The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Sidney Baird
Conducted by Kelly Crager
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Transcribed by Emilie Meadors

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

Kelly Crager: This is Kelly Crager conducting an Oral History interview with Mr. Sidney Baird. Today is 2 November 2009. I am in Lubbock, Texas, on the campus of Texas Tech University and Mr. Baird is joining me from Gaston, North Carolina. I'm interviewing Mr. Baird today in order to gain his reminiscences of his time in Vietnam. Mr. Baird served with Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 165 and was in Vietnam in 1967, 1968. Mr. Baird's primary responsibilities were as an aircraft electrician, although he later served as machine gunner and crew chief of CH-46 helicopters. Mr. Baird, to begin this interview I'd like to ask you some basic biographical information, some background information if I could. Can you tell me when you were born and where?

Sidney Baird: January 11th, '44 in Roanoke Rapids, North Carolina.

KC: Okay, what were your parent's names?

SB: Pardon me?

KC: What were your parent's names?

SB: Oh, Sidney Baird—my father's name was Sidney Baird, he was in the Army in World War II. And my mother's name is Ella.

KC: Ella, very good.

SB: We lost my dad, so I'm staying with her now.

KC: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

SB: I've got four brothers and sisters.

KC: Four brothers and sisters. Now where are you in the line of progression? Oldest, Youngest?

SB: Top of the line.

KC: Top of the line, of course. I should have known.

SB: (Chuckles) Yeah, I've been told for a long time that I pick on my brothers and sisters because momma kept—had me and then she kept right on trying to have another one just like me.

KC: (Laughing)

SB: She finally had my little sister, they gave up.

KC: What did your parents do for a living?

SB: Well, they worked on a little cotton mill here. Like I said, my dad's gone now, my mother is eighty-seven years old so I'm staying with her. She's looked after me for sixty-five years so it's time for me to look after her, right?

KC: Yeah, that sounds like a very fair trade to me.

SB: Like I said, my dad passed away about twelve years ago. My dad was a tight person and I felt like inherited this. He would give his last dollar to somebody in need, but somebody tried to steal a nickel from him, they got a fight on their hands. He was just that type of person.

KC: You mentioned that your dad was in the 2nd World War. Did he serve in Europe or was it the Pacific? Or where did he serve?

SB: He was in the army. I know he was overseas. In fact, he was wounded over there, and they put him in the hospital, got him out of the hospital and right back out on the front line.

KC: Is that right?

SB: In fact, I was seventeen months old before my dad ever saw me. I was born three weeks after he went overseas. I'll tell you what, I miss him.

KC: I bet. Did your dad serve in the Pacific or Europe?

SB: I don't know about that. He was in on the East Coast here.

KC: Well, that's okay. Now, you say you were born in 1944. Both your parents worked at the cotton mill?

SB: Right, uh-huh.

KC: Okay, okay. Now what did they do at the cotton mill?

SB: Tell you the truth, I don't know. Just machine operators.

KC: Okay, well if you can, describe your childhood there in North Carolina. What was it like? What sort of things did you like to do, the family situation, things like that?

SB: Well, I loved to play football in high school. Smallest guy on the team and voted most valuable player.

KC: Is that right? What was your position?

SB: Running back.

KC: Is that right?

SB: Yeah. I was real popular in that. I got out of that, rather than going into the military I went to college.

KC: Where did you go to school?

SB: A local college here. It was not a big one, I just can't think of the name of it. My memory is terrible man, just some things.

KC: Sure. What did you want to do in college? Did you pursue a degree? What were you studying?

SB: Well, I ended up going to college as an electrician and that's what helped me tremendously when I joined the Marines. I was about to be drafted, so I joined the Marines and my experience as an electrician helped me tremendously. That's why I was selected as an electrician on the helicopters, you know.

KC: Were you able to finish your degree before you left?

SB: I don't think I did, I don't think I did finish my degree. You know, this is '64, when Vietnam was getting pretty hot. I don't think I finished—oh, I was working for a company here. A plastic molding company and I had started a training system they had. The way I looked at it, I'd go to train this hard-working devoted joint, help them. I'd rather train them to be a mechanic or electrician than a hire electrician off the street. So I even taught at community college.

KC: Oh really?

SB: An apprentice program while working. I selected young guys and then train them to be mechanics, but that time passed.

KC: While you were growing up there in North Carolina, did you pay attention to world events in terms of the United States and the Cold War and issues like this?

SB: I think so, but that's been a long time ago. You know, one thing I've been diagnosed with too is Alzheimer's.

KC: Oh is that right?

SB: Yeah. I inherited it from my dad I guess, because he had it. I went to the VA (Veteran's Affairs) hospital up in Richmond and they said they were going to nip it in the bud. I chew them out every time I go up there, it didn't work yet. That's forgetful, you know. These are some things when I was in the Marine Corps, you know, I don't think I will ever forget.

KC: Okay, well let's talk about your time with the Marines. When did you join the Corps?

SB: I was about to be drafted to the Army. This is '64. I was about to be drafted in the Army, so I joined the Marines.

KC: Why did you choose the Marines?

SB: Let's see. Why did I join the Marines?

KC: Yes, sir.

SB: I don't know. I felt like they were the best at the time, I still do. (Chuckles) I'll tell you, let me read this first section of this speech I made.

KC: Okay, please do.

SB: It says, "My memory is terrible, especially when it comes to names, but these are some of my Marine Corps experiences that I will never forget. Thanks to Pop A Smoke, a lot of these memories have been revived. Pop A Smoke is the greatest organization I know of. As I said, god willing I will not miss another reunion. I'm proud to be a Marine and I'm proud to have served my country in Vietnam. I will do anything within my power to help today's military, which reminds me of something that I wish I could forget. When I returned from Vietnam in '68, a lot of the public here were protesting the war and blaming the military. Whether or not it was right or wrong, the military should not have been blamed. This cannot allow us fight for our country. Another thing is today's media. You get home, turn on the news, and the first thing you see is six more kills in Iraq today. What does that do to people who have loved ones over

there, that prayed that it wasn't their son, father, or sibling? While in Vietnam, I had my loved ones here convinced I was over there laying on the beach, having a good time as safe as they were. I looked at it like this, why should my loved ones suffer when there was nothing they could do? I had everyone convinced except my mother. She had gone through World War II with my dad, and she knew me very well. I was born two months after my dad went over to fight in World War II. I was seventeen months old before he ever saw me. I have in a frame, my first birthday card from him. I am proud to say that I inherited the tight person I am from my dad, Sidney Baird Sr. My dad would give his last dollar to someone in need. If someone tried to steal a penny from him, they had to fight." That's the first paragraph of the interview, so that kind of tells where I got started.

KC: Right.

SB: When I get an address, I'm going to send you a copy of that one-page speech and the other three pages of experiences.

KC: Please do.

SB: In fact, do you have an e-mail address I could send it to?

KC: Yes, it will be on the business card that I will put in the mail to you today.

SB: Alright, good. I'll send you a copy of that.

KC: Oh terrific.

SB: Now what is your organization?

KC: We are the Vietnam Center and Archive at Texas Tech University.

SB: Oh okay, Vietnam Archive.

KC: Yes, sir.

SB: Okay. Like I said, I'll never forget it. Like I said, I build golf clubs. I've got a niece whose husband just got back from—well, he made two tours. I think one in Iraq and one in Afghanistan, had two tours over there. He just got back, but he was over there the first time and I saw my niece in church. She said, "Uncle Junior, Mike asked me the other day if I can get a couple of clubs from you, a couple wedges to send to him so he has something to do in his spare time." I'll tell you what, sleep that night, all I could think about was Vietnam. The next morning, I got in my shop, I boxed up eighteen wedges. Fishing wedges, sand wedges, lob wedges, gap wedges, both right-handed and left-handed. I put eight dozen balls in there, put in a copy of this speech and I wrote him a

letter to tell him to share these with his buddies and one of the paragraphs in the letter said, “When Nicole said you needed something to do in your spare time, all I could think about was Vietnam.” I said, “Don’t think I had to do it in my spare time.” I put in parentheses, “Of course, I can’t complain because I picked my buddies.” But I shipped them to Iraq and my niece tried to pay me for the clubs, she tried to pay me later and I flat refused. I put it to her in these words, “As far as I’m concerned, those guys are already paying the price.” It took three weeks to get those clubs over there and then I get a full-page e-mail from Mike thanking me from those golf clubs. He said, “Because of those golf clubs, I’ve become the most popular Marine over here.” (Laughs)

KC: (Laughs) Well, that is certainly very generous of you to do that.

SB: I support them. I support our military all I can.

KC: Yes, sir. Well, if I could Mr. Baird, let me take us back to 1964, when you joined the Marine Corps. Can you tell me about the basic training? What do you remember about basic training there?

SB: Oh, in the speech I’m sending you, I’m going to read another paragraph. It’s as shorter one.

KC: Okay.

SB: “When I joined the marines in 1964, I didn’t know they had an airway. We had a room full of recruits in Riley, North Carolina, waiting to be put on a train to Parris Island. They had already scared the—out of us. This man in uniform comes to the door and yells, “Baird.” It scared the daylights out of me. I went up to him in attention and said, “Yes sir.” He said, “The recruit they qualified for Avionics didn’t show up. Test score showed you qualified. Do you want it?” I didn’t know what he was talking about. I was afraid to say anything but, “Yes, sir.” What luck, there was nothing that could compare to the United States Marine Corps Boot. I got there, I was a little hundred and sixty pound boy. When I graduated Muhammad Ali could have said the wrong thing to me and I ought to have kicked his butt.” (Laughs) That’s what I did learn in the boot camp though. They will make a man out of you.

KC: How do they do that? What sort of things do you remember from boot camp?

SB: Making you do things you never thought you could do, physical things. Yeah, it's been a long time ago, but I know it was tough. They brainwashed me too I guess because like I said, Muhammad Ali could have said something.

KC: Well, I think that's the attitude that they certainly try to instill in you.

SB: Yeah.

KC: It sounds like it worked. Now, where did you go to boot camp?

SB: Like I said, I want to get this copy to you. The first page of the two is what I got written down here, but I'm trying to find some of my old buddies. That was the advice I gave to those Marines in church. Told them, "I'll give you Marines some advice that can possibly help you later on in life. Trust me, when you reach my age, you start losing your memory. So take my advice and write down the names and addresses of your Marine buddies now and keep it in a safe place." But before all that I said I'm also trying to locate some of my old Marine Corps buddies, especially Terry Rush. We served together from '64 to '67 in VMGR two by two. In '67 we went to Vietnam together, but they split us up. They assigned him VMGR one by two and sent my butt up north on their HMM 165 helicopters. I've heard that he stayed in and retired. If you can help me find and locate Terry or any of my other buddies, I would deeply appreciate it. Now, I've got another one—I hadn't been back long in '68. In '69, I was back here about a year and my wife gave birth to my son. Named after me, Sidney the 3rd and nicknamed him Skip, after one of my best buddies that was killed, Frank Waller, nicknamed Skip. I was told that he was killed. I was going through this Pop A Smoke membership list and they got them by states and all, you know. I was going through that and they had them in alphabetical order. I went through the W's and there's Frank Waller. I almost had another heart attack.

KC: Wow.

SB: But I called that number right then. I think he was up in Ohio. I called that number and Frank's wife answered the phone. That was Skip Waller.

KC: Wow.

SB: So I reunited with him and I'll tell you what, I hold it to him because I named my son after him. Second, he was dead. My son's name is Sidney the 3rd, nicknamed Skip. I hold that against him to this day. I said, "You owe me big time. I named my son after you." I liked these reunions.

KC: Oh sure, sure.

SB: For a long time after I got back from Vietnam, if I'm sitting in a room full of people and they start talking about the Vietnam War, I'd get up and leave. I couldn't talk about it and that case shut me up.

KC: Well, let me take you back to your early time there in the Marine Corps. Do you know where you went to boot camp?

SB: Yeah, Parris Island.

KC: Parris Island, okay. You were at the basic time there. How long was boot camp then?

SB: Thirteen, fourteen weeks, I guess. Like I said, my memory is terrible. I about forgot.

KC: After boot camp, where did you go for AIT (Advanced Individual Training)?

SB: Let's see, I went down in Florida to—I forgot.

KC: Well, that's okay.

SB: Somewhere in Florida for training.

KC: What kind of training was it?

SB: Well—actually, once they figured out I was small enough to be an aircraft electrician, that's when I went to school too, to be an aircraft electrician.

KC: Okay, and is that the training you received in Florida?

SB: I think so, yes.

KC: Okay, okay. Now as you mentioned, you had some training in college in electronics as well.

SB: Yeah, that was before I went in the Marine Corps. Like I said, I went in the Marine Corps, I was already—I must have been twenty years old. I'd been out of high school for two or three years, you know. I was about to be drafted on. Well, there's no way I ain't going to no army, I want to go into the Marine Corps. You know what army stands for don't you?

KC: What is it?

SB: A-R-M-Y, "Ain't Ready for Marines Yet".

KC: (Laughs)

SB: (Laughs) I got it in this letter too that I'll send you.

KC: Very good, very good.

SB: I pick on the other military a lot, but you don't pick on somebody you don't like.

KC: Right, right. What did you hope to do once you received this training? What did you hope to do in the Marine Corps? Was there a special place you wanted to go? What did you hope to do?

SB: Well, actually I did. I went there, I went to right here in North Carolina after my training. While I was in Florida, in Jacksonville, Florida—that's what it was.

KC: Okay.

SB: Going to school there now, for the C-130s, okay? I was going to school there and I'd come up here about every couple of months and my girlfriend—well, I knocked her up.

KC: Okay.

SB: I couldn't help it, I went crazy because I hadn't seen her in a month, you know. By the way, her stepfather at the time, my wife's stepfather at the time, he was the meanest man I've ever known and he was a Marine.

KC: Oh no!

SB: Yeah, Fred (unintelligible). So she got pregnant and she was still in high school. I had to sneak up here. In fact, I came up here on a weekend, the weekend she got out of high school and we eloped. We had already got married a few weeks before that and kept a secret and we went back to Florida. Oh, by the way, we were only allowed, I think two-hundred-mile radius from the base at Florida. That's our limit for a two-day weekend. I'd come up here about six hundred miles. When I got back down with my bride, as soon as I got on base that morning, these Marines are coming to me and saying, "Man, they're looking for you. CO's (Commanding Officer) looking for you." And they warned me ahead of time that they had heard that I was out of bounds. Sure enough, I got called in the CO's office that Monday morning. As soon as I walked down, he said, "Forget it. I'm going to let it slide."

KC: Oh really?

SB: He found out the real reason why I came up here.

KC: How did he find out?

SB: One of my buddies finally told him why. I mean, he heard that I had come up. They started asking around about it and one of the buddies that told him the reason. I'd knocked up, went up there to get her. I'll tell you what, I'm glad I knocked her up. My daughter is forty-four years old now and she is something else. Got me three grandchildren.

KC: So your girlfriend or your new wife, she was still in high school when you married her?

SB: Yeah, we got married and her oldest sister signed for us to get married, but she had three weeks left in high school, so I didn't take her back down then. Her oldest sister knew about it. She signed for us to get married, helped us out. So I just came up here two weeks later and rented an apartment down in Jacksonville. Made arrangements down there. When I got there, he had called the Marine Corps headquarters.

KC: This is her father?

SB: Yeah, her stepfather. He is the meanest SOB I've ever known in my life and he was in the Marines. But he had called the Marine Corps headquarters in D.C. and he was after my butt when he found out I left with his stepdaughter. They knew out of Jacksonville, so they told them to get it. They knew what was going on, you know. We were married for twenty-five years. We're not married now, but we have stayed friends. We've got two children and four grandchildren.

KC: Oh wow, that's terrific. What did her father do? Did he ever get used to the idea of you being married to his very young stepdaughter?

SB: Well, I was a little scared going around him. But yeah, he finally accepted it. He's been gone now for a long time. He's been dead fifteen—twenty years, I guess.

KC: Okay, so now you are—you're in AIT, you're in Jacksonville and you've got some kind of future mapped out for you. Working on electronics, you're working with C-130s, you're brand new married. What did you hope would happen with your career at this point in the Marine Corps? Was Vietnam on the horizon? Was it something you thought you could avoid? Did you want to go to Vietnam?

SB: Well, I'll be perfectly honest with you and I ain't bragging, but my name kept coming up on the list for Vietnam and the CO kept pulling strings to keep me back, kept me from going to Vietnam. Yeah, not many people believe that, but I had a little

advantage over the rest of them because I went to college before I went into the Marine Corps, so I already had a degree and was experienced. I got into the Marines and I was a chief electrician.

KC: Okay.

SB: I was chief electrician—so I went to Vietnam and I got one of those paragraphs in my speech here. I had a good friend over there at Cherry Point, North Carolina, on C-130s, Terry Rush. He's the other one I'm trying to find. Well, our names kept coming up on the list for Vietnam and CO kept pulling strings to keep us there. Like I said, I was chief electrician on C-130s. Going to college before I went into the Marine Corps. Well, he calls one day and says, "Guys, they're putting pressure on me and one of you is definitely going. Probably both of you, but one of you is definitely going now." He said, "I'll let you know tomorrow." Well, I got talking to Frank about it and I told him, I said, "Listen, let's both of us go and stay buddies." I mean, Terry Rush. We left Cherry Point and went to Florida on our way to Vietnam. We had to go to some jungle training in California—thinking we'd stay together, you know. We decided we'd have to tell the Cos. We said, "Sir, send us both, we'll be together." Got to Vietnam, we left and put him in Da Nang on the C-130s and sit my butt up north on 646 helicopters. All the R&R (Rest and Recuperation) I took while in Vietnam—no, I did take one more. But I'd get a break a day or two you know—I'd hitchhike down to Da Nang and visit Terry. The only break—see, I never took leave while I was over there. I never had a break. The CO came to me one day and we had to make a modification on the C-130s. Yeah, they had been out long then. And we had to do a modification to all of them and we had about thirty, thirty-five helicopters. He came to me because I was a chief electrician; I was ahead of the electric shop. He came to me, said, "Sarge, what we have to do is shuttle two at a time to Okinawa and I'm going to leave it up to you, I'm going to have to have a good electrician and a good mechanic to send over there. It's going to take probably six weeks." Well, he said, "Now, let me know tomorrow." The next day I went into his office and handed him a piece of paperwork with two names on it. See, I'd been over there seven months then. He listened to me he said, "Wait a damn minute, I didn't tell you to go." I said, "Sir, I've been here seven months without R&R, I need break. And I will know if you get Okinawa." In fact, was there seven weeks and I hadn't been over there no time—little

station there and they cut me down to BC Street. I don't know if you've ever heard of that or not.

KC: No, sir.

SB: BC street, that's where the prostitutes and all that live. I'd been seven months without a woman, and they curve me down to BC Street. I's in that letter I'm sending you, I said, "I'll bet my fingerprints are still in the urinal plate." They call it the clap. I will never forget it either. That's just some of the experiences that I got a full memory. But those are things, the Vietnam stuff I will never forget.

KC: Sure, sure.

SB: For a long time then, I couldn't watch any military on television. And if I'm in a room full of people that start talking about Vietnam, I'd get up and leave. I couldn't talk about it. Now they can't shut me up.

KC: Well, that's good for our purposes today for sure. If I can, let me go back here. Now, you're married, and the assignment has come down and you're going to go to Vietnam. What was that like for you and your wife, and your family?

SB: Well, my daughter wasn't but a year old. She's seventeen months old. You imagine how hard it was for me to leave.

KC: How about your wife? How'd she take it?

SB: Well, she took it alright. She didn't want me to leave, but we were only married twenty-seven. I mean, not then, but we had just gotten married.

KC: Right.

SB: We have stayed friends because we got two kids and four grandchildren. So we have stayed friends now to this day.

KC: Sure. Well, tell me about leaving the United States and going to Vietnam. What was that trip like for you?

SB: Well, the worst thing was leaving my little baby here. But like I said, I was going over there to fight for my country. And the feelings I had, I feel like I had heard it from my dad. Like I said, if he was going through World War II, he would help anybody. He was just that type of person.

KC: Now, this is what I believe, you're in country from I think it's June of 1967 when you arrive?

SB: Right.

KC: Where did you fly into? Did you fly into Da Nang?

SB: I think so, yes. I flew into Da Nang and that's where they split me and Terry Rush up. They put him on C-130s there and sent my butt up north.

KC: How did they come to that determination? How did they decide what outfit you're going to be with?

SB: I don't know, I don't remember that.

KC: And when you got to Da Nang, they told you that, "Okay, you guys are going to split up and you're going to go up north"?

SB: Yeah, they had me going up north and him staying behind. They didn't say anything about splitting us up. Like I say, I took a couple of breaks and went down to Da Nang to visit Terry. I'd like to get in touch with him now.

KC: So you wind up with the HMM-165. Now, you're with the helicopters here.

SB: Right.

KC: You'd been training on C-130s airplanes, right?

SB: I'd been working on them for two years.

KC: Yeah, so what was it like this transition to helicopters? Did you know anything about them?

SB: No, no. Never been on one.

KC: Was it difficult to make the transition?

SB: Well, I don't think so. Like I said, I'd already been to college before I went in the Marine Corps and I got an electrical background and that helped me in the Marines, I feel.

KC: Where were you stationed up there? Do you remember?

SB: Where, in Vietnam?

KC: Yes, sir. With HMM-165. Was that Marble Mountain?

SB: It was all different places. I don't remember.

KC: Okay.

SB: In fact, I was put out on—my outfit was put out of the biggest battle of Vietnam, the Tet Offensive. They put my outfit out on a carrier escort and made the

hospital shift, I think as repose for seven weeks. I'll never forget it. For seven weeks, all we did was pick up dead and wounded.

KC: Wow.

SB: Dropped the wounded off at the hospital dead on a freezer, on the carrier. What I went through, that's one reason I support today's military. I pick on the Army, but I support them. You don't pick on somebody you don't like.

KC: Right, right. What was it like, if you can tell me, what was it like for you to join this new outfit up there?

SB: Well, I was expecting to be on the C-130s because I was experienced. I don't know, I think because I was rated kind of high because of my education, they needed somebody like that on the helicopters. Like I said, I was more or less in charge of maintenance on them while I was in Vietnam.

KC: So what would be your daily routine there with this outfit, working on helicopters? What would you do from the time you got up to the time you laid down that night? What would be your routine?

SB: I don't remember.

KC: Alright, if we can then, you mention the Tet Offensive a moment ago. Of course, this is late January, early February of 1968. Of course, the Marines saw so much fighting up in that part of the country, in northern South Vietnam there in I-Corps. What do you remember about this offensive beginning? How did you learn about it? (Audio cuts) Before we were cut off there Mr. Baird, I'd asked you about the Tet Offensive. Do you remember how you found out about it? And what were the activities in which you were involved?

SB: Well, I got in this speech that you're going to be getting that says, "Tet, during the Tet Offensive my outfit was put on a carrier, escorting a Navy hospital ship repose. For several weeks all we did was pick up dead and wounded. That was an experience I hope no one ever has to go through again. While there, I met this young sailor. He got a 'Dear John' from his girlfriend. He jumped overboard and committed suicide. I will never forget that."

KC: Wow.

SB: I don't know his name, but he got a "Dear John" from his girlfriend and committed suicide.

KC: Wow.

SB: But like I said, that's in that letter that I'm going to be sending you.

KC: Okay. So during the offensive you weren't just fixing the aircraft, they called you into actually be on the aircraft to help take care of this duty of dealing with the dead and the wounded?

SB: Right. Well, I was a chief electrician, but for fifty dollars more a month, I think it was, I flew as machine gunner. The crew chief machine gunner, you know. I didn't have to fly.

KC: Alright. What was your gun on the CH-46?

SB: I think it was CH-46—I forgot which gun it was.

KC: Sure, sure. Okay, as you were so busy during this time and dealing with this very difficult duty, did you find yourself under fire at anytime? Did you experience any combat while you're going through this? (Audio cuts) It seems that we're destined to deal with some technical difficulties today. Anyway, if you could, I was asking you the question and if you can provide a—if you can remember this, while you were moving the dead and wounded from the battlefield to the repose, were you ever involved in any combat where you fired upon while you were doing this?

SB: Oh yes.

KC: Tell me about that if you can.

SB: I'll tell you about it, in fact, it's on this thing that I'm going to send you.

KC: Okay.

SB: It says, "Captain Romero, I only had about three weeks left in 'Nam. We were transporting about one hundred Marines to this hill in A Shau Valley, I think. As you know, we always flew with at least two choppers. We had the last nine Marines as my chopper. I was point-side machine gunner about four feet behind the pilot, Captain Romero. As we were hovering to land, I was laying out the open gun and suddenly incoming machine gun fire. As you well know, you can tell the difference in incoming and outgoing. I jumped back behind the gun and I could hear somebody yelling. I looked up front and the co-pilot was yelling. Captain Romero was leaning down with a strain of

blood coming off his face. I ran up to him, snatched the helmet off, he had a little hole in the left side of his head and the right side was just busted. I clamped his head in my hands and we crash landed. I held his head until we had gotten him into the other chopper. I heard that he was still living the next day, but I'm afraid he didn't make it. We return to our chopper and was able to fly back to the base. If I could remember correctly, there were fourteen bullet holes in our chopper. On the way back all I could think about was my three-year-old daughter that I had not seen in a year. As soon as we got back to the base I went to the CO and asked him to please take me off of flight pay. I want my next flight to be coming back to the world." That was affection and I'll never forget.

KC: That's pretty powerful.

SB: Pardon?

KC: I said that's very powerful.

SB: It is. Like I said, these are some of my experiences that I'll never forget them.

KC: Was anyone else wounded in this crash landing?

SB: I don't think it was on that. Our main objective was medevac, picking up dead and wounded. That's all I remember about that and Captain Romero, I'll never forget that. Like I said, he was almost time for him to come back in the States.

KC: Oh goodness. Well, to shift gears here a little bit, Mr. Baird.

SB: Pardon?

KC: I said, let's shift gears here a little bit and can you tell me about your life on the base? What sort of things were you doing everyday when you weren't on duty?

SB: When I work?

KC: When you were not on duty.

SB: Oh, played poker.

KC: Played poker.

SB: I picked my buddies.

KC: Did you have the chance to correspond with your wife at home? Did you write letters?

SB: I wrote letters, but I'm going to tell you what, and I've said this before. I write a letter home and it would take two or three weeks to get here, if it got here. I mean, but that was back in World War II, I guess. It ain't like today. I mean, I made this

comment before that they've got computers over there in Iraq and Afghanistan. They talk on the computers.

KC: Well, as you think back on it, what are some of the more memorable experiences you have about your time there?

SB: Well, like I said, that Captain Romero thing that was one of them. And these on this thing I'm sending you, you'll get a kick out of that, you know. It's four pages of it.

KC: Very good.

SB: Things like beer. When I arrived in Vietnam, I inherited one fourth of a refrigerator. I think Frank Waller, Skip, gave it to me. They had smuggled it over earlier. Nothing went in that refrigerator, but beer. As you know, you couldn't drink the H2O over there because of the purification they had put in it. So I'd get up in the morning and brush my teeth with a beer.

KC: (Laughs)

SB: I bet I drank a tank truck full of beer. When I returned to the States, I didn't want to touch a beer. About a year later I drank two beers and got high. To this day, I can drink a fifth of liquor, bourbon and won't get as high I will off of three beers. I might exaggerate by a little bit.

KC: It makes a good point, though.

SB: Right.

KC: Well, tell me about that. When it's time to come home, a lot of people that I've talked to were obviously very glad to be able to end their tour to come home, but they were also disappointed and some were somewhat saddened by the fact that they had to leave so many of the people that they knew, the people they became friends with. What was it like for you to leave Vietnam?

SB: Well, like I said, I had a little baby I hadn't seen in over a year and I wanted my hands on her so bad I didn't know what to do. In fact, I'll tell you a little something that happened. I got back to California, I got back to California and I didn't have but three weeks left in the Marine Corps. Like I said, I had a seventeen month old daughter here and a wife that I had not seen in thirteen months. Well, I got back to California and I told this in the interview. I held out my right hand and I said, "I swear they did this trying

to get me to re-up." They told me it was going to take two to three weeks to process me. You know, a twenty-minute job. I swear I'll always believe they did this trying to get me to re-up and stay in. Well, they saw the pain that I was in because they found out I had my baby, my seventeen-month-old and my wife that I hadn't seen in over a year. They made arrangements to fly my wife and baby from Richmond, Virginia, to Del Toro, California, still trying to get me to re-up.

KC: Oh wow.

SB: And I said at the reunion in the interview I said, "I swear to you, I will never forget that first night." Not what you think now, not what you think. I said my little baby is going to sleep, my wife's laying there on the bed with nothing on, but panties and sweat rolling off of her and I'm laying over there next to her with a blanket pulled up about to freeze. First time I'd been in an air-conditioned room in over a year.

KC: Right, right.

SB: Your body adapts to it. It's like the day in my shop. I get off shop and I don't have air conditioning in it. I got the heat up, but I don't have air conditioning. I had customers come in there and we had some extremely hot days last year and I had some customers come and say, "Junior why are you standing so hot in here?" You know what I tell them?

KC: What?

SB: "Carry your butt over to Vietnam for about a year. You won't need air conditioning either." And when your body adapts to it there was nothing over 15, 18 degrees, humid degrees over there.

KC: Well, once you're back in the States, obviously you're not interested in re-upping with the Marine Corps. What did you want to do with the rest of your life once you got back?

SB: Be with my baby, be with my wife. I wished many times I had stayed in. I regretted getting out many, many times. But like I said, I don't know if I could have gone through that again with my little baby and a wife to leave them for a year. Like I said, I wished many times I had stayed in the Marine Corps.

KC: What did you like about the Marine Corps?

SB: The Marine Corps?

KC: What did you like about it? The entire thing?

SB: The entire thing.

KC: Alright, now you come back home and it's 1968. Did you keep up with the war after you got back?

SB: To be honest the best I can remember, I couldn't. It would tear me up. They said something about Vietnam come on television, I'd have to turn it off. I couldn't and if I'm in a room full of people and they start talking about it I'd get up and leave. I couldn't talk about it. Today, they can't shut me up.

KC: Very good. Well, as you look back on your time in Vietnam Mr. Baird, what sort of things do you think you came away with? What did you learn about yourself as a result of your time there?

SB: Well, I don't know. I never thought about that. Like I said, I support our military now, big time.

KC: Do you think there are any lessons from the Vietnam experience for the United States that you think this country should have learned or that it did learn?

SB: No, I went through all I needed. Even though I was an aircraft electrician and machine gunner, they put me through jungle training. At the time I thought, "Why go through this? I'm not going to be in the jungles." But I could have been.

KC: And if one of the helicopters you were on was shot down, like it was for you, I would suspect that training would come in a little handy there.

SB: Yeah, that's right.

KC: Well, Mr. Baird, is there anything else you would like to add to this interview before we put an end to it?

SB: I'd like to get back into the Marine Corps. Like I said, you send me your address and I'm going to send you a copy of this thing.

KC: Okay.

SB: Maybe you can find Terry Rush for me.

KC: Well, we certainly have a lot of resources here that we can help people find different units and things like that, so maybe we have something here that could help you out. Well, Mr. Baird, thank you so much for you time today. I really appreciate it.

SB: Well, I appreciate one thing from you. I mean, I appreciate you calling, but one more thing.

KC: Yes, sir.

SB: Don't call me Mr. Baird, I'm a junior.

KC: Junior, okay will do Junior. Thank you so much.

SB: Makes me sound old.

KC: Right, right. Well Junior, thank you so much again for your time today. I really appreciate it.

SB: Alright.

KC: Thank you so much.

(Interview audio ends)