened to them down at some joint in Panama City and they were of course younger than we were and I felt sorry for those guys. They had a worse transition than we had. I thought the Guard

thing was great. For me the Guard turned out to be ideal because not only was it a great probably therapy for us where you really laughed and told lies and were probably in the whole process of working things out yourself, you also had the…for me it was a great escape from my civilian job which at times got extremely stressful, because flying was something where you are totally relaxed in doing it, but you're focused so thoughts don't really intrude into your process. You think about what you're flying but you're not working at doing it, so you're relaxed. So I think that for me, and there's a number of guys that I've talked to that have felt the same thing. They felt that the Guard was a great deal for them. I mean you can really work out a lot of things. You have a bunch of guys sitting around that maybe did the same thing but different places and you'd talk and if your having problems, and it's amazing, you look at them and there's not a whole lot of divorces in this group, I don't know anybody that's truly screwed up in the group—no more than I am, I suppose—but I mean it was really…maybe it's just the group that stayed on, you know, that's a very small percentage for sure, most of us walk away, once their out, they're gone. I've met guys now that I look at and I find out they actually, they flew helicopters in Vietnam and their total flying and only flying experience is the flight school and the trip to Vietnam and out of the Guard, I mean out of the Army, that's it and these guys are ones that like flying. I did it because I needed, I liked flying and I had no job, but that's long since stopped being. I do it now because I simply…in fact, I'm losing money, past sixty I can retire. I can collect my retirement check at age sixty. I'd make more money on my retirement check than do out of my Guard check. But to me, I told my wife, it's cheaper than owning an airplane and I have a less chance of killing myself flying with the Guard. It was not a hard transition at all. The harder transition was once I moved home and after eight years or seven and a half years in the Army and not living together really at all, our being separated for long periods of time, we were vastly different people and it took us a long time, probably a couple three years for us to really work things out where it became obvious that…the children helped a lot in how things worked out, not that they were supportive or anything else, just that they were there. I know, I'm sure that I changed dramatically…I look back and I see people that I'm still friends with from let's say college and they say I haven't changed a bit, but certainly I don't think they remember. I mean most of these guys I still see from college are guys

that I saw off and on whenever I was home, too. So they didn't see…I know that you have to have changed. Particularly when you're doing something like that and then thrown back in the civilian world, and so we managed to solve whatever issues we had and worked it out pretty good. The children probably were the worst part because they really didn't know me at all and I missed them…strangely enough, they were both about six months old when I went to Vietnam, so I missed that year where they went from being little cauliflowers to being human beings on both of them. Then certainly, I was never there, I mean I'd be home for a weekend and that'd be it. At leave I'd be home and that would be for thirty days or two weeks or something like that. So that's probably the thing I feel the sorriest about and I think we've sort of worked it out, our kids, myself and I, it took myself and my son a long time to work things out—probably because I saw too much of him in me, I mean of me in him. He went down the same path I did and I know that when I was at that age, I would get options, but at this time when he was dicking around between schools I knew that second and third options were becoming harder and harder to find. With me, as long as I could play football, I could find someplace to go to school. I look back over the whole Vietnam thing, I say I don't, I never regretted a thing, I enjoyed it. The thing about Vietnam that…and this is a little different from people that I know…I've made no friends but one out of Vietnam, of going to Vietnam. I never maintained contacted with any of my platoon sergeants or any of the guys. I did go back and saw the one kid that I quite liked who had his foot blown off by a land mine. He lived outside of Augusta, Georgia. I did go and try to find him. I found his mother and father, but I never was able to, you know, he was never available to see me so I never got to see him. I did make one friend out of Vietnam, flying, who I still see occasionally and he's out in Kansas City and that's basically it. I don't know whether that's normal or not. The friends that I've got from flight school…these guys, I mean, except for Ted [Betagary], who I spoke to off and on over the years, it wasn't until Dave [Farinbock] and Gary got cranked on the sucker, and [Al Spain] that it came together, and those have been three great weekends. I guess that's it. You know you asked the question before about what I thought about the military operation and what it was doing. That sort of crossed my mind a couple of times in this conversation, I just think that when the government went in there, I don't think that they probably had a clear idea of what they were getting

into. I suspect that to some extent the whole process was effected by people who have various takes on things to further their own goals and desires. I'm sure that the military was looking for a place to have some action. They had their motives. I'm sure that the elected officials had their goals, their needs for things. A lot of it was…statistics don't lie, but liars use statistics. You can prove anything. I think the whole thing was just sort of…everybody was orchestrating it for their own needs and the early part of it it was, it happened to be all the needs sort of have had you all go in the same general direction and it wasn't until that the needs started to change that things started to unravel and the military was making up their rationalizations to solve…to live with their problems as was the politicians and then I just think it was one of those fly paper things where you just get stuck on it and it hurts like hell to pull the fly off the paper, right, leave a couple legs behind. From the beginning, from the time I was there in '65 the military was never truly allowed to control the operation and I think that's probably what…and nobody really wanted to admit that. So you had the things like the artificial body counts and these weird, these reports that were used to justify things and all the crap that goes on to make things look better than they are or to prove a point or influence a decision or something, which may or may not be exact truths. But again, I say that and I truly had good times and I'm glad that I did it. I'm extremely satisfied with myself about that whole process. I hope this helps you some.

SM: Oh yeah, absolutely! What do you think are the most important lessons that we should take away from the Vietnam War experience?

PF: We as a people?

SM: Yeah, the nation.

PF: I have two fears first of all. The first fear is that Vietnam has become something that they…it's become a swear word. They talk about the Russian's Vietnam, they talk about all this sort of stuff. I think my biggest fear is that Vietnam legacy makes decisions, not decisions that should be made. An example is what happened in the Slovic states when that thing was falling apart. I am convinced that fear of another Vietnam, whatever you want to say, prevented the proper and timely use of the military force that probably would have saved this whole, at least a lot of this ethnic crap that went on over there. That's my largest…you can see it. I mean, I get extremely frustrated when I listen

to these politicians use Vietnam as a, to rationalize decisions that they're making that are obvious…you know that the guy in the briefcase ain't going to solve the problem. The other thing about Vietnam that I fear, I actually fear it's happened, is that the Vietnam experience has allowed all the military services to be so demonized that the people that you should be having in the military are not going in the military and that I almost…those two things are my worst fears. These I actually think have happened and they should be stopped. But on the other question, the biggest things we carried, the lessons learned I suppose, is that I think you need to have a line drawn between the military and the government. The civilians need to give a…if they're the ones who decide the goal, to decide the goal, but then don't micromanage the people with the training to do the job. The other thing that I think that we have learned from that is that, and it's being used by everybody today, is the impact, right or wrong, that media coverage has on the events and how now…think of the Gulf War for example, and how that was media managed. Think of how now almost everything that happens is media managed. You've got your spin doctors and everything. It's absolutely amazing and that's the other thing that we carried away from it. I mean it'….

SM: And that's a good thing you think? To go ahead and manage the media, don't give them full reign…

PF: I think, it's not so much the full reign…no, I don't think it's a good thing. I think the fact is that to manage appearances means making decisions that may not be the exact right one to make . I don't really blame the media for what happened. They were simply taking the pictures and when you've got a very few people doing something and there is people that don't want to go and they're verbal and they're organized, then you've got a situation where this information flow, the pictures and the stories and the cameras and everything were, all the videos that were taken were ideal and they showed in graphic detail the horrors even though you could go to any street corner and take the same picture practically in the bigger cities, it's still there. When you think of the number of people that went through Vietnam and you think of the number of people who were actually killed and the fact that the vast majority of those were probably killed in accidents, really, it's really…out of millions of men and women that went through there, fifty thousand is a very, very small percentage. It's like every one of those fifty

thousand, that's all you saw. I think the lives of the survivors are probably more important to look at than the lives of those that really died. Vietnam made an honorable—I'll say honorable death because I think basically most of them were—a public rather than a private occurrence and I think that the circumstances surrounding death are probably should be public knowledge, but the actual death is private, it's a person and his family. And that was taken away from families and tragedies were used on a grand scale to not mold public opinion, because I don't believe the average…just like the debate now over abortion…you're not talking about a majority, vast or otherwise, it should be, you know they took that away and they used it to make a point and they had the organization and they had the popular people—I mean think of Jane Fonda—I just don't take it an armory men's room where they have a Jane Fonda sticker in the urinal. I can show it to you right today! That's the sort of stuff…I feel sorry when I look through the books and I see the pictures of Colonel Isner who was my battalion commander who was killed by a sniper, because I knew his wife, I knew him. In fact, I went and saw his wife who for a number of years was the matchmaker, the hostess over at West Point, because he was a West Point graduate and the fact that the anti-Vietnam people used pictures like that to further their goals and the pro people used that to show all this public support. Certain families were dragged through it by both sides and I think that's a sad thing. The other thing that I think after the war that has bother me the most is suddenly all this contriteness to make things right. First of all, I don't think the government is the person that can make the things right, but the fact is that all this stuff that they're trying to do now to make the Vietnam veteran feel loved or something. They're always having parades all over the place or doing Vietnam veteran memorials and all this stuff and yet, I think again, they're doing it and they're not doing it because when you go back and find the millions and millions, I don't know how many total million men went through Vietnam and women—you probably know that answer better than I do—but by far, 95% of those people are someplace living in America, normal lives and for the most part don't consider them screwed up or anything else and very few of them has ever had a bad experience. I've got thirty-seven years of military and I can't ever say I ever had a time when I had a bad experience with being in the military, public or private or otherwise. I shouldn't say that, I probably had some unpleasant private times with my wife about

being in the military, but those have passed by, fortunately. But that's what's happened. So that is something. I don't know what they're trying to do and maybe it's me again, maybe it's just the way I'm seeing things. For example, the only Vietnam movie I've seen is *Apocalypse Now* and I've never read any books about it and I don't particularly want to. I don't desire to go back to Vietnam because I saw what it was like in '72, what was left of it, how the jungles around Da Lat were basically gone and defoliated and I've seen pictures of it since and it hasn't come back and I remember what it was like…I want to remember what Da Lat was like when I first saw it, I want to remember the iron triangle, what it was like when I was over there in '65 which were the triple canopy jungle and it was gorgeous and the wildlife and actually seeing a tiger and seeing wild elephants and things like that, that's what I want to…and the monkeys and everything that was there. I don't want to remember what it looked like in the 70s when they'd gotten done with defoliation and bombing because they pretty much changed a beautiful country into something like a tornado went through a place. A conversation like this I'm having with you, I've never really had this with anybody else before. Certainly it's not the conversation I that I have in the Guard either now or in the past. It's not a conversation that you would hear at our flight school meetings, you know, the gatherings. You heard those conversations and what you heard was probably what you would have heard if you'd been there the year before and the year before that. It doesn't change anything. This is something that is the first time I've ever really talked about it. I've often wondered what's happened to some of these guys that I knew. I sometimes wonder what happened to Sergeant Lynch because I liked him, I certainly wonder what happened to Sergeant Cotton, what happened to him if some husband didn't track him down and do him in. I think of the docs that we had, Doc Kline, I wonder where he is because we sort of got on together. There was a guy by the name of Fred Beguine and a guy by the name of Dunn who took over the recon platoon after it got wiped out. Those were funny guys, they were really funny characters and they all had their take on life and you wonder how they're doing. The guys I flew with, I can think of some guys…there was a major there that every night drank himself to oblivion and then he got so that… he was ops officer, I was a captain and it go so we didn't even schedule him to fly anymore. But you wonder whatever happened to these guys, you know what they're doing, how their life is normal,

or what's happening with them. It's like they dragged out this old Air Force guy that was the guy who held the record for the longest free fall and the highest jump from a hundred and some thousand feet—parachute jump—and they dragged him out and he said that it was the first time they ever asked him about it in forty years! I don't know what you're finding, I would think that most of these interviews are fairly upbeat, most of them feel positive about their experience. Some probably don't. I would say that if you talked to anybody that stayed involved with the military afterwards, that they probably have a very positive feeling about it. Everybody's going to have those things that they're unhappy about or that scared the hell out of them. I know guys that were shot down four and five times, but they were…you look at them and they have relatively normal lives.

SM: It runs the gamut, but you're right. For those men who stayed in the military, they seem to have an easier time integrating their experiences and going either from Vietnam back to the United States or transitioning from a war time Army to peace time Army. They have an easier time dealing with their experiences.

PF: You said most of our flight school, most of my flight class you've met—that's 90% of the flight class practically there. There's a couple of guys dead and a couple of guys didn't make it, but I look at that crew and out of even twenty-seven guys, there isn't one in the lot there that has not done well. I mean I find that amazing. Just like all of my friends from college, we're all still married to the same woman we married, either high school or college sweethearts and I look around my flight class and most of them got out of the Army when they came back from Vietnam, but they've all had a good life. And I like to believe it was our synergies. How is that for pure optimism? I can't thank you for doing this.

SM: Well thank you! Thank you for taking the time! Why don't I go ahead and officially end the interview. This will end the interview with Peter Faber.