Richard Verrone: This is Dr. Richard Verrone. It is October 3rd 2002. We are conducting an Oral History interview with Mr. Elmer D. Hale. I am in Lubbock, Texas on the campus of Texas Tech University, Special Collections Library in the interview room. Mr. Hale, where are you now?

Elmer Hale: I’m in Flat Rock, Illinois.

RV: Flat Rock, Illinois very good. Sir, if we could begin just tell me a little bit about yourself. Where were you born and when were you born?

EH: I was born July the 8th 1945 in Lawrenceville, Illinois.

RV: Growing up, were your family members in the military- your father or grandfather or any kind of military influence in your life there growing up?

EH: Not really, Richard, no.

RV: Did you go through high school?

EH: Yes, sir.

RV: Graduated high school and from there did you go to college or did you start working?

EH: Well, if we can back up just a minute, Richard, I’ll kind of fill you in a little bit more. I probably should have done this earlier, but I didn’t. I’m from a broken home. My grandmother pretty much raised me until 1962. When she passed away I was put out to a home there in Lawrenceville. I actually ended up going to a couple that lived in
Pinkstaff, Illinois. My mother was a mental patient. She couldn’t take care of me. This
wasn’t a problem that was hereditary. I guess she didn’t inherit this. She had an accident
that caused this problem. But yes, I did graduate from high school. I was behind the
other kids because we moved so much when I was younger. I never had a chance to get
settled down. I wasn’t able to attend school for a very long period of time at any one
location. After I graduated from high school, I went to electronics school in Louisville,
Kentucky. I had not transportation while I was down there. I had a menial job, didn’t
pay much. I went six months down there, ended up coming back home. Within four
months, three months I was in the service.

RV: I see here that you entered in the service your age 22?
EH: That’s probably correct.
RV: What about your father, was he around at all?
EH: He was, but I had no contact with him.
RV: So, your grandmother basically raised you?
EH: Yes, sir.
RV: When you returned to Lawrenceville, did you volunteer, were you drafted?
EH: I was drafted.
RV: How were you informed, through the mail?
EH: I believe that’s correct, yes.
RV: Do you remember how you felt when you realized you were being drafted
into the U.S. Army?
EH: I don’t really remember, Richard, how I did feel. I guess I had no concept of
what was down the road, so to speak. I didn’t have any military influences in my
background so therefore I really didn’t know what was ahead of me. I just took it in
stride and went on.
RV: How much did you know about the Vietnam War at the time?
EH: Very little.
RV: Did you think that when you were drafted that you might be going there?
How did you see that?
EH: When I was drafted, I didn’t think of going to Vietnam until after I had completed basic. I got my MOS. My MOS was, of course, 11-B. That was light weapons infantry. I knew then that’s where I was headed.

RV: Where did you do your basic training?

EH: Ft. Leonardwood, Missouri.

RV: Can you tell me about that? How was it overall?

EH: I didn’t have a problem really per se with the training, Richard. I mean I was in pretty good shape and everything. I was kind of raised kind of in the country. I grew up with a gun for the most part of my life. I didn’t have a problem with it. I’m not saying I enjoyed it, because it wasn’t a time where you’d get a lot of enjoyment out of being in the service. We trained 16 hours a day, 17 hours a day, whatever. I just really never had a problem with it. I probably needed the discipline at the time. I wasn’t what you call a rowdy kid or a jailbird or anything like that. I think it helped me to grow up some.

RV: How long were you in training?

EH: I was in training at Ft. Leonardwood for eight weeks.

RV: Eight weeks. What was the most challenging aspect of that training would you say?

EH: Probably the physical part and some of the mental stress that some of the officers put us thorough. Although I handled that well.

RV: Did you have any contact with your family, with your grandmother while you were in basic?

EH: My grandmother passed away in ’62 Richard, so I wouldn’t have had any contact with her. I did have some contact with a girl that I was dating, plus the people that raised, me Mary and Tony Hill in Pinkstaff, Illinois.

RV: This was basically 1968?

EH: This was ’67.

RV: Ok, ’67. Were there any injuries there at basic do you remember?

EH: For me?

RV: From you or from any of the men in your company or platoon.
EH: I didn’t have any injuries. I can remember one guy breaking his leg. But as
far as anything real bad like somebody getting hurt with a weapon, no I don’t recall.
There was none of that, no.

RV: What kind of weapons training did you receive there at Ft. Leonardwood?
EH: Let me think just a minute Richard. We trained with the M-14. We also had
training with hand grenades [Also trained in hand grenades and hand to hand combat]. It
runs in my mind that after we trained with the M-14, they switched us to the M-16. With
the M-14, I’d done well with it. The M-16 I didn’t do so good on them, you know? You
know, that’s one aspect of the training that I really enjoyed.

RV: The weapons training?
EH: Yes.

RV: What was your personal preference of weapons that you handled there?
EH: Let’s see, Richard. I guess that depends on the situation the person is in. If
I’m in a combat situation, I want that M-16. You know, for everyday weapon or maybe
for hunting purposes or sniping or something, that M-14 is hard to beat.

RV: There in your basic training overall how would you rate that training? Did it
prepare you for what you were getting ready to get into in Vietnam?
EH: I think maybe it did somewhat Richard, but not like it did in AIT.

RV: How about your instructors there in basic; how were they?
EH: I would rate them as excellent overall.

RV: Did they talk to you about the potential of you guys going into combat in
Southeast Asia or did they concentrate more on training you into basics?
EH: I think they concentrated more on training us Richard. I don’t recall any one
of our DIs or our officers talking about Vietnam.

RV: Did they talk about any of their previous combat experience perhaps in
Korean War or before?
EH: No.

RV: I’m just wondering. The reason I’m asking these questions is I was
wondering what was your personal exposure to this and them telling you here’s what a
combat situation is like. This is how you need to be prepared for it etc etc.
EH: Yes.
RV: So basically in basic training you did not have a lot of exposure to any kind of combat stories or what might lie ahead.

EH: No. Richard, I need to take just a break. Hold on.
RV: Okay, sir. I’ll pause it. This is Richard Verrone. We are continuing the Oral History interview, this is the second session with Elmer Hale. Mr. Hale, before we began recording you told me there were a couple of things that you would like to add to what we had done before. Go ahead, sir.

EH: I guess one of the things that I can really think of right off the top of my head Richard, when I was in basic training down at Ft. Leonardwood we’d done a live fire exercise. What it was, they had pits that were dug out, of course. Then up around that they had sandbags, maybe a couple, three high. In these pits they had explosives that they set off periodically. We also had to negotiate barbed wire that was not real high off the ground that you had to crawl under. On top of that they were shooting, I think it was M-60s over our heads. We never had any problem there as far as our guys panicking or anything. I guess they did once in a while. They’d lose a guy, but that was the only thing that I can really think of that I possibly left out there.

RV: Is there anything else that you wanted to add?

EH: Not at this time, Richard. I just can’t think of it right now.

RV: That’s fine, just let me know. We had left off when you had basically completed your journey across the Pacific Ocean. You had landed in Bien Hoa, coming from Manila. What was your feeling? Do you remember your thoughts and feelings when you stepped off the plane when that door opened and you got down the steps?

EH: Yes, I can never forget the stench.

RV: Really?

EH: I’m talking about the open sewers. You know, these people didn’t really know what a bathroom was or anything. When they had to go to the bathroom, that’s where they went, right there. I guess the heat was unbelievable. When we got off the plane there, of course, those were the two things that really hit me was the stench and the heat. I guess from there they loaded us on to a bus, just like a school bus, and over the
windows they had these screens. I thought man, what are these screens for? Well
somebody asked or maybe the sergeant told us that it was to keep the people from
throwing hand grenades and stuff into the bus and all this. I thought Wow! They took us
down to I think it was called the 90th replacement center. I mean, this place was huge.
They had, I couldn’t venture to say how many guys were there Richard, but I’m sure it
was in the thousands.

RV: Processing in?
EH: Yes. This was where they processed us in. Everyday I think maybe two or
three times a day, I don’t recall for sure, but they’d have formations and stuff. They’d
have these guys stand up with these bullhorns and say so and so you’re going to here and
here and here. One of the things I remember very vividly was I heard a lot of the guys
talking about, you know you didn’t want to go to the 4th Infantry Division, because it was
kind of rough. I’ll put it that way.

RV: Rough, meaning they had seen a lot of combat?
EH: Yes, and the terrain we worked in wasn’t great. You know, you really
worked your butt off. I thought, man I don’t want to go there. Well, when my name was
called, that’s where I was headed. I thought, “Geez, oh peach!” just my luck. They had
guys going to 1st Cav and they had guys going to the 4th. They had guys going to the 9th.
I mean just everywhere all over the country. I remember loading up on a C-130, and I
had never been in a C-130. I don’t recall ever being in one until then. These planes are
not pressurized, or they weren’t then. We got on this thing, and we were all setting on
the floor. We took off and headed north to Pleiku Air Force Base. On the way up there, I
don’t know how high we were, but I thought my head was going to explode Richard.
The pressure was so great, and I couldn’t relieve the pressure. I tried swallowing, I tried
blowing. I tried everything. I was the only one it seemed like on the plane that it was
really affecting. I was in misery.

RV: How long was that flight? Do you remember?
EH: Just off the top of my head I’m going to say 30-40 minutes. Maybe not even
that Richard. Vietnam is not a big country, the size of California maybe. It could have
been longer, but I really just don’t think it was. I was affected from that for about three
days. It had really done a number on me. That’s the only time that they’d ever done that
to me. I flew in them after that and I never ever had that problem. I don’t know why it did the first time, but it did. Anyway, we got to Pleiku the Air Force Base then they came in and picked us up in a convoy and took us into a place called Camp Enari. I recall, but I don’t think this is correct. I recall Camp Enari as being west of Pleiku, but I don’t think it was. I think it was a little bit south, but I’m not real sure. It wasn’t too far from Pleiku maybe 10-14 miles if it was that far. Camp Enari got it’s name from a first lieutenant that was killed in that area. I don’t recall the year whether it was ’65 or ’66 when it was, but that’s where Camp Enari got it’s name. That was from a gentleman named Mark Enari.

RV: Is that A-n-a-r-i?

EH: I think it’s E. E-n-a-r-i or something like that Richard. If you guys have got a record down there it’ll tell you.

RV: We do, that’s what I will check.

EH: Anyway they took us in there to this base camp and we were assigned to companies and battalions. I remember they took us down, and got our equipment. We were issued a rucksack and poncho and poncho liners and canteens. Everything you needed. I think it might have been the next day, they took us in and assigned us a weapon. I mean these weapons looked like something that had come over on the Mayflower. They were in bad shape. That was my opinion. We were standing there around this big table kind of a horseshoe or U-shape. I asked this guy that was passing out the weapons I wasn’t trying to be a smart allek. I said, “Does this thing fire?” He said, “Oh yeah, it’s good to go.” Boy, it looked bad Richard. I just couldn’t believe it.

RV: Were these M-14s or M-16s?

EH: They were M-16s. They were the early version of the M-16.

RV: So they had probably been in the field, recycled back to you guys.

EH: Oh yes. I think we were there like I guessing at least seven months before they came out with the new ones.

RV: Excuse me, how long was it when you landed in Bien Hoa until you got to Pleiku and assigned your weapons. About how long was this? How many days?

EH: Three days.

RV: Three days, ok. How were you feeling? I mean this was a big thing that’s happening to you here.
EH: I don’t know Richard, its really kind of hard to say.

(Technical difficulties)
RV: Mr. Hale I’m sorry we were breaking up there.
EH: Let me get off this headset Richard I prefer to work with this thing but evidencedally it’s not going to let me. Hold on. I don’t know Richard; it was kind of hard to grasp at the time. I guess I was, in a way I was kind of naive about things. I come from a background where I didn’t really have a mother and father. I wasn’t bothered by a lot of this like a lot of guys were. I never ever felt that.
RV: I’m sorry I didn’t hear that.
EH: I don’t know why. Maybe, I’m just odd that way. I just never really felt that. Never had time to feel like that, Richard. But at the time I guess I was maybe kind of trying to figure out what the heck was going on and what we were doing over there. A lot of this never hit me until maybe like seven, eight months down the road. We did have a little bit of training there at the base camp once we were issued weapons. They took us out on a couple of little exercises I think. They took us out to the firing range to zero the weapons, and this kind of stuff. Basically from that time on we were assigned to different companies.
RV: Is this 1968?
EH: This is ’67.
RV: ’67.
EH: It’s November ’67. I was assigned to Charlie Company 1st battalion 22nd infantry. They basically loaded us up after about a week there in base camp. Loaded us up with stuff. They took us and dropped off (technical difficulties) to various companies.
RV: Go ahead sir.
EH: Let’s see. Where were we at, Richard?
RV: You were talking about they took you out on training, and you did a couple of exercises.
EH: Then they loaded us up on the helicopters and took us out to the companies. I remember flying in that helicopter. All you saw once we got out of that base camp area it was all green. It was like a big forest down there. I thought, I hope these guys know where they’re going. The next thing you know we were circling a place over in the
jungle, and they brought us down. That was quite a shock. You know, when you walk
into a group of men that maybe have been there a while. You feel kind of, I guess you
call it inferior. Most of the guys I won’t say they were reluctant. I guess they were
reluctant to have anything to do with us. We didn’t know nothing, we didn’t know squat.
It was kind of hard to really get to know what was going on. It took time to bond with
these guys. Once you did you were in.

RV: How many people there were in that group when you got off the chopper,
you went and joined them I guess? You were replacements obviously.
EH: Yes.
RV: How many men were in this one group, approximately?
EH: This is just a guess on my part Richard, I’m guessing maybe 75 at the most.
We as a company were never up to strength. If I remember right, don’t quote me on this
Richard, but I think a company consisted of like 125 or 130 men. We never ever had that
many people. I take that back, we did one time. We did one time, but that was pretty
much the norm. Anywhere from 60-75 people.
RV: What would you say was the morale of the people you were with, the
American troops that you came down with there?
EH: I thought it was pretty good. You know, for the conditions they were living
in, and conditions that I lived in for a year, I think we’d done as well as an animal can
exist. To really put it bluntly. That’s what we’d done. We were a bunch of animals.
That’s the way we lived. You know, you lived in holes, and you didn’t get a bath, and all
this stuff. But, basically, overall I think the morale was pretty good.
RV: So what did you do, you joined this group do you remember what your first
assignment was? You first mission was?
EH: I’m not real sure Richard, but I know I was introduced to my platoon
sergeant, and his name was Sergeant Mixon. He was kind of a rough character. I know
he told me, we hadn’t been there very long. He told me, “Hale you screw up, I’m going
to send your ass to Long Binh jail.” Well, I didn’t know what Long Binh jail was. But I
found out, it’s a place you didn’t want to go.
RV: Right.
EH: Overall he was good to his guys, and he didn’t do anything that he wouldn’t
ask you to do.

RV: What was your assignment in the platoon?

EH: I was just a rifleman at the time. If I remember right Richard, I think I went
out on LP. I think it might have been that night or the next night I went out on LP.

RV: Long range patrol?

EH: No it was listing post. We sent these out in four man groups in four different
directions from the company. We usually went out late in the evening. We’d go to one
spot, and we’d sit there until almost dark. Then we’d move. Just in case, we were being
watched. Maybe we could throw them off a little bit and give us some time to work. We
set up trip flares at night. We always had one man awake. Sometimes that person would
fall asleep, but most of the time, they’d do pretty good. Those [LP’s] were kind of an
early warning if there was a ground attack on the company. But I think that was probably
the first assignment that I was on.

RV: How many ground attacks were there on your platoon? Was this a common
thing?

EH: Really Richard, from my standpoint we didn’t have what I can really
remember as a ground attack. I mean if we did, it was very, very few. Usually, not
always but usually, the NVA or the VC would never attack an American company unless
they knew they had us outnumbered. They’d snipe at us once in a while and this kind of
stuff. For the most part, I can never remember having a full out ground attack from them
on us when we were set up.

RV: What kind of contact with enemy did you have?

EH: [Ambushes, and trying to take higher ground]. I was wounded twice over
there if that tells you anything. Let’s see let me think for just a second Richard. That
was in November. I’m trying to think Richard, when the Tet broke out.

RV: That would be in early 1968. So, basically two and a half months after you
arrived in country.

EH: When the Tet Offensive broke out our company was in Dak To. Because
they knew there was a big force of NVA to the west of Dak To that was going to come in.
Well, when Kontum got hit in the Tet Offensive, they pulled our company out probably
as well as some others. I don’t recall just exactly who all was there. They pulled us
down to Kontum, and from Kontum we went through there, and it was house-to-house
fighting. I remember we were going house-to-house, and I had picked up a knife and an
NVA flag and a couple of little things. I don’t remember just exactly what it was. We
were going through these buildings and stuff, and we were driving them North. We got
to this place, I don’t really know what you would call it Richard. It was a pretty area. It
was all grass, and then on both sides of this grassy area were little white buildings. They
were very nice. I didn’t know what they were, didn’t really pay a whole lot of attention
to them I guess. These NVA were inside these buildings. We got some of them to
surrender. I guess they called that Chieu Hoi, is what they called it. Anyway, we got
some of them to surrender and some of them wouldn’t. I remember we had this one guy
with us, I’m not going to mention no names. But anyway I think there were three of them
in this building. He said to them, “Chieu Hoi you son of a bitches.” They were repeating
what he said. Hang on just a second, Richard, please. He made this statement to them
you know, and they repeated it back to him. When they did, they held up their arms and
came to the door. He proceeded to kill them with an M-60. That kind of really opened
my eyes a little bit. This shit’s for real, you know. We had a captain with us at the time.
In fact, he’s in Texas right now. He’s a veterinarian down there. I think the world of the
guy, but anyway he was a West Point graduate. A very good man. I really hadn’t seen
anything out of the way of him as far as being aggressive or anything like this. We had
got behind one of the buildings. We knew that there was some in the basement. They
had basements in these old buildings. They wouldn’t come out. We tried everything to
get them out and they wouldn’t come out. He made the comment, he said, “We’ll get
them out.” He took a white phosphorous grenade and threw in there. Of course, that was
the end of that. Then we had captured a major there in Kontum. I’ll tell you those
people’s I guess you call it resilience or whatever you call it Richard really amaze me.
This guy stayed out there in that little grassy area all day long. I mean it was hot. He
never had any water. Never asked for anything. Come the end of the day, they came in
and took him by APC to an interrogation center. He supposedly made the comment to
his interrogators that had it not been for the 4th infantry division that they would have
taken Kontum. In and around Kontum right there Richard, to the north edge of it there
was a MACV compound. Somehow and I never did understand this and haven’t yet to
this day, but somehow the NVA had gotten in around that MACV compound and had dug
a trench around the compound. How in the world they’d done that I just really don’t
know, but anyway they did. I think it was the next day, we were going up let’s see it
would have been to the West I guess. We were going west up that street. We weren’t
sure, but we thought there were some down there in the trenches you know? Of course,
we got down there we found out real quick that’s where there were at. There was like six
or eight of us guys, and we had a platoon sergeant with us. His name was Sergeant
Eiring. They opened up on us with their weapons and what kept them from killing any of
us, I have no idea. We were real, real close. Me and this sergeant took off and went to
the north a little bit across this road and got behind a big tree. At this time I don’t know
how I got stuck with this job Richard, but I did. But at this time I was carrying a radio.
This was the only communication we had back to our company. He and I were behind
this big tree. He was quite a bit smaller than I was. I looked around that tree to see what
was going on, and just about the time I did I saw them shoot this B-40 rocket.

RV: At your tree?

EH: Yes. I thought oh, shit. I made the comment, “Hang on sergeant we’re
going to get shook.” Boy, about that time, I mean that thing hit that tree, and I slammed
him up against the tree. He said he felt like he’d been hit by Dick Butkus. I caught a
little shrapnel from that down the right side of my body and my leg. Nothing major. We
finally got a hold of a tank and he came down there and started working them over in that
trench pretty good.

RV: So, you called in the tank?

EH: Yes, we called in the tank [to help us]. He came down there and he got back
up on the road we started down through the trench there, doing away with the wounded
and stuff. There was no way they were going to survive [all we had to do was clean up].

RV: You did not take them prisoner?

EH: There was nothing there to take. They were dying. We didn’t mess around
with them.

RV: You just let them die there since they were in such bad shape?

EH: Well, we left them there and kind of helped them along.
RV: Ok, got you. These were regular NVA or VC?

EH: Yes, they were regular NVA. Then I think, Richard, from that evening we stayed up there along the edge of the road. The next day, they moved us down towards a river. I can’t remember the name of this river. Of course by that time this had been going on two or three days or whatever. I remember setting up by this river. We had a tank or two with us. There was a building, like one of those little buildings I was talking about earlier. It was across the road. I walked over there just kind of nosing around probably shouldn’t have been but I was.

RV: Were you still with your radio?

EH: No I just had the M-16 then. I had left the radio with one of the other guys. It wasn’t very far. It was like across the street. I walked in there and I could smell something. I happened to stick my head in this room, and there was this NVA in there that was pretty well decomposed. I mean he was decomposing pretty quick. I turned around and left there and went back to the company. I think we milled around there’s maybe a day or two. Up the road not very far from us, probably less than a quarter mile, there was a big white building up there. We had kind of moseyed down there, and I heard these kids in this building. I thought what in the world is this? I walked in there and I mean this place was full of orphans. I mean full of them. I talked to this lady. She was a nun, and she was out of Seattle. I think, Richard, her first name might have been Patricia, but I’m not real sure about that. She was an older lady at the time. She was in her 50s I’m sure at this time. She came up there to me.

RV: She was with the orphans?

EH: Yes, she was with a Catholic relief organization of some kind. She came up there and she wanted to know if she could help me. I said, “Well, I was just outside here. What is this place?” She said, “I run this orphanage.” I said, “Where do you get your funds?” She said, “From Catholic Relief. Sometimes I can get some help through the military, but not very often.” I talked to her for probably 30 minutes. She was a very unique lady. She was a registered nurse, and she said periodically the NVA would come in there at night. Hold on just a minute, Richard. They would come in there at night and capture her and take her up in the mountains and would make her treat their people.
She’d done this on more than one occasion. How long she was over I have no idea. I walked out and I thought boy, that’s quite a woman.

RV: Right in the middle of the war zone.

EH: Yes, right in the middle of a war zone and all these mouths to feed and all these kids running around. I’m talking about little kids, Richard. I’m talking about toddlers on up. I kind of moseyed back up to the company area where we were set up there by the river. I think it might have been the next day. We got this replacement in. He was a first lieutenant. He was brand new to the company, brand new to the country and everything. I suppose he’d just graduated out of OCS and all. I mean I can still see this guy and everything. He had on brand new boots and fatigues. Why he was put into this position I have no idea. I guess it was because we were low on men. I really don’t know, Richard. Anyway, he was told to take a platoon and go north to the orphanage across the river and recon the area.

RV: He was brand new too, and he was going to be in charge of the recon platoon?

EH: Yes, I wouldn’t really call it a recon platoon it was just an infantry platoon, but that’s what we called it. It was kind of a recon the area and see what’s up there. He went up there and I don’t suppose they had been gone an hour, if they’d been gone that long. I mean all hell broke loose. I could hear the machine guns and everything. I heard screaming on the radio and a bunch of us jumped on a tank and we all took off and went down there. Well, come to find out, they had run into one guy, as far as I know at the time because that’s all I had ever seen. This guy was dug into the base of a tree. I mean he was just shooting the shit out of guys. It was just utter chaos. We got up there, and we couldn’t really get to this guy, you know as far as taking him out. Every time we’d move he’d pick one of us off. I remember, I don’t know how many we lost up there Richard, but I know we lost Sergeant Crawford, and we lost a colored boy and I can’t remember his name. But he had his arm blew off. It was a mess.

RV: What was this guy firing?

EH: I just really don’t know Richard for sure. I’m guessing it had to be an AK. I just really don’t know. I’m guessing it was an AK. We couldn’t get to him. Sergeant Crawford was beside me, and he took a round between the eyes. It was something else.
Anyway, we finally had to get a tank up there. The tank came in behind us. We had to get him to come go to the west a little bit and come around from the north. He finally got behind this tree. He stuck his head over that turret. I thought, “Geez, oh peach. You’re going to buy the farm here.” Well, he kind of talked to us on the radio. I said, “Where’s this guy at?” We told him, and they finally got rid of him [took him out]. From then we moved on up into the mountains there north of Kontum. There had been some heavy fighting going on up there. From there, Richard, I think maybe they might have took us back in base camp for a day or two and took us back out to a different area.

RV: What happened to that first lieutenant, the brand new guy?

EH: I forgot about him didn’t I? He got killed. Yes, he got killed the very first day. I don’t know the guy’s name. I just really don’t remember. He was KIA in that group.

RV: Do you need to take a minute?

EH: Yes, just a minute Richard, hold on. From here on out Richard things kind of get a little fuzzy for me, with the exception of maybe a couple incidents.

RV: Can I ask you why do they get fuzzy? Is that you can’t remember or have you blocked it out?

EH: I pretty much can’t remember. I’ve been going through counseling for over a year.

RV: Yes, sir.

EH: I try not to dwell on this stuff because it does bother me. But I’ll stick it out, I’ll bear with you.

RV: Ok.

EH: Like I said, at this point Richard everything gets a little bit fuzzy for me. But as I recall they took us back into our base camp for maybe a day or two. Of course, in an infantry outfit, you’ve always got some guys that kind of resent people that are in the rear echelon. I didn’t per se, I didn’t really resent these guys until later on in my tour when I found out what they were doing.

RV: Are you talking about people at the base camp?

EH: Yes, sir. Anyway, some of our guys proceeded to go up to the EM club and they’d get in fights and all this other junk. Well, the next morning we were told to pack
our bags if we wanted to fight that’s what we were going to do. They took us out into a
different area. This was, I don’t know, Richard, exactly what month this would have
been. It still would have been in March I’m sure. I don’t remember. Let me think,
Richard.
RV: Take your time.
EH: I think about this time Richard we, no we didn’t. I think about this time we
were approaching April of ’68. Between the March and April, we just kind of ran routine
patrols. I mean we were all over the Central Highlands. We went from Dak To to Ban
Me Thout. That was our area of operation. It was a very rugged terrain. In fact, when I
went over Richard, I weighed 175 [178] pounds. I mean I didn’t have an ounce of fat on
me. A year later when I came out of country I weighed 143 pounds. I don’t know, for
some reason you work in that kind of an area, you never ever get used to that type of
terrain. It’ll flat kick your ass. You go up mountains and down mountains and across
rivers. It’s really rugged. You put up with the snakes and the scorpions and the
mosquitoes and the leeches. It’s very taxing, very tiring. In fact, I would venture to say
Richard, we spent at least 16 to 17 hours a day working. I mean this was every day. This
wasn’t just every once in a while; this was every day. At the end of the day we were
required to set up at night, build our bunkers, fill sandbags. This went on day after day
after day.
RV: What was the mood of your platoon during this hard work?
EH: We had a few guys Richard, that their tempers were short and this, that, and
the other. Of course, they tried to keep us re-supplied as best they could with mail form
back home and our SP packs that had the goodies and stuff in it and that kind of stuff.
But I’ll tell you Richard, basically I just remember our company was in a fairly good
mood. It really was. We had and I don’t want anybody to ever take me wrong. I don’t
want you to take me wrong I don’t want nobody down there to take me wrong. Of course
I’m a white man, and we had trouble with the Negroes.
RV: What kind of trouble?
EH: We had guys that refused to go out on a patrol. We had guys that would
steal off of anybody and everybody, it didn’t make any difference whether they were
colored or not. Just basically troublemakers. I’m not saying maybe they didn’t
experience that with us, Richard, I really don’t know. I tried not to get anybody in 
trouble. I tried to do my job and let it go at that. I had a knife pulled on me over there by 
a colored man.

RV: Is this out in the field?

EH: No, this was back in base camp. He threatened to kill me. I basically said, 
“You want to cut? You go ahead and cut. But you damn well better hope and pray that 
you kill me, because if you don’t I’ll kill you.” I would have. I was that far in, Richard, 
at the time. I’m not proud of that. Don’t get me wrong. I’m not proud of that at all. But 
I was to the point where I had had a gut full. But getting back to April, Richard. Our 
company had moved, like I say, Richard, where we were at over there, nine times out of 
ten I didn’t even know what area we were in. I just knew we moved. One thing I do 
remember this was in April, I think it was April the 24th, 25th, 26th, 27th, 28th. Somewhere 
in that neighborhood. This was one time, Richard, when we had several guys with us. 
We had 122 guys. The reason I know this because I’ve still got my little book that I kept 
track of our people. You know, how many we had in the weapons platoon and all this 
other stuff: I think we had 122 guys. That included the mortar squad that went with us 
and our company. I was pretty much raised out in the country, and I done a lot of hunting 
when I was a kid. We went in to this area, and I think this was south [west] of Kontum at 
this time. I’m just not real sure, Richard, but it was in that area right there. We went to 
this place and the whole company was walking in there. We had this sergeant with us. 
His name was Sergeant Hollis Buck.

RV: Hollis, what?

EH: Buck. He was a career man. He and I got to be real, real close. Wrong 
thing to do. But anyway, he’d been through Korea, through Pusan that area. We got into 
this area that we were going to stay for the evening. I mean, Richard, the closer we got to 
this place, the quieter it became.

RV: Is this a village you were heading towards?

EH: No, this was a mountain. It was called Chu Moor. But we got up there, and 
we were standing beside this tree, and I told Sergeant Buck, we called him pappy because 
he was 38 years old. He was older than the rest of us. I told him “Pappy, something ain’t 
right?” He said, “What do you mean?” I said, “There’s some shit up here somewhere.”
I said, “We’re going to hit some shit. I can just feel it. Did you notice the monkeys quit
chirping and chattering and the birds quit singing? It’s real quiet isn’t it?” He said,
“Yes.” I said, “There’s something around real close.” So our captain, he got like I think
it was five or six guys and had them go up this mountain. You know kind of seeing what
was up there. They didn’t go very far. They had movement off on the right hand side.
The jungle in that area, Richard, was so thick that this one kid threw a grenade and it
bounced back on him and hit him in the back and it took a chunk out of his back the size
of my hand. It was clear past his spine. [You could see his spine.] He lived and
everything, but it had really done a number on him. The next day of course they got him
out of there and everything. The next day we sent a patrol up there. They just made
mince meat out of them guys. Unbeknown to us, there was a regiment on that hill of
NVA. Also unbeknownst to me at the time, and I did not know this until like in the last
two years, Richard, there was four other companies besides us. I think it was Alpha,
Bravo, Charlie, and Delta Companies of the same battalion. We were all around that hill.
But I mean, I didn’t know anything about it. We were trying to get up this hill and take
this place. Of course, it was so well fortified. You couldn’t move. It was impossible.
They were dug in, they were camouflaged so well, that you could be 10 feet in front of
the bunker and never see it. In fact, the day that Sergeant Buck was killed, he was to my
right, and we were going up this hill, and he turned around to bring the guys up behind
him, bring them up on line. I turned to look at him and he was gone in an instant. Just
phew!

RV: A bullet?

EH: Yes, well they ripped him with a machine gun is what they’d done. We left,
we had to leave his body up there, and another boy from New York. I can’t remember
this kid’s name. They were left up there for two or three days. I remember the third day
that we went up this hill. I remember this so, so vividly. Let me go back just a second.
Before Sergeant Buck was killed, he made the comment to me, “Elmer had that hill been
in Korea that son of a bitch would have been leveled.” We didn’t get the artillery that we
needed. They wouldn’t give it to us.

RV: Why not?

EH: I have no idea sir.
RV: What about air support?

EH: We had some, but not much. I guess I’m kind of fibbing to you, Richard. When I tell you I don’t know and I don’t want to get into it. I think it had to do with some personality conflicts throughout the company, or not maybe the company, but in that battalion and it filtered down to the company. I’ll put it that way. Therefore, it cost a lot of lives. I thought that was the biggest damn waste of bullshit I’d ever seen in my life.

RV: Sounds like it.

EH: You know if you’ve got a gripe with a man, take it to him, get it over with and forget it. Anyway, I think it was the third assault that we went up there. We went up there three or four days in a row and tried to get them out of there, couldn’t. We were getting ready to make the final assault at this hill. I was carrying the radio for our captain. He started to sound the line, and I turned around. I said to him, I called him a name, and I said, “I don’t want you to take me wrong, but I’ve got a question for you.” He said, “What’s that?” I said, “Is that God damn hill worth these men’s lives? My opinion ain’t worth shit.” He said, “I agree with you, but I’ve got to try.” I said, “Why?” He said, “If I don’t I’m going to lose my bars.” I understood where he was coming from, Richard, but I also understood and I think he did to, that he just didn’t have no control over it. I mean he was told, you do this, you do this and you do this. He was following orders the same as I was following orders. Anyway, on the way up there, by this time Richard we had lost probably ¾ of the men in this company on that hill. We started up this hill or started out of the little area we were set up in. Like I said Richard, I don’t want anybody to take me wrong, but I have a hard time dealing with Negroes. Because when we started up that hill, there was like four or five of these guys in a bunker. They told our captain they weren’t going up there and they didn’t. I made the comment to him, “Captain, if you’ll let me I’ll take care of them guys.” I mean I was this crazy at the time. I was stressed. He said, “What are you going to do?” I said, “I’ll kill them.” And I would have. I mean I would have stuck the M-16 gun. I would have done it. I told him I said, “They got killed by friendly fire.” They couldn’t have, I say they couldn’t have. They might have been able to prove me guilty, I don’t know. I was very upset. So we went ahead and tried to take this hill, we didn’t get the job done.
brought the 1st of the 10th cav in that evening. I was on one of the last choppers out that evening. We had 18 guys walking Richard after that.

RV: Out of 100?

EH: Out of 122. I’m going to quit.
RV: This is Richard Verrone and I’m continuing my oral history interview with Mr. Elmer Hale. It is October 21st, Monday and it is 1:30 in the afternoon. Mr. Hale if you would like to continue with the story. We were talking about this battle of Chu Moor Mountain and what had happened there. We left off with some of the initial assaults on this position. If you would like to continue.

EH: You still there Richard? Are you ready?

RV: Yes, sir.

EH: Let’s see. I think it was the day following Sergeant Mixon’s [Buck’s] death. We were again ordered to take that particular position. At this point Richard, I can’t tell you exactly how many men we had lost, but we had lost several.

RV: This is your company that was ordered?

EH: That’s correct. I for one was in question of, you know just what the hell we were doing or what we were trying to accomplish in taking this particular position? Unbeknownst to me at the time, there was three other companies in that area trying to do the same thing we were doing.

RV: To the same position?

EH: That’s correct. Nobody was really making any headway. We were all getting pretty much ground up. Anyway the day following Sergeant Buck’s death as well as another gentleman form New York, and I can’t remember his name. We could not get these two men off of the hill because the fighting was so bad and the fire was so intense that we just couldn’t get them off.

RV: How big was this hill, would you say?

EH: Richard I honestly do not know. When you say big are you talking about in height or in girth?

RV: Both really. What did it look like to you? Did you guys see basically the girth of the hill or were you able to look up and see the summit?
EH: Yes, you could look up and I say you could see it, no you couldn’t because the vegetation was so thick. At one point we were close to the top, but we got beat back. It’s really, really hard for me to say Richard how big that was. That’s just beyond me. I just really don’t know, you know?

RV: The hill was covered with vegetation or was it?

EH: Yes, it was jungle covered. Let me put it like this Richard, if it’s any help and it’s probably not. There was three other companies up there besides Charlie company. We could not hear them firing.

RV: Are you there, Mr. Hale? (Technical difficulties) Ok, go ahead sir.

EH: We could not hear the other companies firing and did not know that there was other companies trying to take that particular position also.

RV: You mean you guys had no idea actually at the time that other people were assaulting that position?

EH: No, absolutely none.

RV: Lack of communication there between the companies.

EH: I don’t know whether it was lack of communication, Richard, or whether it was just the lack of the higher ups did not want us to know that there was anybody else around. I just really don’t know. That’s one of the things that I was always in question about. Why weren’t we told we had help on the other side or we had this, we had that? We were never told that. I always kind of blamed the division level for that. Maybe that’s the way they all operated in Vietnam. I don’t know. I haven’t really talked to other veterans about this particular battle or about anything that they went through. So, therefore I don’t know how they operated.

RV: Did this hill have a number? Do you remember?

EH: Oh gosh, Richard. I think it did, but I’d have to look back through some of my material Richard to find that number. If it does, the next time we talk I’ll have it for you.

RV: Great.

EH: Anyway the day following Sergeant Buck’s death we again tried to take this particular position and we failed again. By that time we were down to probably 18-20 guys at the most in this whole company out of 125 or 128 people. We lost a second
lieutenant up there. His name was Bill Zimmerman. In fact, he had been pulled out of
the company. This is the way I remember this Richard, he had been pulled out of the
company to get ready to go on R&R to Hawaii to see his wife. When we got in trouble at
Chu Moor, he was called back out into the field. I say called back, I say he volunteered
to come back. He was asked to come back. His words were, and I remember this very
distinctly he said, “All you guys are going to do is get my ass killed out there.” He came
back and had no more got off the chopper and got into the perimeter and he was killed.
Matter of fact, I’ve been corresponding through e-mail with some of his people. They
tried to get his medal upgraded from a Bronze Star to a Silver Star I think. That was
denied here in the last week or so. Anyway, that evening we were told that we were
going to be pulled off of that mountain. They sent, if I remember right, they sent a 1st of
the 10th cav in. I was either on the last chopper out or the next to the last chopper out.
Every chopper of course would come in they off-loaded these guys and we would get on.
I remember telling some of the guys from the cav unit, I said something to the effect,
“Keep your head down because that damn hill is crawling with them.” Like I said I was
on the next to last chopper or the last chopper out. The cav unit that went in there was
gnawed up pretty good. They ended up pulling everyone out of that area, off of the
mountain there, Richard. Within a day or two, they brought the B-52s in. From what I
understand, this is from things that I heard later, that after the B-52 strike, then they sent
someone else in there. Now, who this someone else was I don’t know. They sent a crew
in there to see what they could find or whatever. At this time they found Sergeant Buck
and this other gentleman that I referred to that we left up there. I also heard, whether this
is true or not, I don’t know. I would love to know. I also heard that Sergeant Buck, he
was a career man, he had several tattoos on him. Supposedly the NVA carved him up
pretty good. They took a knife and cut the tattoos off of him. I also heard they had cut
his genitals off and stuck them in his mouth. We were taken back to a firebase where at,
Richard, I don’t know where this was located.

RV: Do you remember the name of it?

EH: No, sir I don’t. That’s something, Richard, that has escaped me. I never,
ever recall firebases being named. I know there was a lot of them that were. Maybe the
firebases had a name and I didn’t know them. We were never told. Anyway, we were
taken back to this firebase, and we were asked if there was anybody that needed any
medical attention to get on this particular chopper. I had a piece of shrapnel about as big
around as my thumb and about half inch long in the back of my leg. I got on this chopper
to go down to wherever they were going to take us to have this thing cut out of my leg.
That evening there was someone from the division, came into that firebase and gave out
Bronze Stars to the guys that was left up there on the hill at the firebase. The guys that
went to have medical attention did not receive this.

RV: Really?

EH: I didn’t know this Richard until last two or three years. I have been in
contact with our company commander at the time. I asked him about this. Of course, he
said there wasn’t anything that could be done with it now. Which, I understand. It’d
have been nice to have had that award, but I was thankful I got out of there with my life.
Anyway, I went back to a place in Kontum, Richard, and had this metal or the shrapnel
cut out of my leg. I stayed there probably two or three days. They took us back to our
companies. From there on Richard, I remember us being brought back into base camp,
which was Camp Enari. We were re-supplied, I’m talking about our equipment. We
were also given new people. You know, we had to have a new company practically made
up. From this point on Richard, it really gets kind of fuzzy with me. I don’t know
whether I lost touch with things I guess after that battle. After we lost so many guys, I
was just to the point where I didn’t give a shit one way or the other. Of course, this
would have been in April. In May and June I think we just kind of ran patrols around the
Central Highlands there. I remember working out of a fire support base Richard. Again,
I don’t know the name. I maybe getting a little behind or ahead, I’m not sure where this
particular sequence that I’m getting ready to tell you about Richard, I’m not sure what
month this took place.

RV: Ok, go ahead.

EH: I remember and it runs in my mind Richard, it might have been in let me
think here just a minute.

RV: Ok, take your time.

EH: I’m not real sure, Richard, of the month. I’m not real certain I was trying to
think who our captain was at that time. Anyway, I guess to make a long story short.
RV: Do you remember if it was before or after Chu Moor?

EH: That’s what I can’t remember, Richard. I’m thinking it was after. But boy I tell you, you know, like I said it gets kind of fuzzy. Anyway, I remember us as a company being moved. We had a gentleman with us; his name was Mixon. I don’t recall, yes I do too. His name was Richard, Richard Mixon. I remember he was getting ready to leave the company. He was getting ready to come back to the States. He was the guy I was telling you about initially in the interview where I went in and he was kind of the boss so to speak. He said, “If you screw up Hale, I’m going to send your ass to Long Binh jail.” But I had a lot of respect for this man. I remember when we were walking up to this particular area, he said to me. He comes up and he’s getting ready to leave the field and he puts his arms around me and gives me a hug. He said, “Hale, you watch your ass. Charlie’s up there.” Well they were walking 105 howitzers in up on the sides of us to keep them off of us until we got to this particular location to get dug in. I remember we all were getting our foxholes dug that night, or as best we could. In fact we had what they called Snoopy. He had several different names. He was called Snoopy. He was called Puff the Magic Dragon. And what it was, was a C-47 gunship. They dropped flares and they also shot around our perimeter until we could half way get dug in and get acclimated to the area. Everything was quiet until about 3:30 or 4:00 in the morning. I happened to be on watch, and they started mortaring us. Of course, you hear a mortar has a very distinct sound to it. When I heard that thud, I knew what it was. Of course you yell and say “Incoming!” and everything. Everybody was scrambling trying to get into a hole. I don’t know how long this mortar barrage took place, Richard. It seemed like an eternity. But I’m guessing it might have been 30 minutes. I did not get into a hole. The hole I started in was full and I couldn’t get in, and I was lying on top of the ground. I remember praying and saying oh, God. Don’t let one of those mortar rounds hit me in the back. After that, they kind of left the area or something. I don’t know where they went. We never saw them again. Never heard from them. They kind of left, and we went on about our merry way. Probably in June, no it was July, Richard, I went on R&R. I kind of forgot about Vietnam for a few days. I went to Sidney, Australia. I remember having a good time down there. I remember coming back and that was probably one of the hardest things I’d ever done was coming back to that God
forsaken place knowing what I’d been through. I thought I’ve got well it would have
been July, August, September, October. I had five more months to go before I could
come home.

RV: Right.

EH: I went down to Australia and came back. I spent maybe a day. I’m not sure
if it was in Bien Hoa or where we were at, Richard. Anyway, they flew us back north to
Pleiku and took us back into the company, to the base camp. From there they took us
back out into the field.

RV: Can I ask you, what did you do in Australia on your R&R? Did you go by
yourself or were you with a couple of guys from your company?

EH: Actually, I went by myself Richard. I ended up meeting a couple guys. One
was from the Army. One was from the Navy. We kind of buddied together. Basically, if
you really want to know the honest to God truth, it was one big drunk. That’s putting it
honest.

RV: So you guys just basically drank. Did you go out to bars?

EH: Yes.

RV: Anything else about that R&R that you remember or anything significant?

EH: I remember the country, you know, Richard, as being a beautiful part of the
country. We were in Sydney. I remember going to the zoo. I remember the opera house.
I remember that. I remembered the bay. Something that really struck me when I got
down there, when I got off the plane and stepped into the airport, how damn cold it was.

RV: Was this during their wintertime I guess?

EH: Yes, it was during their winter. But really it wasn’t. It was 70 degrees, but I
was freezing to death Richard because I’d come from 110-115 degree heat. Man, I was
cold! I remember having a good time and basically for the most part enjoying myself as
much as I could. I guess if you consider being drunk all the time enjoying yourself, I
guess that’s about as good as it’s going to get.

RV: How did you feel at this point, psychologically and emotionally? You’d
been through a lot of really bad experiences. Were you able to get away and really reflect
or relax? Try to not think about what had happened?
EH: Well, I felt bad Richard about leaving the guys. I felt guilty leaving them. Not that I could have been a savior to any of them. I just felt bad. I spent a lot of time thinking about the guys. What was going on? What they were doing? Where they were at? Reflecting back just a little bit, Richard, on Chu Moor. I think this is probably common with a lot of combat veterans, I really feel guilty. I say that because it’s a survivor's guilt. I’ve often asked myself why wasn’t I one of the ones that was killed up there? I don’t know. The only thing that I can come up with is God had a different plan for me than he had for some. That’s the only thing I can come up with, Richard. I think I told you early on in the interview that I had a mother that wasn’t capable of taking care of me. I think the good Lord spared my life to take care of her in her last years as best I could. Of course, I feel guilty from that experience with her. When you go through what I went through at Chu Moor you have a survivor's guilt. It weighs on you.

RV: What have you done to alleviate that, if at all?

EH: Up until 20 years ago, Richard, 21 years ago I hadn’t done anything. I went through a divorce that was nasty. I had two boys by that first marriage. After that divorce, I pretty much turned back to drinking until I met my current wife. She had lost her husband to Hodgkin’s disease that was due to Agent Orange exposure. He passed away in ’78. I was divorced at that time. I did not know this lady. I knew her husband. I worked with him, but I did not know her. I met her in 1980. She had two little girls by this gentleman. We were married in March of ’81. The only way that this woman would take me to be her spouse was that I attend a church, and that I went to church with her and the kids. One thing led to another, and I ended up getting saved. I think, Richard, had it not been for her and probably not been for the good Lord, I probably wouldn’t be here today. Also I have in the last year to year and a half, I have gotten counseling for this PTSD. It has helped me immensely.

RV: That’s very good.

EH: I’ll tell you what, it was good for me, Richard. It really was. I’ve talked to a lot of guys that say that’s a bunch of malarkey. It doesn’t work. I’m here to tell you, it does work. It’s not been without some bad nights. I’ve had bad dreams and still continue to have some; not as frequent as I used to have them. My temper’s somewhat better than it used to be. I was never one, Richard, to a lot of people take it out on their wife and
kids. I’ve never ever done that. I always found a different outlet for my anger. I suppose
most of that was turning to the bottle. That’s another thing, Richard. I think where the
Vietnam veteran was wronged was we were brought back into this country and turned
loose back into society, as we know it. We weren’t debriefed. Therefore when you turn
a man loose into civilization, and he’s come from a combat unit it’s very tough for him to
adjust.

RV: I can imagine.

EH: I was fortunate in that I didn’t see a lot. I’ve seen people demonstrating
against the war, I was never one. I wasn’t spit upon, but I always felt looked down upon
by people that didn’t go into the service or by people that went to school to keep from
going to the service. Things like this. I get to thinking, Richard, I’ve done my job, I was
called to do this. I’ve done it. Why are they looking down upon me? I’m not saying that
Vietnam was right, Richard. I think it was right at the time, up until maybe 1969,
possibly 1970. After that I thought it was time to either shit or get of that pot. You
know, you either go in and you do the job and get out or don’t do it. I also feel like, and I
don’t want to step on anybody’s toes, but I told you that from the beginning. It felt like,
Richard, there was lot of big people in government that made money, and I call it blood
money is what I call it. I personally think Lyndon Johnson was one of them. That’s my
opinion, and I do know another gentleman that lives in this little village that I live in. He
told me that this guy happened to be with the 25th infantry division, and he’d seen this
with his own eyes. Now where this was at, I’m not sure whether it was at Cu Chi or
where it was at. But he’d seen this; they had palates of lumber that had Lady Bird
Johnson Construction Company on there. You know Richard, you don’t do that. I mean
my God, you’ve got guys over there dying everyday for what we thought was trying to
deter Communism. Then you’ve got people back in this country that’s making money off
of that. I don’t think so. You know, by the same token you had civilian contractors over
there. They were doing the same thing. Things like that. Richard, getting back I guess
to July, Coming back into country, I felt like it was useless. I thought, “What in the heck
are we doing over here?” I mean, we tried to take Chu Moor and various other places.
When I say various other places, I’m not talking about our company, I’m talking about all
these other places that took a beating. Why did we do it? What were we accomplishing?
To me, Richard the Vietnamese I did not particularly care for the Vietnamese. It’s not that they’d done anything to me, Richard, it’s what I saw. By that I mean I felt like we were fighting their battles. We’d go into a town, whether it be Pleiku or Kontum or any of these towns.

RV: I’m sorry sir, you’re breaking up again. (Technical difficulties)

EH: Ok, I don’t know why Richard I’m on the phone. Anyway, we would go into these towns, and they were setting on the streets selling our clothing and our boots, and the stuff that we had on, Richard, was falling off of us, and we couldn’t get stuff like that. It was on the Black Market, being sold. I just never could understand why that went on. They had people up in the Central Highlands and I’m sure you probably heard of them called the Montagnards.

RV: Yes, sir.

EH: I had a lot of respect for those people. They were good people. They were good fighters. They helped the Americans immensely.

RV: When you say good fighters what do you mean?

EH: I’m talking about they wouldn’t leave you. If you were caught in a firefight, they would not leave you by yourself. They would stay with you if they had to die.

RV: And ARVN would not?

EH: That’s correct. That’s the experience that I had with them, Richard. I’m not saying that’s with all of them. But I’m just saying that’s the experience that I had with them.

RV: How much contact did you have with the Montagnards?

EH: I won’t say a lot Richard, but we did have some and the same with the ARVNs. We didn’t have a lot of contact with them. We worked with them a little bit. As far as I was concerned, they wanted us to do it for them. I had been through several of the Montagnard villages, Richard. For the most part those people were helpful. You know they would help you if they could. Probably, knowing that they were helping us they were going to get retaliated against by maybe their village being burned or somebody being killed in the village or whatever. I also know, Richard, that I think it’s North Carolina out around Ft. Bragg, they have a big contingent of Montagnard people.
RV: Yes, sir that’s correct. One of the largest populations in the United States is located there in Southeastern North Carolina. Well, going back to your flying back in country were you contemplating this overall policy of the United States coming back in country? Were you rethinking these thoughts, these deep thoughts?

EH: I won’t say I was really thinking about them real, real hard, Richard, at the time. I guess I got to thinking about this after I came home. I guess I gave it some thought, but I didn’t give it a lot of thought. I guess, basically, Richard, when I got back in country in July, my main concern was hey, I’d survived seven months. I’m going to get my ass out of here, one way or the other.

RV: Let me ask you a question about that particular subject. How do you reconcile this natural feeling that you described of trying to stay alive in a hostile environment with trying to serve your buddies there in your platoon, in your company?

EH: I’m not sure I understand what you’re saying, Richard.

RV: You have a desire to stay alive. Did that mean when you went back in country you were involved in any kind of firefight or any kind of dangerous situation?

EH: Yes, I can remember being out on patrols and stuff. You know setting up ambushes, this kind of thing. As far as us being in any real heavy contact Richard, after July I don’t recall that.

RV: I guess what I’m asking is, when you’re in that contact with the enemy, and you’re thinking I want to stay alive; I don’t want to die. But you also want to be there for your fellow soldier, right there beside you, these guys that you know. How do you reconcile those two thoughts? Do you duck more than you usually would or hide more than you usually would? Do you know what I’m asking?

EH: Yes (laughs). I know what you’re saying. I think a person has a tendency to look out after number one, first. Then if you’ve got somebody that needs help, yes, you’re going to help him. That’s something that’s hard. It’s very hard for me to describe. I know I had a real good friend, I think he was from South Carolina, that’s where Sam was from. I think, Richard, had it really, really gotten down to the nitty-gritty, if he’d have needed me, if I’d have had to expose myself, yes I would have done it. I really think I would have. If that answers your question, I’m not trying to skirt the issue. I’m just trying to answer it the best I know.
RV: Yes, sir it does answer the question. Also there's a general feeling that in
Vietnam and this might be true in other wars as well, it’s certainly been said about other
wars, is that the soldier on the ground his first priority is to his men beside him and not
overall to the country, or to the policy, or to the big battle. It’s really to people right there
in the foxhole with you. Is that true?
EH: I think it was true for the most part, Richard, over there. I’m saying this and
probably shouldn’t say it. I think it was that way through probably ’64, ‘65’, ’66, ’67,
’68. After ’68 from things that I’ve read I don’t know if that was true.
RV: Meaning after ’68 they were serving more to stay alive?
EH: I think it was more of maybe they didn’t go out on a patrol that they should
have went out on. Or they were told to go to a certain area and they went half way to it.
Do you know what I’m saying?
RV: Yes, sir.
EH: I don’t know, Richard. I have seen pictures and I’ve read articles. The
reason I say that is because when I was over there in ’67, ’68, we were required, even
though we were in the field and we had horrible living conditions, we were required to be
kept shaven and cleaned up. I mean regardless of whether it was in the field or where we
were at. We were required to at least shave and keep our hair. I mean we cut each other’s
hair. The pictures and stuff that I’ve seen after ’68, I mean these guys had long hair and
they’d done stuff. My God, our company--that would never have happened. So I don’t
know whether they got lax with the guys over there or just what happened, Richard. I
just really don’t know. Let me insert a little something here, Richard. I truly believe and
I believe this from the bottom of my heart, that war was winnable. I don’t think they
wanted us to win that war.
RV: Who is they?
EH: I’m talking about our government.
RV: Why do you think that?
EH: Why?
RV: Yes, sir.
EH: When you are put in harms way up a hill and you sacrifice men’s lives and
you may possibly take that hill. Three days later you walk off of it and leave it and turn it
back over to Charlie. I mean what’s the point? I think we had them on the ropes,
Richard. We weren’t allowed to finish it.

RV: What do you think the United States could have done differently to finish it?
EH: What do I think they could have done? Let me think here just a minute,
Richard.

RV: Sure, of course.
EH: I think we could have went in and done a number on North Vietnam. I mean
put them completely out of commission. Boy, we’re getting a lot of static, Richard.

RV: Yes, we are.
EH: I don’t know that may be my phone. Let me switch phones here just a
second Richard.

RV: Ok.
EH: I think personally, Richard, if they’d have went in and bombed the hell out
of North Vietnam. I’m talking about leveled it. I’m not saying using atomic weapons;
I’m not saying that. I’m just saying put them to their knees.

RV: Right, instead of the piecemeal and kind of escalated bombing.
EH: You know from things that I have read, and I can’t tell you the name of the
big general that was over in North Vietnam, but from what I have read, when he was at
the Peace Table in Paris, he made the comment supposedly that, “We can’t beat you guys
on the battle field, but we’ll beat you in propaganda.” That’s exactly what they’d done.
He admitted right there that they couldn’t beat us. That was proven time and time again
over there. But I just felt like, Richard, that we could have won that war. I don’t think it
was meant to be.

RV: From the very beginning or at some point in between?
EH: I think in the beginning, Richard, I think they had good intentions. I really
do. I think it escalated so fast they had to put the GIs over there in order to try to stop the
move of Communism. You know one thing led to another and it got to a place where we
were doing the most of the fighting instead of letting the ARVN do it. I don’t know
Richard, I guess when I think of the Vietnamese, I think of a people that are happy with
that way of life. In my opinion, you can’t take and push capitalism off onto people that
know anything else but Communism. I don’t know. I’ve got a lot of mixed feeling
about what we tried to do over there. I think we had good intentions to start with. I think when the people back home weren’t given a good reason why we were there and what we were trying to accomplish, you know you’ve seen it on TV every night, day in and day out. I think it hardened our people, Richard, as far as the support where the war went. People got fed up with it. Said, “Hey, let’s get out, forget it.” And let it go.

RV: How much did those anti-war protests affect you while you were over there in the field? Did you know about them?

EH: I personally did not, Richard.

RV: Did you guys have access to the news and what was happening around the world or back in the United States while you were there?

EH: I recall very little of that Richard. The only thing I recall, Richard, we had what we called Armed Forces Radio. Basically, that consisted of listening to the Grand Ole Opry on Saturday night. Of course, that tells you we were kind of a red-necked platoon. Basically, Richard, I just don’t recall having access to any news of what was going on back home with these demonstrators and stuff. I just don’t recall that. Richard, I would like to terminate this right now. We’ll pick it up again. I feel like I’ve kind of spun my wheels with you. Maybe I’ve helped some. Let’s see, now let me think here just a minute.

RV: Let me sign off here real quick sir.
RV: This is Richard Verrone and I am continuing my oral history interview with
Mr. Elmer Hale. It is December 9th 2002, approximately 9:50 am. I am in Lubbock,
Texas. Mr. Hale you are where again?
EH: Flat Rock, Illinois.
RV: Flat Rock, Illinois. That’s right. Ok, sir, we left off you had been discussing
overall American policy. I wanted to follow up with your comments on what was
happening in the ground in general. I wonder if you could discuss some of your tactics in
the field, your unit tactics. We’ve discussed some of this previously but I wanted to ask
you specifically did you get enough support from artillery and then from medevac units
and things like that while you were in the field?
EH: Personally Richard I feel that we did not get enough support from our
artillery. The reason I say that, the battle that we had gone through at Chu Moor I felt
was very inadequate. I think our commanders back wherever they were located, which
was not in the general area of course. I think they felt like that we could take that hill by
ourselves, you know. Personally, that’s just not the way you do things in combat. In
fact, I had a gentleman with us. His name was Sergeant Buck. He was from the state of
Maine. He had gone through Korea through Pusan. He made the comment to me the day
before he was killed. He said, “Had that hill been in Korea it’d have been leveled.”
There wouldn’t have been nothing on it. We never got that kind of artillery support.
RV: Who would make that call to get that artillery to come in?
EH: Our captains were the ones that actually made the calls or the lieutenants to
get the artillery. Ultimately, it wasn’t in their hands to really get it to us, because that call
came from higher ups in our division. I know from being there that we just did not get
that artillery support.
RV: Was that in general or was that specifically with Chu Moor?
EH: I think that was specifically with Chu Moor. I didn’t really have any problems before that or after that Richard as far as griping about the artillery support. I don’t know why we didn’t get it there. I just felt like it was very, very inadequate. We just did not get that support that we needed.

RV: How about medevac dust-off teams, were they functional?

EH: Absolutely. I had the utmost regard for the dust-offs. I’ve seen those guys and they were super. They were super.

RV: I’ve interviewed a number of pilots and asked them the question, “How could you deal with the intensity of fire when you would land in a hot LZ to evacuate?” They said, “Well it’s just our job.”

EH: Yes, right.

RV: Did you see them do something like this coming through a hot LZ?

EH: Yes. I specifically seen this well at Chu Moor as well as Kontum in the Tet Offensive in’68. I would love to get a hold of the gentleman that had the dust-off that came into Kontum. He went by the call sign Galloping Ghost. We had called for a dust-off because we had several wounded. We told him it was hot. He asked us specifically what direction it was coming from and all this. We told him and he said, “I’m coming in.” He said, “When those skids hit the ground, you make sure that you’ve got those people loaded and I’m gone.” Like I said, I had lots and lots of respect for those people. It was their job, but it took some bravery and whatever on their part to come in and help us guys. I really respected those people.

RV: How much air support did you get? Did you feel like it was adequate?

EH: For the most part it was Richard. What I had a problem with on a couple of occasions, we would call for air support and there wasn’t enough air support to go around. We would call and they’d say, ”They’re busy up north or they’re busy down here in the Delta or somewhere and they couldn’t get to us.” You know dad-burn-it. When you need help, you need help. You can’t say, “Well we’re going to sit back here on our rumps for 30 minutes and wait.” Sometimes it’s a situation when you’re in dire need and you need that air support. I feel like from the most part we didn’t have a problem, but on two or three occasions, yes we did. We needed it and we didn’t get it.
RV: Mr. Hale could you describe your general impressions of the enemy, both the NVA regulars and the VC?

EH: I thought that the NVA were very well trained. They were motivated. I don’t know what kept them motivated for no more than they had. I never understood that. They were very determined. They were good fighters. Overall, I would say they were very good in what they faced from us, Richard, such as the artillery and the strafing and the air support and tanks and stuff. For my part, we never faced anything like that from their side. But they had years and years and years to prepare for this, too. I’d say overall they were very good at what they’d done. I will say this, and this in my own opinion if they had you outnumbered they were more willing to fight. If they didn’t have you outnumbered they would hit and run. This was especially so with the VC. They were kind of a rag tag outfit. They would stand and fight if they had you outnumbered.

RV: What do you think the weaknesses were of the NVA?

EH: Are you talking about, Richard, specifically the soldier?

RV: Yes, the soldier or the tactics or just whatever you think.

EH: I think the NVA soldier was very good, Richard. I think their tactics were excellent. Of course, like I said that was their home turf. They knew that country and they knew that jungle and everything whereas, the American soldier didn’t know that country well. That’s about the best I can describe them, Richard. I think they had good equipment. Especially their rifles and stuff that they carried, AKs. It was a very fine weapon and still is today. Some of the guys didn’t all carry AKs. Some of them carried SKSs that were manufactured in China. Overall, Richard, I don’t know that the NVA actually had a weakness. I’ve just really never seen that.

RV: On the battlefield say after a firefight or after a battle, there’s been a lot written about the activities of both sides, policing up their wounded how that went about. Did you ever witness the enemy or hear about the enemy executing American wounded on the battlefield before they could be rescued or taken back to the American perimeter?

EH: Excuse me, Richard (clears throat). I didn’t specifically see this. Although, at Chu Moor I think I might have mentioned we had left a couple guys up there and I don’t know that they executed them. I think they were dead before they ever hit the ground really. I did hear of some mutilations that went on from their side, as well as
ours.  Excuse me just a minute, Richard.  I was talking to a boy in Ft. Benning, Georgia.
He wasn’t in our company.  He was in our division.  He had gone out on patrol, him and
four or five other guys.  He was the only one that survived that.  They had shot him and
left him for dead.  They had also bayoneted him.  They had cut a couple of his fingers off
where he had a ring or something on, this kind of thing.  We had a couple guys in our
company that would take gold teeth from the NVA or VC or whatever.  I personally
never participated in that kind of stuff.  That wasn’t my thing.  I’m not patting myself on
the back Richard I don’t want you to think that I am, because I’m not.  In the Tet
Offensive in ’68 I think it might have been to the east of Kontum, we were kind of
cleaning up, mopping up an area.  There was an NVA, that might have been VC, I think it
was NVA and he was wounded lying on the ground.  One of our guys was going to shoot
him.  I stepped in and said, “No you ain’t going to do this.” Maybe that was right, maybe
that was wrong.  I don’t know.  I couldn’t stand by and see one of our guys go ahead and
kill this guy for no apparent reason.  He wasn’t threatening us.  Thus guy was a threat to
nobody.  He was wounded, wasn’t going to do anything.  Yes it went on, it went on both
sides.

RV:  You mentioned earlier the weapons used by the NVA and VC. What kind of
weapons did you carry personally?

EH:  I started out carrying the M-16, and I also carried a .45 automatic pistol.  I
also carried the M-79 grenade launcher.  Then I went back to the M-16 when I became an
RTO, which is Radio Telephone Operator.

RV:  How did those weapons function?

EH:  Overall the M-16 was good if you kept it clean.  You had to keep it
immaculate in order for it to operate.  The M-79 grenade launcher was pretty much
foolproof, Richard.  It kind of loaded, broke down like a shotgun.  There really wasn’t a
whole lot to it.  You know I’ve seen a lot of problems with the M-16.

RV:  Which one was your favorite to carry?

EH:  Of those two weapons?

RV:  Of the ones that you carried while you were there?

EH:  It’s really hard to say, Richard.  I suppose the M-16 would be my favorite,
grenade for several hundred meters or whatever. Overall I think the M-16 was probably
the favorite.

RV: Was there any weapon that you did not have that you wish you did have?

EH: Not that I can think of Richard, off the top of my head. I do think this,
Richard. I do think there was better weapons out there. I’m talking about maybe not on
our market, but Switzerland somewhere like that I think there were better weapons.
Overall the M-16 functioned fairly well.

RV: Could you describe basically when your unit would set up for the night, how
would you set up a defensive perimeter?

EH: We would set up a defensive perimeter in a circle. We would dig bunkers
and sometimes those bunkers would be big enough for two people and sometimes four
people.

RV: How big was the circle in diameter would you say?

EH: Oh my. I think it depended on how many men we had, Richard, at the time.
I would say it would cover, this is just my opinion I really don’t know. I’m saying a
good half-acre. At night, of course, we’d dig the holes and then we’d have to cut the
timber to put on top of them and fill the sandbags. Then at night we’d put out LPs. The
LPs would go out in four man teams. We would put four of them out, one to each corner.
They would setup trip flares and stuff at night. This was to kind of give the perimeter a
little warning that we had movement or we had company that night. Then, usually, our
CP was set up in the middle of the circle. We usually kept one man awake on the LPs at
all times, tried to. We usually kept one man awake on each bunker. This was something,
Richard, that was very, very hard to do. When you put in as many hours as we put in
over there in a day’s time, naturally people were tired. You would fall asleep or things
would seem like they were moving in the jungle. I’m sure you’ve probably heard this
before. You’d be sitting on a bunker and you think you’d have movement out in front of
you when really it was your mind playing little games with you. That’s basically how we
set up, and then at night when we did set up like that our CO would call in or our FO, our
forward observer would call in and have artillery plotted around us in case we did get into
something. Basically, that’s about how we set up at night.
RV: How was it determined who would actually go out in the LP and who would stay in?

EH: They were rotated.

RV: Where did you prefer to be?

EH: I preferred to be back in the perimeter because you just didn’t have that much warning, Richard, if you were out on the LP. You know you were out maybe 100 meters in front of the perimeter, and by the time those trip flares went off if you had company during the night it was almost too late. I preferred to be back in the perimeter. That’s not the way it always worked but you had to do what you had to do.

RV: What was it like at nighttime there?

EH: Let’s see Richard, let me think just a second. It was eerie. You had all kinds of animals to contend with. For the most part though they didn’t really bother us. I suppose they could have. You know like the tigers and snakes and stuff. For the most part we didn’t have a lot of problems with them. The mosquitoes were horrendous, scorpions this kind of stuff.

RV: What kind of animals did you see?

EH: I’ve never seen the animal itself, Richard. I’ve seen elephant tracks. I’ve seen a lot of snakes, scorpions, rats. They had rats over there, Richard, as big as cats (laughs).

RV: That’s what I’ve heard (laughs).

EH: They were very, very huge (laughs). There was a little deer that they had over there, Richard. I remember telling my wife here, it’s been a few years ago. National Geographic had gone over there and claims that they had found this deer that was supposedly extinct. Had a picture of it. I told Sharon, “That animal is not extinct. I’ve seen it when I was over in Vietnam.” It was a very, very little thing. It was probably the size of a half-grown dog and very, very fast. We’ve seen turtles, big turtles in these rivers and stuff over there. I’ve never really seen the tigers you know, Richard, we’ve seen tracks and stuff of them. I’ve seen pictures of where people had shot them or whatever you know. Monkeys, seen a lot of monkeys. I remember a little experience that I had over there with the monkeys, Richard.

RV: Tell me about it.
EH: I tell you what it was scary but afterwards it was funny. I had been sent out by myself probably 75-100 yards outside of our perimeter. I was setting beside this big tree. I heard a noise (cleans throat) excuse me Richard. I had a radio with me. I called in and told them. I said, “I think we’ve got movement.” The CO came on and he said, “Just stay where you’re at. Keep your eye on it. Keep you ears open, your eyes open.” Pretty soon I heard it out in front of me first and I heard it over to the side and I heard it over to the right side and the left side. I thought, ”Man I’m getting surrounded. Those suckers know where I’m at. They’re going to capture me or whatever.” Pretty soon this movement would quit. It’d be quiet for a little bit and then pretty soon start up again. I was starting to get a little shaky. Pretty soon it stopped again. I still hadn’t detected what they were. Pretty soon it started up again and I saw them. They were moving through the treetops, Richard. I mean just like a colony of them or whatever. There were lots of them. I finally called in and told them, “It’s just a bunch of monkeys.” They would be drawn, these monkeys to an area where we were at. I think they may have associated that with food or something. I really don’t know. We had one that followed us for probably a couple of miles.

RV: Really?

EH: Yes, he’d follow the company. Pretty soon he disappeared. I don’t know if he went back to his territory or where. That was kind of funny at the end of it, but it wasn’t funny in the beginning.

RV: I can imagine. Did you ever have any problems with people getting bitten by snakes?

EH: To my knowledge Richard we never had anyone bitten. We had a sergeant that slept in a hammock. Most of us guys slept on the ground. We were in this one area and I can’ tell you exactly where it was at Richard. We had been clearing a field of fire and the snakes were really bad in this area. I personally had been out there helping clear this field of fire. One of the guys hollered at me. This snake was getting ready to strike the back of my leg and he hit it with a machete and killed it. I was that close. I asked the medic, I said “Is that a poisonous snake?” He said, “Oh yes. If that snake would have bit you, you’d never make it out of here.” Anyway, this Sergeant Mixon got through clearing this field of fire he went back up and laid down in his hammock. He hadn’t been
in there five seconds and he jumped out and started cussing and ranting and raving and said, “there’s something in that hammock!” We raised it, there were two layers of that thing. We opened those layers up and there that thing was. It was a poisonous snake and it had gotten in there. They were real thick in that area. I never really heard of anybody in our outfit getting bit, Richard, by snakes. I’m not saying it didn’t happen, I just don’t recall.

RV: Going back to your description of the nighttime, was it easy to sleep? I know that depended on the situation.

EH: Was it easy to what, Richard?

RV: To sleep?

EH: To sleep?

RV: Yes, sir.

EH: Not really. In fact, like I’ve said most of the time you were so worn out you did sleep. It wasn’t a fitful sleep. Of course, it was always hot. Most of the time it was hot enough. In the Central Highlands, Richard, at night it did cool off some. In fact I’ve seen it where it was so cool that you had to have two poncho liners to keep warm. For the most part, Richard, I think most of the guys were so tired that they did sleep some. You always had bugs to contend with you know and sweat. The miserable conditions, not being able to bathe everyday, not having a clean change of clothes every day or every other day. Sometimes it was tough and at other times it wasn’t, Richard. I know I slept better when we were back in base camp, which were very few times. Sleep kind of escaped you most of the time.

RV: Did you feel like you had enough supplies in the field?

EH: Not really.

RV: What were you lacking?

EH: For one thing, Richard, boots would get in very, very bad shape before we could ever get any. Sometimes they were used stuff. Our clothes would almost be in shreds before we got clean clothes and stuff out to us. Water, I won’t say it was in short supply, but there was times when we could have used water we didn’t have. Of course, our company, our outfit lived off of C-rations. We were lucky to get a hot meal once a week. Most of the time it wasn’t fit to eat. But there were things I think, Richard, those
little things like that, and if you went into town you’d see this stuff sold on the Black
Market, which irritated the shit out of me because there were guys out there that needed
boots and socks and this kind of stuff. Sometimes we could get it, sometimes we
couldn’t. It was being sold on the Black Market. If you had the money you could get it.
Well, a soldier in the field needed it, but he couldn’t get it.

RV: You were ending up having to purchase with your money American supplies
that were supposed to be for you?

EH: No, I wouldn’t say that, Richard, because I never purchased anything as far
as our clothing and stuff like that went. I never really purchased anything like that, but it
was there if you wanted to buy it. I was always the one that said, “To hell with it. If they
can’t furnish it then I’ll go without.” That’s basically what we’re doing. I’m trying to
think, but basically I don’t know, Richard, it was adequate but it could have been better.

We did get supplied with what we called a CP. It was a big pack, a big box, and it had
candy in it. It had cigarettes and toilet tissue, just a little bit of everything. We kind of
divided that up. I think that pretty much came once a week or once every two weeks.

We’d get a little ration of beer, it didn’t amount to a whole lot. Of course, it was hot and
there’s nothing worse than hot beer (laughs).

RV: Did you see any excessive alcohol abuse or drug use?

EH: Yes. I didn’t really see any excessive alcohol use, Richard, because like I
said we just got rationed. When it was gone, it was gone. Now, the drug use was very
prevalent.

RV: Could you describe that?

EH: We had several guys in our company, Richard, that were on drugs. They
would buy this stuff, where they bought it at I don’t know. I suppose they bought it off
the villagers and stuff like this. When they were in town, that stuff, it was like the
women. You know, the women were cheap, the drugs were cheap. I remember we had a
guy with us I cannot tell you his name, I guess it really doesn’t make any difference. But
this guy was in the company when I went in November of ’67. He was still with the
company in November of ’68 when I came back to the States. This guy was high all the
time. I’ve seen this guy down in Pleiku before I flew out of there to Cam Rahn Bay. He
was downtown Pleiku and there were five or six MPs, Richard, that were trying to load
him into a deuce and a half. They had beat him with those nightsticks. His head was
swollen up the size of a basketball. They had really worked him over and he was still on
his feet. But the drugs were real bad over there, they really were. I think it probably got
worse after I left there. I think this is me talking, Richard. I think personally guys that
done drugs done it to escape reality. I personally wanted to know what was going on
around me. I felt like the sharper I was the better off I was. Yes, the drugs were getting
bad.

RV: Was that looked down upon by the other members of your platoon or
company, the guys who were using the drugs?

EH: I feel like it was Richard. I feel like that it was, yes.

RV: Did you ever know of any officers that were using?

EH: No.

RV: Did you ever witness any tension between the draftees and the lifers?

EH: No, not really, Richard, I didn’t. What I did witness was some tension
between the people out in the field versus the people that stayed back in base camp and
had jobs back there to do. I never really had anything, any animosity toward these people
because I felt like that was their job and I had my job. Although I might not have liked it,
it was still something that I had to do. Their job consisted of maybe being back on a
typewriter or in re-supply or whatever the case was. I did see a lot of fights and stuff
over that. Basically, I never seen anything out of the way of the people that were lifers
versus the draftees. I think for the most part, Richard, and I’m speaking for myself for
the most part I think we had a pretty good relationship with those people that were lifers.
I did, anyway.

RV: Did you ever hear any talk of fragging?

EH: I heard some scuttlebutt about it, yes. I never, ever witnessed anything that
actually took place. I knew a lot of guys that would get pissed off at the officers or
something because they made them do this or they made them do that. Well, they were
doing their job too, trying to. I never really witnessed anything in that line Richard but I
did hear talk about it, yes.

RV: Did your unit ever function with a canine unit?
EH: Our work with the dogs, Richard, was sometimes we’d have two or three

guys with dogs with us. For the most part we kind of operated on our own. The dogs I

had the utmost respect for and their handlers. I thought they’d done an excellent job. I’m

partial to dogs. I never understood their policy of not bringing those dogs back to the

States. I’m glad I wasn’t a handler because it would have broke my heart to see those
dogs put to sleep or whatever the case was. I do think those dogs saved a lot of men’s

lives. I really believe that.

RV: Did your unit use snipers?

EH: We had one guy with us, Richard, that was supposed to have been a sniper.

We never, ever used him for that. I always used to kid him. His name was Fred Childs;
his was from California. He carried an M-14. I asked him why he carried that M-14. He
told me he was sniper. I always told Fred he wouldn’t make a pimple on a sniper’s ass. I
used to kid him about it, you know. We never ever used Fred for that kind of job.

RV: How did you deal with the enemy snipers?

EH: Basically, Richard, it was kind of a guessing game as to where they were at.

What we would do if we thought they were in the trees, we’d just kind of open up in the
trees and stuff around us. For the most part that pretty well took care of them. They
were so well hidden and so well camouflaged. You know, you really didn’t know where
they were at, unless they fired three or four shots in a row, which they were smarter than
that. You know, they weren’t going to do that. That’s how we took care of them,
Richard, for the most part that I recall.

RV: Tell me about the relationships that you were able to form with the men with

whom you served.

EH: I had a pretty good relationship with a lot of the guys, Richard. I got very

well acquainted with a gentleman from McBee, South Carolina. We got real close. He
came back the same time I did. I have talked to him in the last six or eight months. I
have a friend in Great Falls, Montana we were very close and still are today. I have a
very good friend in Oceania, West Virginia that I talk to at least twice a year. Just got
through talking to him at Thanksgiving. The thing I regret probably the most, Richard, of
that thing was I got acquainted with a lot of them never took their name or address and
telephone number and this kind of stuff. Therefore I’m kind of separated from them
today. One gentleman that I would love to get in contact with and I can’t tell you his
name, can’t tell you where he lives or anything and it has haunted me for 30 some years.

RV: Did he serve with you, in your unit?

EH: Yes. This guy for some reason took a liking to me. Whenever we’d go out
on patrol or something like that I’d come back in he was with a mortar crew. He would
have me a cold something to drink or something. I asked him one day, “Why are you
doing this? What’s the deal?” He said, “Well I like you.” I said, “I appreciate that, but
I’ve just never had anyone treat me like this.” I think early on I had told you I had come
from a broken home and all this. I just wasn’t used to somebody doing anything for me.
Anyway, I got very well acquainted with this guy and we were up at Kontum when he
came to me and said, “I want to talk to you after while.” I thought, what’s this guy want
to talk to me about? I knew he was married. I thought maybe he wants to talk about
problems he’s having with his wife or whatever. I thought hell he wouldn’t want to talk
to me, because I wasn’t married I didn’t know anything about women you know (laughs).

So, I did, I went over and talked to him that evening. Come to find out this guy and his
father owned a ranch out west somewhere. He asked me, “What did you do back in the
World?” This is what we called the United States, the ‘World’. I said, “Before I came
into the service I worked on a farm.” He said, “What kind of farm?” I said, “Well, we
raised grain, had a few head of cattle.” He said, “I want to know would you be interested
in coming to work on a horse ranch for me and my dad?” I told him, “I couldn’t tell you
anything about a horse. I’ve ridden them, but I don’t know anything about them.” He
said, “You can learn can’t you?” I said, “Yes.” He said, “I’d like to have you come to
work for me and my dad.” And I said, “Maybe you ought to ask your dad about this.”

He did, he wrote his dad and told him, “I’ve got this guy I think would work out.” His
dad wrote and told him, “If you think this guy is the one for you, we can do it.” He told
me, “When dad retires I’ll split everything with you 50/50 down the middle.” He came
back, Richard, I think like a month or two before I did, so he would have come back in
September of ’68 and I came back in November of ’68. We came into the same place out
at Ft. Lewis, Washington. I was supposed to stop there and spend two or three days with
him and his wife. We were going to make plans and stuff. For some reason I didn’t do
that. I came on home. I have regretted that ever since. Not maybe that I didn’t take the
job. It’s that I owe the man an apology. I would dearly love to get in contact with this
guy, but I don’t know his name. I’ve forgotten it over the years, it’s escaped me. I think I
would probably recognize the guy if I’d seen him. Nobody seems to know who I am
talking about. I had a good relationship with the guys, Richard, I really did. Of course,
I’m not sure whether I told you about this or not. I ran into a guy, and this happened at
base camp and he was a colored guy and he pulled a knife on me. He threatened to kill
me. That didn’t happen and thank God it didn’t. For the most part I had a good
relationship with the guys.

RV: How much contact did you have with home?

EH: With home (clears throat)? When I left to go to Vietnam, Richard, of course
the only people I had was the people that had taken care of me, raised me basically and
my girlfriend who I ended up marrying and later on divorced. Those were probably the
only three people that I had contact with. Of course my brother was living at the time.
He was, let’s, see how old would he have been? He would have been 13 or 14 years old
when I was over there. He never ever mailed me or wrote a letter back to me. Of course,
I didn’t write to him. I guess he didn’t feel like he ought to write to me. That’s probably
the only three people I really had any contact with back in the States. I’d get maybe a
couple three letters a week. Mostly from my girlfriend.

RV: Were you ever able to make any of the MARs calls?

EH: Yes. I made one. It was back home to Mary and Tony, the people that raised
me.

RV: How was that call?

EH: It was good for the most part. When you get through talking you’re kind of
let down because you know you’re over there and they’re back here and everything. It
was good.

RV: What would you do for entertainment there?

EH: Are you talking about out in the field, Richard?

RV: Just in general. If your mind needed to go out in the field, then yes. If
you’re talking about base camp and going into town then that too.

EH: Ok, out in the field, Richard, we played a lot of cards. We listened to Armed
Forces Radio. That’s just about it, Richard. I’ve always told people when you worked as
hard as we did when you were out in the field, you really didn’t feel like doing any
games. You didn’t feel like being entertained or wanting to do anything. When we did
get back into base camp or in town or close to a town, we would go in and try to find
something to drink, see the ladies. Basically that was about it, Richard. Of course, I
wasn’t around Saigon where there was a lot of things to do. We were basically, like I
said, up North and we did our business and that was about it.

RV: Were the prostitutes readily available?
EH: Yes.
RV: Was that pretty much anywhere in town that you went in to?
EH: Yes.
RV: How would you locate them in a small town? Did they come to you or
would you guys have to go seek them out?
EH: They weren’t hard to spot (laughs) if you know what I mean. They were just
there. If you’ve seen a little building that had the sign on it called car wash or something
like that, you could pretty much count on that’s what it was. When I think about it over
the years, that was probably the only income that those girls had. Some of those girls
were very, very pretty women. They were very pretty women. Of course, what they’d
done at night to the GIs who knows? They may have been VC or NVA at night. Nobody
knows. Yes, they were very readily available, and you just really didn’t have a problem
finding them.

RV: Out of curiosity do you remember how much it would cost to be with one of
these girls? You don’t have to answer that question if you don’t want to.
EH: Oh, no that’s not a problem (laughs). I’m getting myself in a little deep
water here, Richard. I’m telling you that I did associate with these girls. I think it was
like 500 P, which would have been five dollars (laughs). That was cheap. Oh goodness.
Of course, I was kind of wild when I was over there, Richard. I kind of threw caution to
the wind.

RV: Were your spiritual beliefs affected by the war? Say, how you thought
before and then during and after?
EH: As far as the war itself went, Richard, it didn’t really affect my spiritual
beliefs. I knew that God, in the Bible it said there had been wars and rumors of wars.
This happened in the Bible all the time. I didn’t feel bad about some of the things we’d
done over there as far as the killing and stuff that went on. I would say it has bothered
me more today than it did then. Maybe, it was because it was a life and death struggle.
That’s about all I know to say Richard as far as that part of it goes. I don’t think it’s
affected me spiritually, no.

RV: Did you ever get to take any R&R?
EH: Yes, sir.

RV: I think actually we’ve talked about that. How about USO shows?
EH: No.

RV: Did your unit have any pets?
EH: No.

RV: Were you ever exposed to any of the defoliants over there, Agent Orange?
EH: Yes.

RV: How so?
EH: Well through the water system. When we did run out of water that was
flown into us, Richard, we would have to get water out of the streams and stuff. The
streams had this Agent Orange in them. The reason I say that is because it’s already been
a proven fact that the defoliant was sprayed from planes as well as helicopters. It was in
the airways, and it got into the water system. It seems like Richard I remember one time
when they flew over us and was dropping this stuff. It was just like a shower. Not as
intense, but, yes, I was exposed to it.

RV: Have you suffered any affects from it that you think?
EH: None that I’m aware of. I’ve talked to some of the guys with our company
that are being affected by it. One of them passed away here about five years ago from
that stuff. It’s nasty, very nasty.

RV: What was wrong with him, do you remember?
EH: I think he had Leukemia or non-Hodgkin’s Lymphoma or something like
that.

RV: Speaking of defoliants and taking out the jungle, what did you think about
Vietnam the country itself, physically?
EH: I thought it was a very poor country, but I also saw the beauty in it too, Richard. It was a very pretty country. If you stopped and looked around you could see the beauty there. I don’t know that the people really wanted it any different than they had it as far as maybe their infrastructure went. I think it had a lot of potential and still does. I think the people were pretty much content with their way of life as it was. The country it was a beautiful country, Richard.

RV: How would you rate the leadership that you had, first of all there in your company, the lieutenants and the captains?

EH: I would rate it on a scale of 1 to 10, I would probably rate it an eight, seven, eight.

RV: Quite high?

EH: Yes. The thing that really bothered me, Richard, with our leadership was, I felt like our higher up people in the division were trying to make calls that they weren’t qualified to make. I say that because they weren’t out there with us. They didn’t know what the hell was going on. They were sitting back in a secure air-conditioned office trying to tell us what to do. Overall, our leadership in the field I think was good.

RV: What would you say was the bravest action you witnessed while you were in country?

EH: Oh, gosh, Richard. That would be pretty hard, I don’t know, Richard (coughs). Excuse me. I’d say that’d be pretty hard for me to answer because I’d seen two or three things that I thought was very good. I know we especially had this captain and when we were in Kontum, you know I thought the guy was kind of a sissy. But unbeknownst to me, when the shit hit the fan he was right there. I had a lot of admiration for this man. Overall, Richard, I just really can’t say. I really don’t know. I’ve seen a lot of guys that have done things that I thought was good and brave. But overall, I’d say I just can’t really pick out one thing and say that was extraordinary.

RV: Do you recall any humorous events besides the monkey event you described for me?

EH: Humorous?

RV: Yes.

EH: Not right off the top of my head, Richard, I just can’t think of anything.
RV: What did you think of the media coverage of the war?
EH: I didn’t think, Richard, as far as it being brought back here to our people, I
don’t think it should have been. I think it hurt the GIs. Hurt the American fighting
people.
RV: How so?
EH: When you have CBS, NBC and all these outfits over there and they’re
showing guys getting hurt or killed and maybe even some of our guys had captured NVA
or VC prisoners and maybe slapped them around or done something. It just kind of went
against us. I think it lowered the morale of American men, I really do. Ultimately, I
think it lost a war for us. The reason I say that is because I can’t think of the gentleman’s
name. He was a general in North Vietnamese Army. Gip or something like that.
RV: Giap.
EH: Yes. He made the comment at the Paris Peace Talks to Henry Kissinger that
he said, “We can’t beat you in the battlefield, but we’ll beat you in propaganda.” That’s
exactly what they’d done. I think that ultimately cost us the war. In a sense, it did
Richard, but also our leaders back here, for some reason or another and I don’t know the
answer. I wish I did know. I think there was things that could have been done in North
Vietnam that wasn’t done to end that war. For instance the lack of artillery on our part. I
think ultimately, Richard, I think it cost us the war, I really do. I don’t think that is the
place for the news. I don’t think people need to know what is going on day after day
after day. It kind of, I don’t know how to put this Richard, I can’t find the wording.
You know, when the American public sees this day in and day out, it kind of turns them
against it. Therefore they turn around and say something or have a demonstration or
whatever and it goes against us.
RV: You left in November 1968?
EH: Yes, sir.
RV: You knew the date you would leave?
EH: Yes.
RV: How did you feel when you were getting short there in that last month or so?
EH: When I was getting short, Richard, I wanted to be in the most secure area I
could find. A lot of the units, I know I talked to this buddy of mine from West Virginia
said that when he got two or three months before he came home, he was sent back to base camp.

RV: Really?

EH: Yes. I never had that luxury. I was out there until probably three weeks anyway. Then I was sent back into base camp to get things ready to go and see the doctors and dentists, whatever I needed to see. Yes, I think the shorter a person got, the more caution or whatever you took to try to say, “Hey I’m going back and I’m going back one piece.”

RV: Was that supported by the other men in your company?

EH: Yes.

RV: Everybody understood?

EH: Oh, yes.

RV: Tell me about when you left Vietnam how did you feel?

EH: I felt like a load had been taken off my shoulders. I felt good, Richard, that I was going home, but I also felt bad for the guys that I left. Because when you left, you basically lost all ties with these people. You had no way of knowing what that company was doing, how the guys were doing. It was just one of those things that you just didn’t know. There were friends that you left behind and you wonder to this day how they are. I felt glad that I was leaving, and relieved and thankful that I did make it.

RV: Do you remember that flight back?

EH: Yes.

RV: What was it like?

EH: It was very, very quiet, very solemn. I do remember the closer we got to the United States it was kind of pandemonium. Everybody was “Yeah, this is great.” I remember when I left Ft. Lewis, Washington or SEA/TAC I guess they called it, to board a plane out there to come back to St. Louis, I think it was Mt. Rainier the pilot showed us that. From then on, Richard, I just kind of settled down and I wanted to sleep. I had one of the stewardess come by wanting to know if I wanted to lay down. I said, “I wanted to lay down, but there’s no place to lay.” She said, “Oh yes there is.” She took the arm out of this seat, and went and got me a blanket. Then I curled up in that seat and I went to
sleep and I never knew nothing until we got to St. Louis. It was nice to get out of there, it really was.

RV: Did you bring any souvenirs home with you?

EH: No. I say souvenirs. The only thing I did bring home, Richard, I got some money. I did have some souvenirs. I had an NVA flag. I had a knife and I had a bracelet that was given to me. I gave them away before I left country, wish I hadn’t have. But I did. I just wanted to be done with it, be away from it.

RV: Who did you give them to?

EH: I gave them to a guy by the name of Berliner, out of Chicago, Illinois. I just gave them to him.

RV: Was he serving there with you in your platoon?

EH: Yes.

RV: Did you have any difficulty at the airports when you were home?

EH: No I didn’t really see that Richard. I mean, if it was there, it must have been a different area. I just don’t recall seeing that. If it was there, I kind of ignored it. As far as being spit on or talked down to, no. I didn’t see that.

RV: When you returned how difficult was it for you to transition back into civilian life?

EH: I think it was very difficult. I remember coming home, Richard, and I hadn’t been home probably a week, and I was out in the backyard and this was in a very, very small town. There was a gentleman that lived behind us and I knew Bill and everything, and he was always shooting blackbirds and stuff in his yard, trees and stuff. I was out there in the backyard and he popped off a shot out of a .22 and it scared the shit out of me. I ,of course, hit the ground. When you do this you think, “Damn these people are going to think I’m nuts.” I had some difficulty. I had a very bad temper. I remember being down at Ft. Benning, Georgia, and I lived off post. I was married by then. Lived off post, lived in a trailer, and I lost my temper there at the trailer one night and beat the hell out of a refrigerator. This kind of stuff. Over the years, Richard, I think it’s affected me a lot more than I really realized until I did start going to counseling. I think it was a transition that was very difficult. It was very difficult. I look back, Richard, at the guys that went through World War II and World War I. At that time, they didn’t know what
PTSD was. I mean when they came back from World War II these guys joined the VFW and the Legion and they had places to go. They could go down there and drink or do whatever they wanted to do and talk about the situation. Also, most of those guys came back from World War II in these troop ships and stuff and it took them a month to come back. You know they could talk about it in these ships and stuff. We’d come back, we were out in the field one day and back into the World the next. It was difficult.

RV: Did you talk about it with anyone or did people ask you about your service?
EH: I had people ask me about it. Most of the time I never talked about it, Richard. I would talk about it with someone who had been there. For the most part, people that I didn’t know that would ask me about it, I would skirt the issue. The friend that I have in Oceania, West Virginia he and I have talked about it. I know he commented to me, it’s probably one of the best things he’s ever done was talk to me about it. But for the most part, you know you just don’t talk about it to somebody who’s not been there.

RV: Do you think you’ve suffered from PTSD?
EH: Absolutely.

RV: Did you follow the war effort when you left, what was going on over there in Vietnam?
EH: No, not really, Richard. When I got out of the service I never watched it on TV. It just wasn’t ever my thing.

RV: What did you think about it when the United States withdrew in 1973?
EH: When the United States withdrew from Vietnam in ’73?

RV: I thought it was a very large waste, not only of material but of the men. I feel, Richard, that we lost 58,000 of our best people. Even though I say the best people, a lot of these men come from lower class such as myself, but I think these guys were very talented, a lot of them were. I think it was just a very large waste. I don’t think that war should have ever happened. I think it was political. I still say had John F. Kennedy lived, we wouldn’t have a Vietnam, as we knew it. We might have had a Vietnam but it wouldn’t have been that long. That’s my personal opinion.

RV: What did you think in April 1975 when Saigon fell and South Vietnam was lost to North Vietnam?
EH: My feelings when that happened I thought those poor people that had fought
for the South Vietnamese that had fought with us, along side us, the people that had
helped us as far as being out in the field as well as being in the cities, the clerks and staff
that had helped the war effort on our side. I felt sorry for them people. Because I feel
like the United States not only abandoned them, but I thought about what the North
Vietnamese would do to the ones that was in the South. Especially if they knew they
served in the military, which they had a way of knowing I’m sure. Even though they
took off their uniforms and threw them and burned them and got rid of the weapons and
this that and the other. I think it could have been handled different Richard. I really felt
bad for those people. I really did.

RV: Do you think the United States learned any lessons in the war?
EH: Maybe. I think maybe they probably did Richard and especially when I say
that I look at the Gulf War, what happened over there. They went in, done a job and got
out. That’s the only way you can do it. You know, when you go into a fight you go in to
win and you win and get out. Quit pussy footing around and beating around the bush.
Go in there, do the job and get the hell out. I feel like that they did learn some. There are
probably more lessons that they need to learn. Of course, when you’re fighting a war on
terrorism, that’s global. There are just a lot of things, Richard, that I think they could
have done different that could have ultimately won the war for us. I feel like the guys
that were over there were kind of used as puppets, kind of guinea pigs. We’re going to
try this and try this, see what happens. That’s the way I feel about it.

RV: How do you feel about your own service in Vietnam, looking back at it?
EH: Can you be a little more specific, Richard?
RV: Looking back at your Vietnam service, are you proud of what you did? Are
you proud of your service with the country?
EH: Yes. I don’t have any problems there. I just wish it would have worked out
for the better. I look back, Richard, and I feel like the Vietnam veterans, most of the
people in the country look at us as losers. We didn’t lose the war, that war was lost in
Washington, D.C.

RV: Do you think the United States government is taking care of it’s Vietnam
veterans?
EH: No, absolutely not.

RV: In what way?

EH: Medical. I think there are a lot of Vietnam veterans out here, Richard, that have problems that they’re not being compensated for. For instance myself, I went through this PTSD for 30 years, not knowing what was wrong. I end up going to a psychiatrist, being evaluated, getting counseling, and I end up getting a small compensation every month. Well, that small check that I get, isn’t a drop in the bucket for what I’ve been through and what I’ve put my family through. I’m not asking for nothing, Richard, I’m just saying there’s no amount of money that can take care of that. I don’t care if it’s $1,000 a month or $200 a month, there’s nothing that can replace the way you were. I mean I have bad thoughts. I’m not saying I don’t. I don’t think I’m as bad as I used to be. I’ve thought about suicide. I never, ever thought about hurting my family, Richard, as far as that went, but I have had suicidal thoughts. Yes, I suffered for 30 years or longer and really didn’t know why. I still see guys today, Richard, that are Vietnam veterans out here that don’t have nothing. They can’t hold a job. They can’t stay with one person, marriage. They’ve got kids that are strung from here to Texas. It’s a very large burden to carry.

RV: How do you think the war had most affected your life?

EH: Mistrust. I don’t trust anybody. Probably the only person I trust is my wife and a few close friends. Overall, Richard, I don’t trust anybody. I always look at the down side of things instead of the positive side. I don’t know if we call it an inferiority complex or what you would call it. If I’m in a strange area I take precautions. I don’t care if it’s daylight or dark. I just take precautions of trying not to get into a situation that I might not be able to get out of. This sounds strange Richard, for instance, when I go into a bathroom I’ll push that door all the way over to the wall to make sure there’s nobody behind that door. It sounds stupid, Richard, but that’s part of it.

RV: No, sir it doesn’t sound stupid at all.

EH: When I’m in a restaurant, I always try to sit facing the door so I can see what’s going on. I don’t know. That’s some of the weird stuff that I think the Vietnam veterans go through. It seems as though, Richard, and what bothers me a lot, you see people out here getting messed up on these methamphetamines. That’s the doing of their
own. Then they turn around and go on Social Security. Damn, here’s the Vietnam veteran out there and he can’t get shit. He’s been through ten times what those people have been through and he’s still having to prove himself and fight for whatever he gets. These people they can get it over night. That’s not right. That’s just not right.

RV: What do you think was the most significant thing you learned while you were in Vietnam?

EH: Probably the most significant thing I learned Richard, now this may sound selfish, but taking care of number one. I’m not saying I didn’t try to take care of my friends, but you learn to take care of yourself because there wasn’t anybody else going to.

RV: What do you think about Vietnam today?

EH: I think Vietnam today, Richard, I think they’re maybe not crying out for help, but I think they would welcome the help that the United States gives them or any other country as far as that goes. I don’t know, I kind of have a problem with the United States helping them, because we tried to do that once and they wouldn’t let us. I don't totally blame the South Vietnamese. Some of the blame lies there. Most of the blame lays with North Vietnam. Of course, a Communist régime, they think they can do it and they don’t need no help. We all need each other. I still think it’s kind of a backward country. I think they’re making some progress. I will probably never do it, but I would dearly love to go back over there and just see how it has changed. I think the potential is there, Richard, if they’ll submit to it.

RV: Have you seriously thought about going back to visit?

EH: Yes, I have. I’ve thought about it, yes.

RV: What would you like to do?

EH: I’d like to go back to Bien Hoa and see that area and if it was possible to fly on up to Pleiku. Go through Kontum, Dak To places like that where I had been in country and Ban Me Thout. Places like that I’d just like to see how much it has changed. I’m sure that probably I wouldn’t even recognize it. I’ve talked to guys that have been back into the Pleiku area where Camp Anari was located. It’s just all a big, overgrown mess. The only thing that they really recognize is Dragon Mountain. I think it would be interesting to do that, but I don’t know.

RV: Have you had any contact with Vietnamese here in the United States?
EH: I have had some, Richard, but very little. We had a Vietnamese engineer that worked for Marathon Oil Company. His name was San Do. The guys up there at the plant tried to get me to do some things to him, make fun of him and I’ve never done that. I said, “No I can’t do that.” I turned around and walked away. I did get to talk to him one day. He happened to be up in the supply room there. It was just me and him in there. I asked him, “Son Do,” I said, “Where are you from?” He said, “Vietnam.” I said, “Yes I know that.” I said, “South or North?” It got real quiet and he said, “Originally,” he never turned around, never looked at me, “Originally I’m from North Vietnam. I came down in a boat to the South Vietnamese side.” He said, “I was in the Navy.” I think he said it was the Navy. I liked the guy, I really did. He had a nice family. I don’t know what happened out there at Marathon, but he ended up quitting out there. They still live in Robinson, Illinois. I think it’s been two years ago, Richard, the wife and I were going to Vincennes one evening just down the highway here a little bit, I saw his car parked over on the side of the road and his wife or this lady was in there. I turned around and went back, pulled up behind her. Very pretty lady, beautiful lady. I asked her, “Aren’t you San Do’s wife?” She said, “Yes.” I said, “Are you having problems?” She said, “Yes, I about lost a wheel or something.” I said, “I’ve got a cell phone here in the truck if you want to use it.” I said, “You can call San Do or whatever you need to do. You’re welcome to use the phone.” She did. She used the phone and called him. She offered to give me some egg rolls and some other stuff that they had in the car. That’s what they do. They make these Vietnamese foods and they take them around to the stores and sell them. That’s the way they make their living. That’s really the only contact that I have had Richard with them.

RV: Are there any songs that you hear on the radio that take you back to Vietnam?

EH: Mostly I listen to country music. Of course, up in here they don’t play some of the old country music. They play this modern stuff. Once in a while, Richard, I will hear something that will remind me of that, but not very often.

RV: How about books on Vietnam? Have you read any?

EH: Oh, yes I’m a nut for that. In fact, I went to Indianapolis over the weekend and was up at one of the malls. That’s where I spend my time when we go to the mall or
something. If the wife’s got shopping to do, she goes her way and I go to Walden Book
Store. I sit in there and look through these books and try to find something to look at. I
usually don’t buy anything because they’re too expensive. I just don’t have the extra
money to buy these things. I’d love to bring them home and read them. I just don’t.
Yes, I’m a nut for books. I love to read.

RV: How about movies on Vietnam? Have you seen these?
EH: I have seen a couple, Richard, for the most part I don’t watch them.
RV: Why is that?
EH: I think it brings back too much memory. I think the more I stay away from
it, the better off I am. The wife gets on me, she doesn’t like for me to watch them.
RV: She does not like them?
EH: No.
RV: Why not?
EH: She thinks it bothers me as far as my mood goes. I’m kind of hard to get
along with for a few days. I’m always snapping at her or something. She doesn’t like
that. I can understand that.
RV: Have you been to the Wall in Washington?
EH: Yes, sir.
RV: What was that experience like for you?
EH: I don’t know, Richard; it was very touching, very solemn. I felt like I was
with those guys. It was just a very touching thing. I don’t know how else to describe it
Richard, I’d love to go back. I didn’t agree with the layout of the monument. The way it
was in the ground. That was just me.
RV: How do you think they could have done it differently?
EH: To me, Richard, they could have kind of put it above the ground, and put it
into some other color other than black. Black represents death to me. Maybe that’s the
reason they’d done it. That’s 58,000 American lives lost and that is death. I just feel like
it could have been raised above the ground, and done different. That’s not the way it was
chosen to be.
RV: Were you able to find Hollis Buck’s name?
EH: Yes. There were several of them on there, Richard, that I found.
RV: Did you do one of the rubbings?

EH: Yes.

RV: For young people today if you were able to talk to high school or college students and tell them about the Vietnam War what would you tell them?

EH: I don’t really know Richard. That’s something I’ve never really thought about. I would try to make it a positive experience for them rather than something negative. I just really haven’t thought a whole lot about that. I just really don’t know, Richard, how I would address that.

RV: Sir, is there anything else that you would like to add to our conversation?

EH: Nothing that I can think of, Richard, right off the top. I just wish things had been different. You know, with Vietnam I just wish that we could have come back and looked upon as good warriors or good fighting men, which didn’t happen. I think the Vietnam veterans as whole is probably talked about negatively more than probably any of the wars that have gone on. I have heard myself in VFWs and stuff the World War II guys talking. The comment was made that “give them a good platoon and they’d clean that whole damn country out.” Well, bullshit! Don’t sit and tell me that. I know better. There’s really nothing else, Richard, that I can think of that I would like to add. Should something come up I’ll give you a call. If something comes upon your end that you would like to ask feel free to do so. There’s nothing that I can think of right now Richard.

RV: This will end our oral history interview with Elmer Hale. Thank you sir.

EH: Thank you.