Richard Verrone: This is Dr. Richard Verrone; I am conducting an oral history interview with Mr. Michael Bradbury. Today is September 15, 2003. I’m in Lubbock Texas in the Special Collections Library Interview Room on the campus of Texas Tech University. It’s 10:10 a.m. Central Standard Time and Mr. Bradbury your in Apache Junction, Arizona. Why don’t we start with a brief biographical sketch of yourself sir? Could you tell me when and where you were born and a little bit about growing up?

Michael Bradbury: Well I was born on the 22nd of March 1948 in San Francisco right there in the city and I grew up in one of the rougher neighborhoods, it wasn’t the roughest neighborhood there, but it was, Pacarol Hill was one of the roughest ones. As I was telling you earlier I went to school with O.J. Simpson, which isn’t anything really to brag about, but I knew the guy personally.

RV: That was in high school?

MB: That was in high school, yes Galileo High which is down by Fisherman’s Wharf.

RV: Let me ask a little bit about your family. What did your mom and dad do for a living?
MB: My mom was a housewife, homemaker and my dad was an Automobile Mechanic, he worked the majority of his years up till he retired he was the Head Mechanic at the San Francisco branch of Hertz Rent-A-Car.

RV: Did you have any brothers and sisters?

MB: Yes, I have one of each.

RV: Were you the oldest or where were you?

MB: Yeah.

RV: What about military experience in your family, had anyone served in the military, your father or uncle?

MB: My dad served in the Coast Guard. I have two uncles that served in the Navy and one in the Air Force and two in the Army and I am the only Marine anywhere in the family.

RV: Tell me a little bit about your childhood, what do you remember about growing up in San Francisco?

MB: What I remember about growing up in San Francisco was we lived on a hill, it seemed like everything was either up hill or down hill. We used, well we use to like to play baseball and we played down in this little parking lot and there were some trains, commuter trains, went down to San Francisco. From there to San Jose and people would park their cars on a big dirt lot which is actually laid over tar and on the weekends it would be empty because nobody would be going to work so we would go down there and play. I remember at night if you went anywhere like to the store or something you always went with three or four guys because in our neighborhood you didn’t run around by yourself but it was a good time. All of our heroes were not the heroes of today, we use to watch Roy Rogers on TV and stuff and Sky King and life was really simple. When I look back at the 50’s and then I look today it angers me a little bit of what the world has become and people tell me you know when we talk about the problems in America they say, “Well you know this is still the best country going” and I said, “You know I’m so tired of hearing that because just because we’re still the best country going that don’t mean we couldn’t be better. I know we could be better because we have been and I have lived in a time when we were. When they weren’t selling drugs at the grade school level
outside the fences, you didn’t have the perversion, the child pornography, and all the rest of it so…

RV: And that’s what you remember about the 50’s, that kind of…

MB: The 50’s was beautiful, if I could step back in time, knowing what I know now I would go back to about 1955-56, it was great, the air was clean, in fact it didn’t cost you an arm and a leg to do anything and personal values were better. I don’t know who the kids have today as heroes but we had good role models to look up to. You know Roy and Gene, and Hop-a-long Cassidy and stuff like that, the baseball players who weren’t involved in drugs and everything else. I remember in San Francisco going to Candlestick Park and watching Willie Mays and some of them guys, you know the superstars who weren’t making a lot of money but were really producing and they weren’t involved in things. That whole era, that whole “I Love Lucy” era was great and one thing that I do like about today is that they do show re-runs sometimes, I see some of the old TV shows I use to see and I remember the cars. I remember we could drive down the road and I could look out the window and I could tell my mom what kind of car that was, what year it was, because you could tell the difference, anymore they all look alike but the 50’s was a wonderful time. I feel sorry for anybody who didn’t get a chance to grow up in the 50’s and 60’s because when you hear us old farts talk about the good ol’ days, they really were, they really were.

RV: What kind of jobs did you have, did you work when you were young?

MB: Yes, when I wasn’t out stealing hubcaps, yeah. I did odd jobs around the neighborhood, there were some elderly people and they would come home in their cars with groceries and I would carry their groceries up stairs in the apartment for them. I’d make sometimes 25 cents, sometimes 50 cents and I just did odd jobs around the neighborhood. I joined the Marine Corps right out of high school so I didn’t really start working a civilian job.

RV: Yes sir. What about sports and involvement? You mentioned playing in that lot nearby, were you involved in sports?

MB: Yes in school I played a little baseball and I boxed and I guess just baseball and some boxing I guess. And then just on the weekends me and my running buddies or
my running buddies and I whichever is correct we would just do whatever around the
eighborhood. Run around just looking to get into mischief I guess.

RV: What about school? How were you as a student?

MB: I was about a C average; I think I got a B+ in bathroom going (laughter). No
I did pretty good in math. Math is the one thing that you always have to have because of
all the subjects you take math as the one thing, well English to a degree, but math, you’re
going to use that all your life.

RV: Yes sir.

MB: Cyrano de Bergerac, I never did understand. Why do you got to know about
this and that but [you need] math because your figuring out bills and everything, gas
mileage and all that stuff.

RV: Was there an expectation of you to go to college from your parents or were
you set on joining the military?

MB: I was set on joining the military. My mom and dad didn’t want me going
into the Marine Corps, especially with Vietnam. Vietnam was just escalating, just starting
up, it was getting hot and heavy in ’65 and I graduated in early ’66 and I went down and
enlisted. My mom and dad weren’t real pleased over that because they thought it would
be better off if I joined the Air Force or something where it wouldn’t be a chance of
getting shot up.

RV: Why did you join the military in the first place?

MB: Well I always admired them, I like the war pictures, the old John Wayne
pictures and stuff and actually I kind of joined the Maine Corps almost, well almost on a
bet you might say. For instance, let me explain, the Marine Corps is not an outfit that you
would want to join if your going to further improve yourself as far as getting an
education. I mean they’re getting into High Tech now but back then all they needed was
somebody they could mold into a machine. The Marine Corps is an attitude, the Marine
Corps is an outfit fit for tough little guys, like myself, or guys who thought they were
tough little guys on the block, if you have something to prove, you feel like you have
something to prove, then you join the Marine Corps.

RV: And you knew that back then, you had that feeling back then?
MB: The way this came about, Rich, we were sitting around at a high school
dance there. We had people around us, some of our buddies and we were very close to
graduation and we were talking about what we were going to do because some of the
guys said well I don’t know if I want to get drafted, this and that, or want some guy
going [says]…”I’m going to join the Air Force, man, I ain’t going to do this” and being
a cocky little shit like I was, I said, “Well you pussies” and I said, “I’m going to join the
Marine Corps man.” They said, “The Marine Corps?” I said, “That’s right, man, some of
us can cut it and some of us can’t.” So then I was just about trapped myself because that
sounded pretty big then with girls around us and stuff and then I realized I’ve got to go
through with this because if I don’t it isn’t going to look so good. When I got to boot that
is whether you find out that you might have been the toughest little turd on your block
but down there you isn’t nothing and they let you know right off the bat when you get off
the bus. Boot camp is unbelievable and you graduate, you lose about forth to a third of
the guys you start with. Guys that just can’t cut it week after week or they can’t make the
obstacle course and in the back of your mind you’re thinking, “I’ve got to make this
because if I get sent home I’ll be the laughing stock of everybody” because after all the
bragging you do, you better make it.

RV: You went to basic down at San Diego?
MB: San Diego; yes.
RV: San Diego, and this is 1966?
MB: Yes, in March of ’66.
RV: Tell me about your impressions; what did you think of basic and what were
your first impressions when you stepped off the bus down there.
MB: I was scared as hell.
RV: Yeah.
MB: I was scared as hell, we were all, they enlisted a bunch of us in San Jose that
were going to different places. We processed out of Oakland then I flew out of San Jose
with some other guys and some of the guys I didn’t even know from different schools and
we were all going down there, everybody talking big. Well we got down there, and they
picked us up on a bus and there was a drill instructor that picked us up right there on the
bus and he got on the bus with us at the airport and as soon as the doors closed then the
shit started.

RV: What did he do (laughter)?

MB: You know you’re thinking, “Oh no!” They’re already climbing on you, cursing at you and you say, “Man I got on the wrong bus here or something.” And every Marine I’ve ever talked to, either at San Diego or Paris Island, they always seemed to get there at night and I think that is so your down there and you’re disoriented and you don’t know where it is so you couldn’t run out the gate if you wanted to because you don’t know where the gate is and they get you in there and they run you off a bus and put you on the yellow footprints and then they start in. It’s a dehumanizing thing and you’re scared out of your mind now, you aren’t the tough little kid on the block no more, you’re down there and you don’t have a clue what’s going on and you’ve got a whirlwind of drill instructors. You’re only going to end up with three but there is about a dozen of them down there at receiving and grabbed by the cuff and you’re tossed around and you’re screamed at and they, the first things they do is get you in there and they buzz all your hair off: So that’s the first dehumanizing thing, so you all look alike. You’re all bald as cucumbers and everybody just got a wild look on their face and you don’t know what’s coming next. They run you down this hallway and I remember a real slick linoleum, freshly waxed deck, it’s called a deck. They don’t call it floor, you use Navy language and you’ve got your shoes and you’re already down to your skivvies and they’re going to send you down to start getting you some uniforms and this is in the middle of the night. So you’re double timing down out of the barber shop and all you got on is your shorts and your socks and you make this 90 degree right hand turn. Well this is a real slick deck and you’ve got your socks on and there is a drill instructor standing down there right there where you make the turn to help you make the turn if you can’t make it, you start slipping and sliding, you’re trying to make it and they grab you by the scrap of the neck and yelling at you. You could kind of say they aren’t allowed to be man handling people around. Well yes they do. The stories that you use to hear that your granddad told you that he might have heard and I didn’t have any Marines in my family but you hear stories. You know people make them up as they go along, but whatever it was it was true more and so and so we got down there. We got all of our stuff, and none
of it fit, it was going to fit later and you get your footlocker, your mattress, and you’re humping it over your shoulder and they’re marching you out the door and it’s dark out there. So everybody’s real close to each other and then, you go all over the place and you end up in a quonset and then they have you, you don’t make the bunk jump on the mattress, and lights out and everybody is there just shivering and you hear guys start to weep just a little bit. They want to go home, what the hell, and it’s maybe one in the morning and you don’t know what time it is because they took your wristwatch, I mean everything is mailed home. All your stuff, before you can get there, you’ve already boxed your stuff up and mailed it home because they’re going to send it there and then the lights come on and the drill instructors come in there and you haven’t gone to sleep yet, and then they say, “You ladies have gotten into the wrong, these are the wrong quonsets like it was our fault. They get everybody up and grab all of your stuff and out again and you play this game a couple three times and finally when they do a lights out everybody’s laying there awake and everybody’s afraid to go to sleep because they think the lights are going to come on again, eventually they do at 5 o’clock then here come your regular drill instructors, there going to be rolling in there, the lights come on, overturning racks, people dropping on the floor and say, “God, what the hell is this?”

RV: How did you deal with that personally?

MB: I was scared, I’m not too proud to admit it because I’ve heard horror stories, and I say well I am me, this is Mike Bradbury they aren’t missing with me, they aren’t shoving me around. They’re in for a rude awakening when I get there. Well I was the one with a rude awaking and I started out doing dumb things and when we finally got our, in the quonset where we’re supposed to be, I jumped into the upper bunk, well the upper bunk isn’t the place to be because if you know what a quanset hut looks like, it’s a rounded, a big rounded Hooch and you’re up there close to the roof and so when they came in there and if you are not out of your bunk at time, and they start overturning racks. Well see first of all when the lights comes on and you’re scared and you jump up and you whack your head on the ceiling and then all of a sudden your bunk is being overturned and if you’re on the upper bunk, that’s the longer way to the floor and you know and you don’t know what to do and that is the first couple of days of what they call a shock treatment. That’s the initial, “You little assholes belong to us and this is how it’s
going to be.” We’re your mommy and daddy now and you will conform and you will do this or we will kill you, I mean that’s what you’re thinking you know, holy moley. You read about Vietnam, you know I said, “I ain’t going to make it to Vietnam, I’m going to die right here in San Diego, God Almighty, these guys can’t be serious (laughter). RV: How long did your training last?

MB: 12 weeks.

RV: Ok, tell me about what your typical day was like during this 12 weeks.

MB: A typical day, you get up at 5 in the morning and you get about 15 minutes to run down to the head, to shower; shave, we used to say, “shit, shower, shave, wash your toes, pick your nose”, and you come back into formation. Then they’ll come out and they’ll look you over and then you get to go to chow you know that’s kind of the highlight of the morning but except when you get down there to chow you march down, of course, in formation. When you’re going through you side step through the channel line and they just plop crap on your plate. You can’t even recognize half enough and so then, you sit up at these long, look like picnic tables and they’re long wooden benches and they’re metal, metal trays like what they have with the prisoners you know in the prisons and you’ll stand up at attention until they tell you to sit down and then we just sit down. You [have] only X amount of time to eat and the time you get to eat at any meal is dependent upon how fast you were to get ready to go over there because your training day starts at a certain time and if you are not fast enough getting over there. If you had 15 minutes now maybe you got 12 or less and so when they tell you eat, and well you start in, and you got the DI’s right over your shoulder, man, saying, [yelling], “Hurry up, Hurry up, shovel that shit down, we ain’t got all morning.” And everybody is up together whether you’re finished or not, you run your tray through the hot bath and back out in the formation and then we start the training day.

RV: What was that like?

MB: Typical training day you would, well they would give you something different everyday but it always starts out with calisthenics. Then you have close order drill, and here is where you learn mass punishment, somebody gets out of step and everybody stops, everybody has to pay for it, put your rifles down, and what I remember the worst was the knuckle push ups on the grinder. Now the grinder is a great, huge,
asphalt parade deck and you would be doing knuckle push-ups and the DI of course, he
would conveniently lose count and so you would have to start again and sometimes,
depending on the infraction, and of course whoever did the infraction, we get to know
about it. And they say, “Well, we’re all going to pay for Private Kelly being out of step
here” or whatever we’re doing. Sometimes they put you on your back and you lift your
legs, your feet, you know, about six inches off the ground and hold it and I don’t know if
you’ve ever done that but I tell you what, that can be a while and then sometimes they’ll
have you put your rifles out at arms length and just hold them out there. Now the M-14,
which the rifle we trained with, and the rifle I wish we would have still had in Vietnam, it
is just right at ten pounds, about 9.8, 9.9 loaded and it feels like 100 after you hold it out
there after a while. Or, depending on mood the DI is in, they might take you out to the
sand pits. Now the sand pits, you go out there and you do squats, bends, and thrusts out in
the sand pit. You kick sand and dirt around on everybody and it gets hot and you’re half
gagging and you run the obstacle course three times a week. Now the obstacle course is a
bear because you think the sucker is never going to get over with. You know, you got the
high towers and you got the ropes and you got everything and every Friday. This is where
a crucial time comes, because every Friday they have a PFE test, which is your physical
readiness [test] and which you have to do, you have to do so many push ups, so many sit
ups, so many pull ups, timed rope climb, and then at the end of that a three mile run with
all of your gear and that is full canteens, packs, rifles; everything, and you have to do so
many of each and you have to make the minimal of each. If you come up short on one
and exceed in the other you still don’t pass the test, you have to make the minimal of
each one and they raised the bar every week.

RV: How did you do?

MB: Well I made it, but if you didn’t make it then you got sent back a week so if
you were in your second week, you got sent to a first week platoon and if you get sent
back three times then they send you home and the biggest fear ever to have there, you
didn’t want to get sent back a week because then you end up doing 13 weeks of boot
camp or 14 and you know the 12 was going to be miserable enough. And anyway by
then, I don’t remember the number of pull ups and sit ups and everything else but I do
remember the three mile run. At the end of 12 weeks, you had to make it in 27 minutes.
Now 27 minutes don’t sound like much over three miles, but when you’re packing 70 or
80 pounds of gear and you’ve just done four other events, it’s a long way and you’re in
your boots and you better make it, I’m telling you what.

RV: Were you in shape before you went?

MB: Yes well I was out of high school and we played athletics but you find out
there too, that’s a great deception when you first get to boot camp and you see some of
these guys that were football players for example and you look and at the guy. Look at
that man, he’s got a good physique, he isn’t going to have any trouble at all making this.
Well you find out that that doesn’t mean a whole lot because the mental attitude is a
bunch of it. I have seen some of the jocks that if they didn’t make it, they get most way
through the obstacle course or something and just the will isn’t there and then on the
other hand you will see some guy that looks like he was an accountant but he’s got the
attitude of a terrier. He’ll just dig and dig and dig and that’s the kind of guy they want so
you think oh man this guy here, he is going to have an easier time then me because he
obviously played football, his biceps are there, that don’t mean squat. [In] The Marine
Corps, you’ve got to want to be a Marine, you’ve got to want it so bad that you’re willing
to stand anything. Just stand whatever they throw at you when you don’t think you can
see another foot, you better be willing to go another couple yards and that is where you
see a lot of separations and you will see guys that aren’t there after Friday’s test that you
thought would be there. You thought he would be the honor grad so in the Marine Corps
it’s an attitude and then you get halfway through your training and it just continues, they
tighten the screws and you reach a point where you know, “I’ve got so much invested
now, they have hammered so much, I am going to make it, I’ve got to make this, I ain’t
going to put up with all of this” and then get sent back so your attitude builds and really
they are molding you and you don’t even realize that your being molded into what they
want. But it’s a good feeling when you’re finally done and come graduation day, man
you can’t believe what that is, that was probably the proudest moment of my life. When
we’re all in formation, in uniform on Graduation Day and the Marine Corps hymn is
playing and we’re marching down and you know it’s oh my God, we made it. It’s a really
an accomplishment.

RV: Had you regretted your decision or were you happy at that point?
MB: Well I was happy then and especially because that after, well after we left there, we were going to go to Camp Pendleton for six more weeks of training, up and down the mountains and I used to think that is why they get you in shape and they kind of condition you for, not for Vietnam, [but] for Pendleton. Because you get there and it’s like one long hill and you’re just huffing and at the end of that you see. Once you get to Pendleton, once you leave San Diego, or Paris Island, you’re now officially a Marine and that’s glorious title and when you get home, you know you’re going home in uniform because everybody traveled in uniform by then and you weren’t going to be like everybody else on the block, I mean it was special. When you went through an airport and this is no ghost story, when you went through an airport in uniform and like I said every body traveled in uniform back then. There would be four or five sailors standing around, or Army guys you know and you would be walking down the corridor with your sea bag and they see you coming, they would part a path for you. The Marine Corps, [gets] a lot of respect, “Oh man, that’s a Marine, I’d better let him [by number]”, and you felt, you almost got to feel so vain about it, so you know, “I think I will make an excuse to go back the other way just so these guys will part again”, you know but to me it was a constant [thing] because I was, being the only Marine, I’m still to this day the only one of the family.

RV: Yes sir, now when did you graduate from San Diego? That was in ’66 as well right?

MB: Yeah.

RV: And then you went down to Pendleton.

MB: Yes, Pendleton is 31 miles north.

RV: Ok; tell me about Pendleton, what was that like?

MB: They took us up there on a cattle car, a cattle car is like a great big semi truck van except instead of a regular box trailer, it had windows and a side door and so that was our transportation. The Marine Corps spear no expense so we went up there and went to Camp San Onofre. Camp Pendleton is made up of several smaller camps and it’s a huge base, I don’t know if you have ever seen it but they’ve got artillery ranges, tanks, tracks, and stuff so we went up there and I was assigned to Yankee Company and that’s where I went through, we started doing our, you know, advanced infantry training.
RV: Can you describe that, what was that like?

MB: We would go out on maneuvers, they would teach us squad tactics and some of the stuff we had seen on film in the classrooms and stuff and we would go out on maneuvers and they would have bad guys out there to ambush us with blanks and stuff and everybody would hit the deck. Then you would return fire and everything and then you would have judges out there to judge how you did, you would be critiqued and say ok well you guys should have moved one squad over there and you guys, you know, and a lot of forced marches. We lived in quonset huts but we would be gone three or four days at a time out in the field so we would just camp and stuff out there and the long arduous hikes. To this day, I still go out to Pendleton, I still drive out there about once a year, once every other year and three years ago, I climb up Smokey which, Smokey is a Mountain there in San Onofre and they call it “Old Smokey” because it’s out there close to the ocean and sometimes early in the morning the fog from the ocean would come in and kind of swirl up at the top of the hill and they looked like there was smoke. Now we use to run that sucker in about 18 minutes in full formation, packs, and everything and you know if you go up there on your own today, you look way down to see the Quonsets of way below you, you say, “Man, there ain’t no way you could do this in 18 minutes.” You know but we did it, of course you were 18 and 19 then, your not 52 like I was three years ago when I went up Smokey with just my Nike’s and my shorts and it took me almost an hour to get to the top and I was about dying when I got, and I am planning on doing that one more time. Maybe next month or sometime in early November and when it ain’t too awful hot I’m going to try it again at 55. There are guys that have had heart attacks and died going up that thing but it becomes kind of a personal thing and I like to get back to Pendleton every now and then and see what all has changed but Camp Pendleton, I was there three different times. I was there for ITR, which is Infantry Training Regiment, I was there before I went to Vietnam because you pre staged and do amphib landings out there and I never have understood that because we never made an amphib landing the whole time I was in ‘Nam and then when I came back from ‘Nam, I was in Pendleton again before I got out and we did amphib landings some more and I said, “You know you do the amphib landings, that’s what you see on TV you know at Iwa Jima and Guadalcanal, here come Marines off the craft, they’re storming the beach.
We never had an amphib landing the whole time I was over there and we’re practicing some more after I get back. So I never have understood that.

RV: What kind of weapons training had you received after this point?

MB: Well mainly M-14, I carried an M-14 rifle, well we all had M-14’s at Boot Camp, we qualified with them at the range and then when we got to Pendleton we were issued M-1’s which were even older and of course we weren’t going to carry them in combat and so we carried the M-1’s for a whole bunch of our training there. Now before I went to ‘Nam, when I was at Pendleton, we had a weapons familiarization course with all kinds of things, we’d shot with the BAR and the M-60 and then we got our first look at the M-16.

RV: At Pendleton?

MB: Yeah.

RV: What did you think?

MB: And I wasn’t real impressed with that, we had already been hearing some things about this, about this thing, that it wasn’t performing well, that it, and the cartridge was too small for one. You know it’s a man, you’re taking a big 30 caliber away from us and giving us this little brush thing you know so nobody felt too good about that but the M-14 was such a good rifle, it didn’t need to be replaced. There was a lot of politics, McNamara and them guys were in on this stuff, I found out later but the M-14 was a fabulous rifle. It was heavier, but you don’t mind packing the extra weight as long as the gun is going to work for you and get out there and do the job. Then before I went over I personally had some special weapons because they put me in, they gave me a weapons, what they call a Special Weapons MOS and the way the Marine Corps does it, they have a very intricate selection. They just line everybody up in four files, eliminate the first three squads and then there is a whole bunch of us in one single file row and then the first sergeant goes down there, he’s got another guy with him, carrying a clip board and every third guy is this and every second guy is this and every first guy is this it was like you, you, you, and that’s their selective system. So when I was lined up there with a bunch of them they started down the line and said, “Ok, machine guns, mortars, rockets, machine guns, mortars, rockets, and I think I was the ninth or the twelfth guy or something so I was assigned to rockets which is 3.5 Bazooka and LAAR Rocket. So that
was going to be my job when I went to Vietnam so I had special training for that, that
picks up at the rocket range, we learned how to use the big tube, and the little tube and
they said, “Okay, this is going to be what you are going to when you get to Vietnam and
it turned out that MOS stayed with me. When I came back form ‘Nam I was still a
Bazooka man and then that’s what I did when I came back.

RV: Tell me about the training and how would you rate your instructions and the
DI’s?

MB: Oh, excellent, excellent. I tell you what, as frightening as it was down there
and as hard as it was, I am glad it was as hard as it was now because when you get into a
fire fight you just instinctively know what to do because it is drilled into you so hard and
the things, you’re taught as far as how to camouflage and attitude under fire. Trigger
control so your not voice commanding or something and just a dozen, dozens of things. I
am glad Marine training is as hard as it is because there are a lot of us that wouldn’t have
made it back.

RV: So it did benefit you directly in Vietnam?

MB: Oh absolutely, well in fact, and it benefits me today because I don’t think if
there is something I got a mind to do I don’t think there is nothing that is going to stop
me. To this day, you think you’re indestructible because of the attitude like my own, I’ve
been diagnosed with this cancer then they’ve nailed it down to a year and I ain’t just
going to roll over and give up. I am going to keep digging. You could [can always] tell
the Marines, all you go to do is drive around your neighborhood or anybody’s
neighborhood and you look at the back of pick-up trucks and cars, you’ll see Marine
stickers, people who have been in the Corps. You won’t see Army stickers, you won’t see
Navy stickers, you won’t see Air Force emblems but you’ll see Marine stuff on the back
of pick-up trucks and cars, man that’s a pride that is just there, just there.

RV: Yes sir.

MB: And every Marine knows the birthday, November 10th, and you get a bunch
of us together in just about any town that we seem to seek each other out. We recognize
each other in stores by tattoos and to say, “Hey we’re going to celebrate the birthday.”
You might be in there with a bunch of guys that are 50, 60, years old but they are all still
Marines, you know.
RV: Yes sir.

MB: There’s a pride, an accomplishment to have made it. When you look back at it, you say, “Well you know this is nothing I can apply to life, I’m not a millionaire because I was in the Corps but when you make it through that obstacle you go the rest of your life knowing that you got nothing to prove. You know for however foolish that might seem to other people. If you hadn’t of been in the Corps, it’s hard to relate that rich to know to people that hadn’t been in. They say, “Oh what’s the big deal, everybody’s you know there guys ran around without decal and all the branches are basically alike.” Well no they aren’t, I guarantee they aren’t. (laughter) The training is definitely [different].

RV: Let me ask you about Vietnam specific training, did any of your instructions; your drill instructors and then subsequent obstruction involve talking about discussing their experiences in Vietnam and what you might expect?

MB: Yeah, a little bit. Our first reaction time when we’d they would have us jump down on the ground and say, “When you got incoming, you ain’t got no time to think about it, you just need to jump down and do your job and you’ll be ok”.

RV: Had any of your Drill Instructors been in Vietnam?

MB: Yeah, every one of them.

RV: Did they talk to you about their experiences?

MB: Not too much, they weren’t very personal. Boot camp is very impersonal. Where we got talked a lot about Vietnam was at Camp Pendleton, once we got to ITR.

RV: What did they tell you?

MB: They told us about booby traps, about things to look for, if you’re looking at villages and even kids, just how they react. They told us when you’re going through a village, and it’s deserted or something and you see something that might look [make] a good souvenir, don’t pick it up because it is booby trapped. They would tell us all the different kinds of ways, to go through whatever situation that you needed. They prepared us, you know, about different sounds to look for and at night they said when you’re out there looking at night there is a lot of psychological things. They said when you’re after a night ambush, or just on a perimeter, don’t fix your eyes on anything particular because you’re looking at a bush, [and you] start looking at this one particular bush, pretty soon
that bush turns into a man, it starts looking like a man to you. So you start cranking off
fire and then they know where you are. A lot of, they talked to us a lot about there, about
the things to avoid, things to look for, and just things to be weary of.

RV: You were pretty definite about you were going to Vietnam, there was no
question?

MB: Oh there was no doubt about it because once you got the Pendleton for your
jungle training, the orders were already there and they don’t send you to weapons, special
weapons training, if your one of the ones selected, like I was for rockets, unless your
going. Because there is no place in the Peacetime Marine Corps, there is no need for
machine guns or you know for stateside duty, not really.

RB: How did you feel about getting orders and going into a war?

MB: I wanted to go.

RV: Did you?

MB: Yeah, I wanted to go. You got to remember when I joined the Marine Corps
because like I said I had something to prove and I said I wanted to go over there and there
was certain time that you wanted to go over there and kill a Commie for Mommy and you
thought this was for Mom’s apple pie. You don’t realize America wasn’t being attacked
or you know these are the bad guys, and maybe your uncles were over seas and you know
and now you’re going to go over there, your going to kick some butt like old John Wayne
and you know you get a whole different perception. You say, “We’re going to go over
there, we’re going to do this, and we’re going to slam these guys, and I am going to get as
good as I can with this Bazooka because I am going to kill as many of them as I can and I
am going to come home with a chest full of medals and there are going to be big parades
when I come back and it’s going to be great.” Well guess what, (laughter) but you’re
under your own misconception there a little bit but no I was anxious to go, I was anxious
to go, man, I wanted to go over there.

RV: How did your family feel?

MB: Hmm?

RV: How did your family feel about you going over to Vietnam?

MB: They were scared because we were losing, United States was losing a lot of
guys and a lot of America was starting to say, “What is this all about, why are we even
over there?” I am thinking, well we are over there, you know, because they’re the bad
guys. Now see, at 18 or 19 you don’t reason like you and I do today. You don’t. You’re
just fresh out of the box, boy your just ready to, just to go do it and in your mind you
ain’t going to get killed. Everybody, some of the other guys are because they, most of
them are Army, and the Army lost a lot of people so but they don’t have our training,
they don’t have our discipline. We say, “We’re going to go over there, and we’re going to
bang some butt” and oh you got different perceptions first time you come under fire but
that passes. They weed out, boot camp weeds out the guys who aren’t going to play, guys
who are going to crack. If you’re going to crack under pressure they’re going to find it
there and we had guys in boot camp that, I remember one of them, just cowering, just
cowering in the latrine [under a sink]. He just crying and you know he was finished. They
will have you do all kinds of things, they will be all, they will run you through stuff
where you don’t think you can do anymore push-ups or punishment stuff and then they’ll
have you stick your head in the toilet and flush it and if you say “What?” they’ll grab you
and stick your head in the toilet and flush it and you would just bewildered, where is all
this you know. Their going to do, if they can break you physically, break you mentally,
break you emotionally, that is when they want to do it because if they don’t break you
here, and you get over there and crack, you might get a whole platoon killed. So
everybody has to be on the same sheet of paper and you’ll hear differences, you will hear,
you talk to different guys who went to Paris Island, well “Paris Island is a different kind
of training”, but it isn’t. It all has to be the same because when you go to Vietnam you’re
going to be in with the guys from PI and the training has to be identical and you can’t
allow somebody to crack under fire because if that happens, you could get a whole bunch
of guys lives killed. That is why Boot Camp in the Marine Corps, anyway, is as hard as it
is because you know you’re going to break down well you’re going to break down here
Diego or PI. You’re not breaking down north of Da Nang when you got a whole patrol
out there. If you can’t cut it, we’re going to find out here and that’s why a lot of guys
don’t make it and they’re sent home. So when you asked me a little while ago about the
training, did I think it was benefit, it sure as heck was. I guarantee it was because your in
there with guys, you didn’t even know this guy maybe you just met him but you know
you can depend on him.
RV: Yes sir.

MB: You ain’t got to know him personally because he has been through the same crap you’ve been through, he’s been hammered like you have and he stood up under it, he’ll be there when lead starts flying, he will be there.

RV: How much did you understand about why the United States was in South East Asia to begin with but when you were on the eve of shipping out?

MB: I didn’t. All I understood is that they were Commies. We’ve got to rid the world of Communism and these are, and if we let the north take over down there then it will spread like Communism wherever it grows and when they mention Communism the first thing you think about is the Russians. You think well yeah we don’t want them so we’re going to go over there but you don’t really realize what’s it about until years later, and that’s all the carnage is over and well we will get into that later.

RV: Right. Tell me about your trip over, how did you get over there?

MB: We flew. We went to 29 Palms, which is out in California, we staged over there, we boarded a C-130 and we went to LA and then they had to charter a flight out of LA and they flew us to Okinawa.

RV: And this was in September ’67?

MB: Yes.

RV: Ok.

MB: Went first to Okinawa, we landed there, we had two day in processing, that is where we got some vaccinations including the infamous GG Goblin shot, you probably heard of that one.

RV: Yes sir.

MB: Oh man, you can’t believe, oh! Hurt your hip and it just, what is it supposed to do, and I don’t know if it did or not, maybe it did I guess, they said the purpose of that was to thicken your blood so that if you got hit, you didn’t bleed so much and you might not bleed to death before a Corpsman could get to you. Now that’s what we were told but the GG shot, oh it looked like a milky white thing on a big tube and the needle looked like it was long as a broomstick, I’m sure it wasn’t. We were all still limping and sore when we got into Da Nang, they flew us into Da Nang because of part of 3rd Marine Division and they were based out of Da Nang so we flew into there.
RV: What were your first impressions of Vietnam?

MB: Well I saw it from the air, looked like a big green jungle, you know it looked like something out of one of the Marine movies that you see on TV, like a squad will come out with some places, the same, basically the same kind of foliage and anyway we landed down there and then it turned to a scene. Kind of turned into a scene of what you see MASH, just old fixified [military] trucks coming by you, dirt muddy roads, and so they took us out to 3rd Division headquarters which is just a great big huge compound with some tents so we got issued all of our gear, all we took over with us just a sea bag with clothes. We didn’t take any weapons over there with us because we would be getting issued our weapons over there. So I got over there and they issued me a M-16 and I was going to be part of a Bazooka team. I wasn’t going to be Gunner yet, I was going to be just Asst. Gunner so they issued me an M-16 and then they divided us all up, you know some of you guys, you guys are replacements. X amount of you guys are going here, X amount of you guys are going there. I was assigned to K Company, 3/26 at Camp Evans and they loaded us up in a two and a half ton truck and they trucked us on up there and it seems like it was raining, it was damp and…

RV: Did the heat bother you at all?

MB: No, it wasn’t hot, it was kind of humid but it was cold, it was clammy, they were just kind of near the mist of there. The tail end of the arms monsoon so the road was still so muddy, we’re all going up on 6/11 and we’re all rookies in there too. There were no seasoned guys in the back of this truck so we’re looking out, we’re looking over the sides, both sides of the truck with the weapons loaded and stuff. None of us had seen combat and if we’d had been jumped that would have been our initiation but we weren’t and now…

RB: How did you feel going up there in that truck, were you scared, were you eager?

MB: Well I wasn’t really, I was kind of apprehensive, you’re just nervous, it’s like being back in San Francisco on your block when you’re going into strange turf. Our neighborhood was divided up into the Black Bart’s, The Medallions, and Persian Warriors, that’s where O.J. belonged to, Persian Warriors and it’s like when you get over past a certain block, you just start watching over your shoulder. Yeah you get nervous
because you never been under, you’ve only been under a live fire once and that was
Pendleton when you, you know, when you crawl under barbed wire with the Machine
Guns going but that’s a controlled deal. They’re not trying to kill you, so you’re a little
apprehensive and until the first fire fight, your always nervous. I mean if you’re honest
with yourself, you’re nervous.

RV: How would gauge the morale of everybody that you came in contact with
those first few days?

MB: Good, good. Except for a couple, oh some of the old timers, those guys that
were getting ready to go back, they would just tell you to keep your head down, and they
tell you opposite I joined K Company just came back from Con Tien and Con Tien was
one of the more major [fights]. It wasn’t as big as Khe Sanh but they lost a lot of guys
and some of the old guys would tell you, say a few things you know, all about mainly just
watch yourself, cover your butt, watch out for the Corpsman, that was a universal thing.
You take, if two guys, they teach you about this all through your training, there are two
guys that you always look out for over there, your Corpsman and your Radio Men.

RV: What do you mean look out for?

MB: Well I mean you cover his butt, you want to make sure nothing happens to
your Corpsman, you know if somebody gets wounded and that Corpsman is down there
helping him, patching him up, you cover his back. One of you guys, whoever is closest to
him, you don’t let your Corpsman get hit because if he gets hit and then you get hit later,
you’re in trouble. Who’s going to patch you up, some Machine Gunner so look after you
Corpsman, and look out for your Radio Man, let the guy call it in for Artillery support
and you know so…

RV: What was Camp Evans like?

MB: Camp Evans was a real small camp, it had a 105 Howitzer Battery, there
were several of them and they would be shooting out on targets every now and then, hard
to sleep at night when you were there, everybody took their shift in the trenches. We had
a perimeter run all the way around of course and you would pull watch for seven, eight
hours at a wake [stretch] sometimes at midnight, sometimes in the daytime and
occasionally you would have a scout patrol out and they would suspect something and
they would call it back in and the 105 batteries from within our camp would open up on
them and then we would send a few patrols out, sometimes during the day so I got to go
out on a few of those.

RV: That was the first time you had actually been out on a patrol?

MB: Yeah.

RV: What was that like? Can you describe your first one?

MB: Well I was near the back and I had my rifle and I had a LAAW rocket, John Snowder was our team gunner, with the big tube, the big Bazooka, and as an assistant
gunner you would carry one of the smaller LAAW rockets, sometimes two of them and
then plus a round or two for the big tube, you know if you had to feed your gunner and
then you carried your rifle. Now on a patrol you normally didn’t carry the big tube
because you’re going to be moving, you’re not looking at hardened targets in places and
stuff so I just got. I was one of the newer guys, so I got picked to go out on one of the
patrols so I took a couple of law rockets and I had my M-16 and I, we had already shot
the things just for familiarization, and I was apprehensive about this thing anyway
because to me after being in Pendleton and San Diego with the big rifles, this didn’t seem
like enough gun, I felt like I was almost naked with this thing. I said, “Well I hope this
thing works as well as everybody is trying to tell us that they are, they are our new space
age guns, this is going to be the greatest thing since sliced bread. But now we’re walking
down through the trails and you just look past the elephant grass and you’re looking a lot
because you’re expecting to see something come jumping up out of nowhere. First couple
of patrols, they were pretty much uneventful so just a long hike and you go down through
some of the swamps and some of the streams, I picked up my first leeches there, you go
through a stream and you will pick up leaches (laughter). And they tell you what you
could eat off land and which you couldn’t, star apples, you could have star apples.
They’re strange looking things but they ain’t too bad and you’ll use your iodine tablets in
your water and stuff, but we were just walking, walking along just down each trail, seeing
some of the country side and I thought for the first couple of weeks, “if this is like this the
whole 13 months, this isn’t going to be bad”, but we didn’t. I didn’t see any action,
actually action, until we saddled up. I was there about three, four weeks I guess and then
we saddled up and we went to Cobi Tanh Valley.
RV: Let me ask you a question real quick before we go there, tell me about being a replacement. How did they treat you?

MB: Well they treated you kind of hurriedly, you got over there and they said, “Oh good, glad to see you”, they ain’t glad to see you, they’re just glad to see you so they can leave. You’re just trying to figure out who and what and what’s what and the old timers are kind of split up a little bit. They want to take the time to tell you about things and how things are but they also don’t want to fart around because they want to get down to the runway as soon as they can and fly out. They’ll pass along things and some of them didn’t want to talk at all, you know. This a bunch of crap and you heard a few rumblings about we’re the only ones over here, we’re over here helping the South Vietnamese Army and they ain’t doing jack, man they’re going the other way and we’re, you know. So you hear a little bit about that being that about being a growl, the guy just got an attitude because he has been here all this time. A lot of things you’re going to find out on your own after you are there. I was bitter when I left, I was hot before we got off the hill after the first aid kit and I think I told you about those.

RV: Yes sir, but yeah we will get to that.

MB: Man, holy crap, boy I tell you what, I’ve never been so hot in my life but anyway…

RV: Let me ask you about your quarters. Can you describe how you lived at Camp Evans and what it was like?

MB: Yes, we lived in tents and I was just lying on a cot and then during our [watch], whenever we were out on the perimeter we all had our own bunker so we stayed in the bunker you know all sand bag bunker. We were always filling sand bags, we were forever filling sand bags, building bunkers wherever we go and for the most time in Evans we spent in the camp. When we were out on individual operations and stuff where we would just sleep on the ground, usually under bushes and stuff with our ponchos.

RV: Did you always have enough supplies or was it difficult for some items?

MB: Supplies didn’t become a problem because we got to Khe Sanh because we had, because they had, Camp Evans wasn’t all that far from Da Nang and they trucked stuff in there fairly regularly. We always had plenty of C rations, and ammo; stuff like that.
RV: Mr. Bradbury, why don’t we take a break just for a moment?

MB: Ok.

RV: Ok sir, continuing now, let me ask you about when you would go out in a field, out at Camp Evans, what was your uniform like? What would you take with you?

MB: Well we would have our jungle fatigues on, which had side pouches on the hips for carrying you know whatever you wanted to carry with you. You had your flak jacket, you would have your helmet, and of course your mosquito repellent. You would have your cartridge belt and in your cartridge belt you would have your first aid kit, your bayonet, and I would usually pack three or four grenades, the old M-26 grenades. You would have your pack, and you wouldn’t have everything in it because you’re only going to go on a daytime patrol so in your pack have extra ammunition, and you would have some C rations because somewhere along there you’re going to stop and have chow. Then you would have, in my case at the time, an M-16 and I had three or four magazines loaded and of course your water, canteens of water.

RV: Yes sir. How did that M-16 function for you?

MB: (laughter)

RV: That’s a loaded question isn’t it?

MB: Oh man, I tell you what, you’ll write a chapter on this, in fact if I live long enough to finish my book, I’m writing a book. The M-16 if it was surgically cleaned it would shoot okay to a degree but you got a little bit of dirt and grim in it and it would stop on you. Nobody really knew why back then, they blamed a lot of things though. One of the first things McNamara and all them boys tried to do was pin it on like a cleaning so you guys can keep them clean enough. Well you know you can’t stop every 15 minutes during a firefight, tear your weapon down and clean it.

RV: Yes sir.

MB: The reason the M-16 doesn’t work and doesn’t even to this day is recently as Iraq, this last thing; they still have field reports about 16’s jamming. The M-16 is built for too close tolerances for one thing. Like Mikhail Kalashnikov said when he was interviewed about his AK-47, and it is true, just like John Garand did for the M-1 and then the M-14. A combat weapon has to be built loosely, you got to have some tolerances in there. You got to have room for the parts to move around a little bit. You should be
able to pick a combat rifle and shake the thing and hear things rattle around in there a little bit, and this is because of the environment that a weapon has to operate in. You get sand, dirt, and grit, and sludge, and when you look at it like an AK-47, for example, you pull the cover off of it, look down in there, you could almost throw gravel down in there and the thing would shoot. The 16, like the old German Luger; the German Luger was replaced by the Nazi’s by the P-38 pistol because it too was state of the art. Luger is a beautiful pistol but it’s also very finely machined and it doesn’t take a lot of dirt to get in there. So no matter how clean you keep a M-16, you still got that too tight of a tolerance problem. They blamed the ammunition, they blamed everything but the fact that the gun should never have been introduced because that would make them look like they spent a lot of tax payers money, wasted a bunch of money on a piece of crap weapon which still is, and it baffles me today that they still use it. They didn’t chrome plate the chambers, [like] Kalashnikov [did] back in 47, and Winchester did it back in the 1800’s. I mean you have to have a chrome plated chamber because of the powder fouling that you have from burnt powder and when the reports got back there about the chambers, McNamara and them guys said, “Well if Eugene Stoner,” and Stoner is the guy who designed them M-16, he said, “If Stoner thought that chambers needed to be chrome plated he would of done it.” Well no he didn’t, Eugene Stoner was not a gun designer. Colt, for all the years he had been building pistols and stuff had no experience in building a rifle so that was there first attempt at building a rifle and it just didn’t work reliably. If it got the least amount of dirt, it would stop and the bad thing about an M-16, the horrible thing about an M-16 is when one of them quits you, it’s not a matter about kicking the bolt back open, [with] an M-1 or an M-14, you know, or most other weapons you can put the butt of a gun on the ground there and hold the gun upright, take the side of your heel and kick the bolt open from the bolt handle, well an M-16 that’s all internal. If a 16 stops on you, you’ve got to take that gun apart. You’re not kicking no bolt open at all and when the lead is flying, time is critical, you ain’t got half an hour to stop and fix this thing. We’ve had guys get killed, and the Army lost a lot of guys too because the things quit.

RV: Did you see it jam during firefights and cost men their lives?

MB: Yeah. I’ve seen it jam, I had my, the one I had jammed on me at Khe Sanh, almost got me killed and I will tell you about that one when we get up to Khe Sanh and
what I saw. I didn’t actually see the gun stop and the guys getting killed while he was
trying to do [clear] it but I saw M-16’s half torn down with dead Marines laying beside
them when the smoke cleared at Khe Sanh. So it was clear had quit sometime during
night because he, they would have the pivot pin out and the bolt half out through the back
so it obviously had quit and the guy is in the middle of a darkness where you can’t see
anything, trying to clear the malfunction. I mean it was obvious what had happened.

RV: Did you have a favorite weapon?

MB: Oh I sure did, the M-14, the one we had in boot camp, and they were a
standard service rifle. The M-14 first came about in 1957 and it replaced the M-1,
everybody thought the M-1 was probably the best weapon there ever was but the M-1
really had two drawbacks, if you call them that. They put out a big, they put out a lot of
muzzle flash from the 30-OTT 6 bullet at night and it was only an eight round shot from
an eight round clip.

RV: But you didn’t have that in Vietnam did it?

MB: No.

RV: How about in Vietnam, what was your favorite weapon to have?

MB: It was the M-14 and I finally got my hands on one after Khe Sanh but I was
fine with 14 and up from back there. The M-14 like the AK-47 would shoot forever, no
matter how dirty you got it, it was built to much looser tolerances and it shot a 30 caliber
bullet. That 22 caliber bullet doesn’t do what everybody says, you will hear this thing, if
you haven’t read it, you will about the government trying to pass out about the M-16.
That it, the 223 bullet it tumbles and it does all this horrendous damage, no it doesn’t, I
have personally drilled gooks at 30 yards, three or four rounds to the chest taking fourth
round to drop him, that is not a confidence builder.

RV: Right.

MB: At all and that’s when the gun is working. It also, the 16 has no range, you’re
good for maybe 500 yards, I’m not sure you could kill at 500 yards with that little bullet.
The 14 you could, that 30 caliber bullet it will carry up to 800, 900, to 1000 yards [and
more], in fact snipers used them over there along with the bolt action rifles. Some of the
proponents of the 16 say, “Well why do you need a gun that will shoot 500 yards, 600
yards if you don’t see the enemy [at that distance]?” Well just having the capabilities
there and the selling point of this little piece of crap was that you know when the gun
only weighs so much and ammunition is small, you can carry twice as much ammo for it,
and that’s true but it means nothing if the gun doesn’t work, you’re just carrying
ammunition around and consequently nurse-maiding this thing to keep it going. We
captured some AK-47’s and some of the guys wanted to use them instead of the 16’s and
the only reason they were allowed to bring home a souvenir was they bring them back but
they weren’t allowed to take them on patrol and everybody wanted to take AK’s on a
patrol because they worked. They worked well but they also made a very distinctive
sound, a very distinctive muzzle blast and if you cranked one off, some of your buddies
might mistake you for one of the bad guys. That’s the only reason they weren’t allowed
but we captured AK’s that were rusted just because gooks didn’t take care of them, they
carried them in tunnels and left them in caves an didn’t clean them but the gun was
always reliable.

RV: What would you say was the most feared weapon?
MB: The most feared?
RV: Yes sir, or was there one?
MB: You mean for the other guy?
RV: Yes sir.
MB: The mortars because they were so good with them, they didn’t even have
high tech sights on them; they’d had a little traverse shroud and the two peg poles, two
steel pegs in the ground with a little aiming stake hanging from a stick and they’d just run
it back and forth, “Yeah, that looks good” and you know drop one in. The gooks they
could land a 61 in the millimeter mortar in your back pocket, they were that good. They
had higher explosive weapons, the RPG’s were feared, although, but they weren’t all that
accurate, if an RPG hit you, now that’s what we call the gook bazooka, that was very
destructive but the aiming sights were crude on them and they weren’t all that good with
them. The 122 Rocket, we didn’t fear too much of those because they saved those for the
main bases, not the smaller bases. But the mortars they were, well they weren’t the most
powerful weapon they had, they were deadly accurate with those things, they could drop
them things like right into your back pack almost.
RV: Can you make some general comments on the NVA and the Vietcong? What were your general impressions of the two?

MB: Well the NVA is the only ones I really know about, I don’t think I ever seen a VC. All I know about the VC, what I’ve heard about them, they’re farmers, a lot of them are farmers by the day time, you would walk by there and they’re waving at you by the field. I probably seen some Vietcongs, didn’t know about it but then [they laid] out on land, bobby traps for you, the NVA would pretty much fight you on your own ground. They would swap shots with you and those were the guys, you could tell they had a certain amount of artillery and they would come charging up to the Concertina wire and I had a certain amount of respect for them because they would kill us in formation and “Hey, alright guys, let’s get it on”, where the Vietcong you hardly wouldn’t see them which, you know the Vietcong is their handwork, you would run into their booby traps and stuff laced with poison, the punji pits and stuff like that. The NVA well they were gutsier and I tell you what I think, I got in the way of proving this with somebody you may not see from the media. I think there were a lot of Red Chinese in with the NVA. The reason I say that is because having been all over a lot of Vietnam, you look at the average Vietnamese and we killed North Vietnamese that were almost six feet tall and most Vietnamese don’t get that tall. Now you expect to see Russian made weapons and stuff but I think we had some Red Chinese in there too, now that is just Mike Bradbury’s opinion that is not “take that to the bank” but I seen some pretty tall guys over there.

RV: What would you say were the strengths of the NVA?

MB: Their persistence. We hammered them with B-52’s, we hammered them and they wouldn’t give up. You know they might retreat and they might regroup somewhere but they were not giving it up no matter what we hit them with. Their determination, you know, we had them outgunned. We had an arsenal we never used, and that might of turned [ended] the Vietnam War right there but the fact is, we didn’t and they lived out there in the field, they lived off the land. I don’t think their food supply was as good as ours but they’re used to living in their back yard and you know when you’re fighting on your home turf, your attitude it seems like you want to hold onto it more then the guy that is trying to move you out of there. So I would say the NVA, the strength of the enemy
was just determination to hang on no matter what we did to them. Although, like I said, we didn’t do what we could have done by any stretch of the imagination.

RV: What about weaknesses of the NVA?

MB: You know I don’t really know. Intelligence maybe, I think they maybe got into some places where they didn’t realize where we were and they also had some turncoats, they feared their guys like mad. We had a Chu Hoi down there, he was like a Kit Carson scout and he was a defector and he scouted for us and he is just a little peasant soldier and they had him carry two rockets all the way down the Ho Chi Minh trail. Way down, almost into the delta and he hand packed them and he evaded air raids that he happened to get caught in, fire hard ball or some kind of stuff and he got down there and got the two rockets inside of a day they fired both of them at one of our installations then told them to go back up north and get two more and he went crazy. Took his pistol out, shot the guy that ordered him to do it and then came over and defected for our side so they had some defectors and yeah I would have to say that would have to count for a weakness. I don’t know of any of our guys who might have defected over there.

RV: What were their common tactics?

MB: Their common tactics were to wait for nightfall before they would, well if they could catch you out in the open and then drop a few mortars in there but they liked to infiltrate at night to see how close they could get. Occasionally they would even slip by a trip flare but if they would hit one of course then they would lite off. At Khe Sanh up on 8/61 the night of the siege, they hit us on one side of the hill but we only had a few guys over there. The main force was on the other side and the idea was to hit us with a few guys on one side but try to draw as many over to that side as they could and the main force would come up on the other side. Of course now we didn’t do that, everybody stayed put but that was a tactic and they had a lot of psychological stuff too. They had these whistlereds. I will never forget this Rich, they had these little whistlereds and they would get, they had these “toop toop” at night and you would hear way out there somewhere and then you hear another guy do the same thing 90 degrees on the other side of where, and they would do that occasionally during the night sometimes, early in the morning and they just move around and blow these whistles and just keep on your nerves. Where are these guys, you got somebody sneaking up here then and they would do a
different number whistle each time to make you think they’re whistling in code, maybe
they were. I mean who knows but you would only hear them at night and it was clearly
human but you couldn’t see them and they would move around, there would be two or
three guys out there, different places and they were just, you know, and they probably
weren’t going to do nothing anyway but just keep the Americans on edge. Make you lose
some sleep, make you wonder what is going on and that was kind of a psychological
thing. I remember that, some things stick in your mind forever, sometimes you can’t
remember what you did last week but 30 years ago, some things just stick and remember
them little shrill pitch pipe type whistles that they would have out there. You would hear
it over here then at 8 o’clock, the 8 o’clock position, then way over on the east end of the
hill you would hear it again but it would be some guy different. Some other guy respond
to him and he’s out there about a 1000 yards and distance was hard to figure at night plus
sound carries more at night and you would hear that and the little buzzards would be out
there doing that kind of stuff I’d say, “Boy if I get a hold of him I would deck him out”,
but you didn’t know where he was. So they had the lack of firepower, compared to us,
they made up for it in other ways plus they knew the land. You could walk right by them
and they would be in a hole camouflaged or something, you walk right by them and
wouldn’t know it until the element has gone past and there is a bunch of them jump up
out of the ground and start opening up on you and man you might have walked through a
nest of them, they were very good at camouflage, that was a strength.

RV: Tell me about the first patrol where you did have contact, you said that you
had been in Evans about three weeks?
MB: Yeah I was at Camp Evans about three weeks, in fact it really wasn’t patrol.
It was a Company size movement, we were going to hump into Cobi Tanh Valley so it
was the first time that we actually saddled up. I mean we ran some squad size daytime
patrols but now we geared up as a whole Company and we went out to this place called
Cobi Tanh Valley. We were coming into this marsh and all of a sudden all hell broke
loose and there were shots coming from everywhere and everybody dug in and we started
returning fire. That’s the spooky thing when you get ambushed because initially you
don’t know what is coming from until you start, until somebody gets hit or you see some
dirt fly up and it’s hard to see dirt fly up from bullets in the soggy landscape but after you
reorganize yourself, after your initial shock you can see where some of it is coming from and you return fire.

RV: How did you feel that first time?

MB: Well, first time I was scared but it’s just instinctively you know, it’s like everybody else I just jumped down and just immediately do like you were training at Pendleton. It’s just an instinctive deal because they put you through all kinds of different ambushes at Pendleton and they do it so much that the only difference is the scenery of course then the bullets are for real. You don’t really shake, if your going to shake it off, really until it’s over, by the time, ambushes happen so fast sometimes that you don’t have time to be scared until it’s over and you have time to think about and you see a couple guys laying dead then reality sets in because this isn’t judges out there putting tags like at Pendleton, this is the “Real McCoy”, guys going home in a body bag.

RV: Were you able to handle that?

MB: Yes.

RV: How?

MB: Oh I just realized I said, “Well it wasn’t me.” I was thinking that it wasn’t me and you know of course we start counting bodies and we got a lot more of them then we did here. It’s, yes you look at it you know and you realize that you’re going to see more dead people before this is over. That first time you know, you get a sick feeling in your stomach a little bit, you don’t feel like eating or nothing and you’re on edge the rest of the time of course because now you don’t know if you’re going to get hit again and accept the reality that you might get, they may reorganize. They might be more apt to hit you again, that quickly, that replaces any scared feelings you got because your looking at a couple of dead bodies that are pals of your. Then it sets in, in just a few moments this might not be over. You better get your head and ass wired together man because they may be coming again and so you just reset yourself and you get ready for if it comes again or if it don’t. You don’t forget about it, you never forget about it, but you realize that you’re here and I guess if you couldn’t handle it, you would have never made it out of San Diego; they would have found some way to bust that out of you I guess. That is why I credit my own survival to the tough training we had back there.

RV: Can you describe what kind of tactics that you all used out in the field?
MB: Oh yeah, we had a really neat one that they assigned at Pendleton. We’d set up like we would go out and set up for an ambush, they would take a certain amount of guys, ok first squad is going to go out, or third squad or whatever platoon. “You guys are going to go out on an ambush tonight.” Well we would sit out along a trail or path where maybe the gooks had been spotted at one time or another and we would sit out there and you would lay down on your belly and everybody would be quiet and you would be, oh a couple yards apart. And whoever was running it, there was always an abundance of real, kind of a light gauge string and so now picture this, if you will. You’ll have let’s say eight or ten guys out there laying side by side a few feet apart and they’re overlooking a trail, overlooking this area. Now the last guy, all the way to the end, will have this string and he will tie it to his ankle, it’s easy enough to break if you tugged it good and hard and if you had to run you could and that string runs past everybody else down to the guy on the other end. Now along comes this formation of Zips and they’re coming down the road. Now, whether they’re coming from the left or coming from the right, whichever end of our bunch sees them first, you give a little tug on the string, now that alerts the guy on the other end of overland that we got a column coming through. So you’ll start watching, now when the last guy goes through that he can see, then the same guy will tug again and that will let the guy know that that was as many of them as there is going to be, now the guy who is being signaled to by this string, it’s his determination to either open fire or not. Now if 20 guys have gone by him and he ain’t felt that second string [tug] yet then there is about 40 of them out there so you may not want to open up. However if you’re the guy laying out there and your buddy on the other end pulls that string, pretty soon he pulls it again and you’re just now seeing that first guy, then you know that the odds are in your favor now and you go ahead and open up on them and then you would be surprise that way [them], and whoever the guy is on either end, whoever gives the signal, the other guy determines if you open up depending on how many, as gun people call them by the time he gets the second string. That second string [pull] says the last man just closed [passed] me, how many have gone by you and if not, just a few have or a whole bunch have, he may not choose to open up but if he’s just now seeing that first guy walking along and he’s already felt that second tug which tells him the last guy went through, these guys are going to be dead meat, he’s going to open up on them.
RV: About how far off the trail are you?

MB: About 30 yards, 40 yards. You’ll pick a good ambush place, a place where you got plenty of cover and you’re just laying there in the trail, of course, and stealth is a big thing I mean you want to be as quiet as you can. The secret of any ambush is the element of surprise because the first couple of seconds it’s going to be mass chaos, nobody is going to know where it is coming from and you need to kill them all. If there is 40 or 50 guys that have gone through there and you open up that is going to give them sometime, some of them guys a chance to regroup, see your muzzle flashes and then return fire, you might get overwhelmed so that is why they use the string system.

RV: Is there a particular point when you get to a certain number and you would say ok we’re not going to fire now because there are too many, was it like one American to two or three Vietnamese or was it one to one?

MB: No you just use kind of a gut feeling, just a gut feeling. You know if the last man clears and you’re the guy that is going to open up or not and you feel that second tug and maybe four or five guys have gone by well you still got the element of surprise. They can outnumber you two to one and you could take them on but the thing is you’re out there in squad side, they might be coming through with a platoon. There might be 35 guys in there, well the odds are not good, you’re going to mow 15 or 16 of them, maybe 20 initially but then you know, then the tides are going turn. They still got enough to outnumber you and that is their, kind of there home turf so that’s a judgment call. Usually if you’re the guy being signaled to, if that first guy has walked by and you still can see him in sight when that second tug comes, that is usually a good sign. But if he is well out of sight and four or five of his buddies are well out of sight, you don’t know where they’re going to come back on you from, you know, because you’ve already lost track of them. There are enough of them going by where you’ve lost track of them so it’s a judgment call.

RV: What other things would you all do?

MB: Well we would set up our own booby traps there at night and trip flares and stuff like that. Another ploy we would use in a firefight is to save grenades especially if you’re out somewhere where being resupplied might be a problem. You get into a fire fight sometimes you can pick up a rock and you can throw it into some brush where you
think they are, that rock will land and in a split second a gook will think it is a grenade
and he will jump out. He will panic and run because you know the first thing you’re
going to think of when something like that falls if you think that’s a grenade you know
your going to get blown to bits and without thinking, quite often, they will jump up and
they will run. Because anything is better then being you know splattered all over the hills
and they will come running out and you can cut them down with your rifle without
having to extend a grenade which you might not always have ample excess to, so
sometimes we would do stuff like that.

RV: Sir why don’t we go ahead and take a break.
Richard Verrone: This is Dr. Richard Verrone; I’m continuing my oral history review with Mr. Michael Bradbury. Today is October 27, 2003 and it’s approximately 10:07 a.m. Central Standard Time. I’m in Lubbock, Texas again in the Special Collection’s Library Interview Room on the campus of Texas Tech University in Lubbock Texas and Mr. Bradbury is in Apache Junction, Arizona. Sir we left off when we last talked you were describing your operations in and around the Cobi Tanh Tanh Valley and coming out of Camp Evans. I want you to just pick up with what happened. After your first contact and I guess we’re in October 1967.

Michael Bradbury: Right. Well after our first encounter when we dropped into an ambush is what is was, we lost some guys, took several causalities. That is where I got my real first taste of combat and I can’t speak for everybody but I think, well again my general synopsis was with time, it was over. It happened too quickly to even get scared; people have asked me over the years “Were you scared the first time?” “Well sometimes it goes down so quickly, you don’t have time to even think about it till afterwards and then you think about it.” We went down.

RV: Let me ask you a question. Did you feel like after that first contact that you performed like you thought you would or was it something completely different for you?

MB: No, I felt pretty good about it, there is a change in reality when you see dead bodies, and in fact I recall we didn’t even lose anybody. We got a couple guys got hit and wounded but we exacted more causalities and you know that’s when it becomes real, at Camp Pendleton and stuff you know you’ve got people shooting blanks at you in
training, well when you really hear the bullets whizzing by then you know it’s for sure.
You hear the snap behind and you see barks of trees you know coming down behind you
and you think, “Man, this stuff is real”. I remember it was raining, it was damp that time
of the year over there and it’s hard to hear the enemy at night because you got the
elephant grass and these huge leaves off these tropical nut trees, and the rain just
splattering. But it’s good there too because if you’re there laying out at night and your on
watch, you got your poncho over you, the rain doesn’t sound any different on that then it
does on the leaves so it’s pretty hard to tell where you are. But anyway we came in off
that and we stayed at Camp Evans there for about another probably month or so. We ran
a few day time patrols, I didn’t, and there was not much going on there, occasionally your
105 battery would open up. We had some 105’s there and they would get a firing mission
called out from a recon team and they shoot and so you would hear that at night. One of
the things I remember just because Christmas was coming up, we had a First Sergeant
Goddard and Goddard was the guy, this is the guy that you would put on the Marine
posters. Because if there was ever a real Marine, it was Goddard and if you ever read the
annals of Khe Sanh, Hill 861, you will see his name mentioned. When we were hit up
there, he took a piece of shrapnel in the throat and it nicked an artery and he still, he just
took his thumb and forefinger, pinched it off, and still ran around the hill giving orders
and giving directions, I mean this guy was hardcore.

RV: Wow.
MB: He had two or three tours in Vietnam, he was the only guy, this would be
one of them guys that you would write into the Reader’s Digest: Most Memorable
Character. First time I ever seen Goddard he was riding in the back of a jeep with the
Company Commander and he had a Thompson, and you never saw a Thompson sub
machine gun in Vietnam but he had one.

RV: Now how do you think he got it?
MB: I don’t know but of course it’s easy to get ammunition because it’s 45 colt
ammunition and a lot of colt side arms over there for if anybody who had a 45 automatic
had ammunition so that wasn’t a problem. That was the first Tommy gun I’d seen outside
of a movie but we just welcomed the M-16’s didn’t work worth nothing so we see at
somebody, we’re shoot but I remember Christmas; this guy was Gung Ho. I mean I think
when Goddard crapped it was olive drab (laughter). His sister, and if you happen to talk
to anybody from K Company beside myself, ask them about this story and I bet you
every one of them will remember. His sister sent him a Christmas package and it had
some bright colored Christmas socks because you try to keep your feet warm, you know,
and he was so enraged he took a k-bar and shredded them and threw them in the trash
barrel. He said, “Them damn civilians”, you know if it wasn’t Marine Corps green, I
mean he didn’t want no part of it. He was the most Gung Ho, hardcore Marine I’ve ever
seen.

RV: Now he was a Lieutenant or was…
MB: He was a 1st Sergeant.
RV: 1st Sergeant, ok
MB: 1st Sergeant.
RV: And he was in K Company with you?
MB: Right, and he was the only 1st Sergeant I ever seen that was out in the field
with us. Usually a 1st Sergeant was an admin guy, he was in the rear and I will tell you
how much respect this guy had from the many campaigns. Every company commander
that we had that he served with, when they got together and they have a meeting, yeah
you could hear some of it if you go by there tent. They would be talking about an
operation or a patrol or where going to go here or there and we should take this and that
and the company commander would turn to 1st Sergeant Goddard and says, “Is that right
1st Sergeant?” and if it sounded good to him he said, “That’s right sir.” If something
wasn’t quite kosher they’d say, “We’re going to go here, do this, we need two squads for
this, is that right 1st Sergeant?” He says, “No sir, that isn’t right.” “Well what is right 1st
Sergeant?” Goddard would tell them and they would go with it.

RV: Really?
MB: Oh yeah, well I mean this was the old pro, this guy had more medals then
Patton (laughter). The guy was a legend but he was hardcore. He expected everybody to
be Marines although this wasn’t the spit and polish of the Corps. This is my favorite time
of Vietnam because you didn’t, because if you shined your brass or your boots, you got in
trouble, nothing reflective, and then of course we’re around long operations, we didn’t
have to shave unless we come across streams, that we’re going to fit in, in because you
didn’t use your drinking for nothing but drink. We became a pretty grubby bunch but anyway we were coming off the Cobi Tanh Tanh Valley, we stayed at Camp Evans for a month or so and then we got orders for this place called Khe Sanh and we got there and it was actually snowing a little bit.

RV: Really?
MB: Yeah.
RV: At Khe Sanh?
MB: I’d never seen…
RV: At Khe Sanh it was snowing?
MB: Yeah, and I’d never seen snow in Vietnam before, it only snowed about one day and it wasn’t, it was kind of a light, enough where people could say, “This looks like snow.” But it was raining and stuff.
RV: Is this December, November ’67?
MB: This is December. We got up there and, boy I wish I could remember, I want to say it was an element of the 5th Marine that we relieved up there but I can’t say for sure, I don’t remember now. But we got up there and stayed a night or two at Khe Sanh and then they were going to hump up the hill 861 because that is where we’re going to be, we’re going to relieve the Company that is up there. We walked through the wet and the mud and then we got there and relieved them guys and while we were up there we further dug trenches and holes and sandbags and then now…
RV: Can you describe the Hill 861, what it looked like when you arrived there?
MB: Hill 861 it was bare, it was a little bit bare at the top and it was just across a couple of ridges from kind of a double hill, what is called 881 South and 881 North, and you may or may not of ever heard of it but we got up there and it was. Oh I would have to say, it was maybe 50, 60 yards across at the top and then there was a trench ran all the way around the perimeter. There was some barbed wire up there, we put up some more, we put up some engineering stakes. They stand up there and wore rolled concertina out. We just heavily fortified that and we made like little gates which were also barbed wire, and we started laying out claymore mines and you know you don’t get, the Marines don’t get told hardly anything. We have an old cliché “First to go, last to know” but you could tell something was up because we were really fortifying this place even more so then
what it was when the choppers come in with chow and supplies and ammunition and
stuff, your C rations and everything. There is usually another chopper right alone with
him, bringing up more sandbags, you know you never run short of sandbags in the Corps.
There is going to be more digging and there is more wire and more claymore and you
could tell that we were sitting up for something. Well apparently intelligence knew that
there divisions building, some gook divisions and of course the little ground pound that
was the Lance Corporal, you don’t get told anything. We just started digging in up there
and in my hole, if you crawled out of it, it’s on the inside of a trench, now picture a
trench that runs all the way around this hill. This hill comes up to a small mound near the
top and just kind of gradually, real very lightly slopes down, all the way around and you
got this trench running around in there and the protective sandbags on the outside of the
trench, you can ridge your rifle over it and be somewhat protected. We dug some bunkers
in addition to the existence bunkers and then on the inside perimeter of the trench, that is
where we dug our individual sleeping holes. You dig it side ways into the side of the hill
and what I did, I dug mine about two, three, couple three feet in and then I went to the
left, I dug out to the left for another couple feet and then again back that way. Everybody
is going to have their own little design but I figured if a mortar happened to land in the
trench or something and I was in the hole, the shrapnel would go in, would fly in there
but it would stop at a wall because my tunnel was kind of zigzag so it would only go in,
so the shrapnel would only go in so far but it wouldn’t continue around the bend and
make another deal so I had kind of a, my own, everybody did.

RV: How deep was your trench?
MB: Trench?
RV: Or actually, you individual sleeping hole?
MB: Oh my individual sleeping hole, I could stretch out in it, it was about five
feet, five, six feet and then that’s the part I slept in. The whole thing, if you measured it, it
would be about nine or ten feet because it only went for a foot or two and then you had to
crawl and go over another foot or two to the left and then back and I dug it that way like I
said so any shrapnel would only get in through the entrance and wouldn’t, it would stop
at the dirt, it couldn’t, shrapnel doesn’t know how to make a left or right turn and then
another left or right turn to come back and get you so that is how I dug mine. The trench
itself was about chest high and then you had sandbags on top of that where you could
drape your rifle over. Out in front of us was, of course, was the concertina wire and stuff
like that and then in my case I dug my hole perpendicular, kind of perpendicular there to
the trench to where up above my hole was several feet, just out there was a flat area. I
think a flat area, in fact I quoted [chatted] that with our team leader when we first set in, I
said, “I need a flat area to shoot from because if you have to shoot, you know you shoot
from the trench but if you got to shoot the Bazooka you need area behind you so you
know for the back blast because you don’t want to be shooting with a wall of dirt behind
you because think of the back blast out of the tube will hit that and come back and take
your head off, you have to have a good, clear area, so...

RV: And the Bazooka was your specialty that was your weapon?

MB: Yeah, that’s what I did. I carried a 3.5 which is a big tube that you see in the
old combat Korea movies and then our new one that they call the LAAW rocket, which I
don’t know if you’ve ever seen one those but there like a portable, extendable Bazooka.
One shot and you throw them away and no matter which one your shooting you got to
have some room behind you for the back blast, that’s why in that Rambo movie, well I
don’t know if you’ve seen the Rambo movie.

RV: Yes sir.

MB: But I embarrassed my ex wife, I embarrassed her big time, we were sitting
there in the movie and she wanted, she said, “Let’s go see that.” I was kind of not really
into ‘Nam movies because they glorify things up so the part in the movie where Stallone,
you know at the end of it, he manages to commandeer this helicopter, remember that and
he loads all these guys in it?

RV: Yes.

MB: Ok then the bad guys are chasing him in there and pretty soon he sets it
down in a pond and as the big hind helicopter, the Russian chopper was coming down. I
don’t know if you remember that but he grabbed a LAAW rocket and he was sitting
inside the chopper, in the pilot seat and he extended this thing and he fired it through the
canopy glass and it knocks out this other helicopter.

RV: I remember that.

MB: Yeah remember that?
RV: Yes sir.

MB: Now he’s got a wall sitting directly behind him in the front cabin there, well right behind that tube and even if he had cleared that, there were, you know, you got a whole bunch of guys sitting behind him in this thing and it would have, this thing was just, the back blast would of killed everybody including him and he fired that thing off and I jumped up out of my seat and said [yelled], “Bull shit.” People started looking around at me and my ex-wife, she is slinking down in the seat like she don’t know me you know and, (laughter) I kind of embarrassed her I guess, see everybody looking at me and all. I said, “That’s a load” and she said, “Mike, Mike.” And I said, “Man that’s a load of crap, that’s a load of crap. That was my job, you can’t shoot from inside, a Bazooka of any kind from inside of an enclosure.” She said, “Well it’s just Hollywood, it’s just Hollywood.” I said, “Well they’re lying to the people.” Oh I was, other then that, I guess the movie was all right.

RV: So your hole was designed where you could shoot your Bazooka without a problem?

MB: My hole, no I couldn’t shoot from inside of my hole.

RV: But your trench, where you…

MB: Yeah my trench was set up to where I had a good flat area above my hole to where if they did call on me to make a shot I could shoot there although usually you know when they call you to make a shot, it should be right [it’s not always] in your area anyway and the one time I did have to make a Bazooka shot from the hill at Khe Sanh I had to go over about 60 or 70 yards over to the other side to make a shot from the top over there. So I never even got to shoot from above my own hole but I picked out a flat place above my place you know so in case I did, I would already have one ready made. We had a scout team out there one afternoon and they encountered a machine gun, and this machine gun nest was one you could see it from our hills because it was just across the valley a little bit and up amongst these rocks and they were drawing some fire. Just heard some chatter over there and the word came rolling down the trench “Rockets up, rockets up” so I grabbed the tube and ran down the trench and Bob Canopy, he was a machine gunner, well he’s a team leader of that particular platoon gun team and I run over and I said, “What do you got Bob?” He said, “Right over there on that ridge there is
a gook machine gun” and they were popping shots, of course, our guys were keeping
them pinned down.

RV: About how far away were they?

MB: 350 yards.

RV: Ok

MB: The reason I knew that is, you know, they can’t get through the rocks. They
were in behind these rocks and he said, “We need a rocket over there.” So I jumped up on
the ridge above their position and I yelled down to him, I said, “Canopy, what’s the
range?” He said, “350 yards.” They already had the range.

RV: Are you out in the open at this point? Are you exposed?

MB: No.

RV: Ok.

MB: Of course it is easy to calculate range when you got a gun team that is sort of
doing it for you because they’ve already exchanging fire with the other guys, you know
you set the fights in your machine gun until your right on them and the sights on their
M-60 were set at 350 yards and they were right there where that gun team was. Of
course, they couldn’t get through like the little makeshift rock wall that these guys were
in behind and they couldn’t get through there so they needed something heavier to punch
through so it’s just a matter of you know, you holler out, “What’s the range?” And he
says, “Hold up.” And he jumped in behind his Gunner and looked over to the sights and
he comes back and he says, “350 yards Brad.” They all call me Brad you know. So then I
jump up there and I holler, “Firing the LAAW.” Anytime you fire something heavy you
always holler so everybody knows in the area and then I just kneel down and drew a bead
on it and let her go and you can’t say for sure if it killed everybody but it blew rocks and
everything out of there and the fire from their end stopped.

RV: Right.

MB: So I have to assume that they didn’t send a team out to confirm it or
anything because you never know when them guys are playing possum, well that was the
last fire that we drew from there. That was one of the few times that I ever used my
Bazooka, most of the fire fights were for rifle which I carried one.
RV: Did they explain to you what your orders were on at 861? Did you understand kind of what they wanted you all to do?

MB: No, all we knew was our orders anywhere is to kill the enemy but now after it happened then, initially, within the first week until after the assault on our hill was made and the gooks tried to over run it, I think it was January.

RV: How long had you been on the hill when that happened?

MB: About a month.

RV: In that time, in that intervening month, there was no real contact at all?

MB: No.

RV: Ok, so you’re basically are getting used to living on the hill and digging in and just waiting.

MB: Right.

RV: So the first contact was, that was the opening of the offensive, the Tet Offensive?

MB: Oh no, that wasn’t the opening. Actually, I think I got ahead of myself here. This incident was shooting at the gun team, probably happened a few weeks after the offensive started. We didn’t actually know they were out there until late that night, I think it was January 20th and it was way at night. This is when the whole entire offensive started on all the hills and everything. South side of the hill, our hill got hit with RPG way, it must have been around midnight or something, and it killed a couple of guys. Then they dropped some mortars in and the idea, it’s a good thing everybody stayed put because the idea was to, I think, was to draw most of us over on that side of the hill but the real attack came from the north side. They sent a sniper team over apparently on the other side of the hill, held fire on us from over there, but everybody stayed put and all of a sudden there are all kinds of mortars coming and here they come and a couple of them had sent off some trip wires and flares.

RV: Where were you, were you on the north side or the south side?

MB: I was on the east side.

RV: On the east side, ok.

MB: I was over on the east side at the time, because I was standing in the bunker, my hole wasn’t quite dug where I wanted it yet and I was over on the other side. But
anyway it opened up, for the main assault came from the wrong side so everybody just
kind of stayed put and we you know we just hid, I think we could of. It lasted probably
two, three hours and over on the north side, kind of northwest side the gooks managed an
RPG on one of our machine gun teams and then they managed to break through in an
area down there and there was like a clearing down there where the Concertina wire was.
Word came down you know you always pass word back and fourth in the trench and this
is about the only thing I’ve ever had nightmares with and it lasted for a year or so after I
got back from Vietnam and then I haven’t had them since. But when they broke through
word came down and it just chilled you to the bone, they said, “Gooks in the trench,
Gooks in the trench.”

RV: Really?
MB: Yeah and I said, “Oh man, they’re in here with us.” Maynard and I were sent
down there to where, this is Jim Maynard. We were sent down there to where that place
had been rocketed, where that bunker had been rocketed or they try to close things back
up and so a couple of guys coming from the other side of the trench to close the area back
up. By this time about a half a dozen of them had gotten in and they had cleared the
trench and started up the slope towards the top of the hill. Maynard and I were working
our way down there and an AK-47 clearly, you can tell the sound of an AK, couple of
bullets whizzed by, I was in front in the trench. I was the first guy going down, Maynard
was behind me, you know of course I am nervous now because there is gooks in the
trench and I’m figuring that is the first guy I am going to see is a gook and it’s going to
be, it’s still dark, the only time anything is lit up is when a flare goes off, then you see a
silhouette, other than that, man you don’t know…

RV: You couldn’t see in front of you very well.
MB: Yes, you couldn’t see very much except for our on trip flares and then we
would send off some flares to try to keep the area lit up.

RV: What kind of weapon did you have with you?
MB: I had an M-16; you’re going to love this one.

RV: (Laughter) I think I guessed what is going to happen here.
MB: Yeah and we, this was my real introduction to that piece of crap. So I’m
going down the trench, I got Maynard behind me and heard, “clack, clack”, it makes a,
it’s not a “bang or bam”, it’s a “clack” out of an AK, I mean they’re just so distinctive. That’s why they wouldn’t, that’s why when we captured AK’s later they wouldn’t let us use them although they were more reliable then our guns, because the sound they make is so distinct that you might be afraid that our own guys returned [might fire] on us because they think it is a gook. You can bring them back as souvenirs but you can’t use them in combat. Well anyway, I heard this “clack, clack” bullets whiz by, and I heard Manynard scream behind me, he says, “Oh God.” And he jumped down, I will never forget and he was hit and how they bypassed me and hit him. So I jumped in the side bunker and I knew right about where the direction came from and I just kept looking up there and pretty soon another flare went off and then there was an explosion went off south of the hill and it was just enough light where I could see his silhouette. He’s got the little Jungle Jim hat on and he is sitting up about 30, 40 yards from me and he kind of looks like he is rocking back and forth, just peering into the darkness. Just trying to see whoever is in the trench and in his silhouette, I guess he is at level with my M-16, I got off one round and the thing stopped. You can tell when they stop because I couldn’t squeeze it again or nothing and in the darkness, half darkness I managed to miss him and he whizzed another 2, 3 AK’s and right into the bunker where I was and you could feel dirt from the sand bags hit you in the face and I thought oh crap. You’re in the middle of the night, the gun is jammed, you can’t see what you’re doing if you could fix it and to un-jam a M-16 you got to virtually take one apart. I thought, “Oh shit!”

RV: You’re by yourself too?

MB: Yeah, I am by myself now because Maynard who gone down with me, Flaherty and them guys there another 40 yards up there, they had just send Maynard and I down there to close it up and, “Hey, we’ll be along in a few minutes”, one of them say. So I am done there by myself and I am sitting there with a jammed 16 and this gook is up here with AK that is working just fine and he just whizzed a couple of them after my own noggin and I thought you know the first thing out of our mind is shit, that’s usually the, in fact I’ve heard pilots say that’s the last thing people say before they crash an airplane.

RV: You said that, or you felt that?

MB: Oh I didn’t say nothing, I just thought that and there is the rest of the commotion going on. But I knew right about where it was and I always and maybe this
was why but, I never really knew why, but I always carried a few two or three extra hand
grenades in my flak jacket. I would carry an extra, in fact all the time I was in ‘Nam I
would carry an extra grenade before I would carry an extra can of chow and they was the
M-26 grenades, the little oval ones and I knew right about where he was and I said, “Man
I got to get out of here because my rifle is dead, it’s too dark to fix it, if I stay here he is
eventually going to move around where he can get a clear shot at me and kill me so I got
maybe one chance” and so I jerked the grenade out and I went ahead and pulled the pin. I
lobbed it real high, you know because there is a three to five second delay on it and you
don’t want to throw something right at somebody who you can’t see exactly where he is
and maybe you would hit the side of the mountain and bounce it back towards you or,
and this has happened, they tell you about it in Pendleton. If you throw a grenade at
somebody close enough they could pick it up and throw it right back at you so you need
to eat up some time on the clock. So I knew right about where he was, he was about 30,
40 yards, because I’d seen his silhouette that one time so I pulled the pin, lobbed it up
high in the air, it was like thousand one, thousand two and finally when it went off and I
heard a scream right from where he was and I think I got him. Anyway when the grenade
goes off it throws dirt and everything and in all that mass explosion and crap flying
everywhere man I ducked out of the hole. I said, “Enough of this crap.” I headed back
down the trench and told Flaherity what was going on so they sent a whole squad down
there, I said, “I ain’t going back down there. I ain’t got a weapon.” All I had is, back at
my own bunker, all I had was a Bazooka, and you can’t shoot a Bazooka at night because
you can’t see what you are doing. Sights are useless at night on the tube so I went down
past Flaherity and them guys and I can’t think of his name and I should remember his
name because this guy became important to me, before I left ‘Nam. It was a guy down
there, in a bunker, and he had an M-14, we only had two or three M-14’s in the whole
Company as they were being phased out and you know to make way for this new tinker
toy that we’re getting. So I jumped in with him and asked him, “Do you have another gun
in here or something?” He said, “Where’s yours?” I said, “It quit.” He said, “That
figures.” Bang, bang. He said, “Tell you what” and he’s kind of in a corner of the hill
there, we had lots of boxed ammo and he says, “You stay here and keep my magazines
loaded for me.” So I loaded magazines for him and so we managed to stay in there and I
tossed a couple of grenades. Then occasionally we would switch off and he would load
magazines and I would get to shoot his 14 and something would light up and you could
lay far out there so we kind of worked together as a team.

RV: What kind of attack were receiving, was it kind of a full body wave attack
where they were coming running up the hill?

MB: Oh yeah they were coming up in force and we had booby traps laying out
there and occasionally one of them would trip and sometimes they would trip a claymore
mine. A claymore mine looks like a big belt buckle, its sits down there and you put the
concave, or the convex side towards the enemy. It’s got about 700 little pieces of BB
shrapnel things and with composition C-4 packed in there. It will take out a bunch of
them at once but they were just swarming up the hills, the whole idea was to hit us, 881,
and the Khe Sanh base all at one time, just one big [sweep]. They had a couple three
divisions out there, general Giap, he was there, the gook division Commander and the
whole idea was just to overrun us. They must have had a couple 300 of them out there
just on our hill. They’re swarming up, they said, “We got the most of them, our machine
gun teams because they would trip a flare and when they didn’t trip a flare we had hand
flares, they were like, well I say hand, there like a mortar [and illumination rounds for our
mortars], you drop them down a mortar and they would get some elevation and light up
then you could see down the slopes. Every time we get a flare going and we would light
them up and it would be like a big parking lot out at Wal-Mart or some place and you
could see them little buzzards crawling up through there so in the few minutes the flare
was out there you could have a fairly clear view. You could pick a bunch of them off
even though a flare would light off maybe, of course the first thing they’d do they would
try to jump down but you could see them jump down and you could put some fire over
there, toss a few grenades. They out numbered us by a big margin but when you’re dug in
like we are and you got the concertina that kind of evens things out.

RV: How did you feel during this whole time? Do you remember going through
any feelings of fear or anticipation, anything like that or did it hit you afterwards?

MB: Well on this one here you go through it fair while isn’t going on because it
ain’t like an ambush when it’s over in just a few minutes and reaction is over, yeah I did.
When the gook had me pinned with my default rifle that was really the only time on the
hill that I thought I was going to die. The rest of the morning, which the battle raged for
another hour or so and it was just a matter of almost a mop up now. When we got the
trench closed back in, between the bunch of us, we had already took care of the gooks
who had made it inside the perimeter. So they were all killed except for one of them that
they took prisoner and then it was just the last hour or so, it almost turned into a turkey
shoot.

RV: Did you all have good intelligence; did you have any idea this was going to
happen that night?

MB: No, not to my knowledge or if we did it never got down to the little guys in
the trench. What the Company Commander knew, I don’t know, him and the Radio Man
I mean sometimes they will get something. The idea was for to take all, take 881 South,
881 North, 861 where we were, and the main Khe Sanh Base. All one big wave and the
idea, of course, early in the morning or late at night was when they hit you that time of
the night you really can’t get good artillery support from Camp Carroll or someplace out
in the darkness because you don’t know for sure where they are. Air support was moot,
you know, in the middle of the night either. No, I don’t know that we knew they were
repelling [coming], we were just ready, the idea was to be ready for anything but I don’t
think anybody knew that it was going to come this naturally [quickly]. They say they hit
us with 2, 300 guys on our hill and we’re there with about 120 but like I say we’re dug in,
we’re sand bagged, we’re concertina wired and we’re booby trapped out there so they ran
into a lot of crap before they even got within range of our own bullets so that kind of
balanced things out a little bit.

RV: So this is the opening night of the Tet Offensive?

MB: This is the opening night; this is January 20th.

RV: Now what happened immediately after that, the next few days, did it calm
down?

MB: Well when the smoke cleared, now on the initial day and this is when it
finally got, by the time dawn started coming, you didn’t see any more gooks out there. A
lot of them out there lying dead, the rest of them had scattered.

RV: Now were there any wounded out there that you could see moving around?
MB: Yeah there was a couple and those were the ones that we took prisoners, one of them on ground.

RV: Ok.

MB: That’s when we searched bodies and when I was back at Charleston when I was talking to you in the lobby there in Charleston, this is, well we found the first aid kits from Berkeley, and we started searching these bodies and we found first aid kits donated by the, I forget how they had that worded, donated to the Freedom Fighters of Vietnam from the students of Berkeley College California and we found a bunch of first aid kits on them.

RV: Do you remember what the first aid kits had in them?

MB: No.

RV: What kind of size were they, did they fit inside their jacket, inside their pack?

MB: Yeah they were probably, you stack two VHS tapes side by side, VH, the video tapes, that’s not, there stacked one on top of the other, laying flat and you stack them. Yeah not bad size, oh yeah they fit in the pack. They were individual ones.

RV: Can you describe your reaction when you guys found these things?

MB: Oh mass anger because we had you know, amongst all those Carnage we had some dead Marines and here are these guys that are trying to kill us and there getting help from our own shores. The general feeling is that if we could have got out of Khe Sanh and got out of Vietnam every man on that hill wanted to go back to California and level that college. You see Rich, there’s nothing wrong with cowardice, not every male is born with a lot of testosterone. A lot of good men over the decades have fought for the right for people to go out and protest if they want, in this country, and say what they think and feel what they feel and that’s fine. That’s your right; it’s been bought and paid for but if you have had no stomach for combat, all right, and if you’re going to stay out of the war then stay out of it. You don’t be sending crap to the enemy who, I mean these college kids and protestors you kind of know that they’ve got brothers and maybe fathers and uncles in Vietnam being shot at by these same guys and they’re turning around and sending these other guys. Sometimes we can’t even get stuff from our own resupply and these guys are getting help from California. So there was a lot of anger and there was, and this was a double sided thing for a lot of guys because amongst many of our fallen
Marines that were up on the hill land I understand from 881 and Khe Sanh this was a
similar thing there or also on the other hills. We found some Marines on the hill that were
just laying there dead, had been shot, and their own rifle half open just where their rifles,
like mine, had quit them during the night and the guy is sitting there trying to get, in the
middle of the dark is trying to get the thing going and some gook jumped up and nailed
him and that was double anger. It spurred a real bad taste in my mouth [not only] for the
people [traitors] at home and also for our own government for this piece of crap weapon
you know. There are some guys all over Vietnam that would be here today if it hadn’t
been for this new M-16 that didn’t work and still doesn’t work well even as recently as
Iraq. I’ve seen the reports where they’ve had jamming problems out in the desert with
them, they still haven’t perfected that piece of junk. You know only by the grace of God
did I get out of there when mine quit and I found mine and I went ahead later on in the
day and opened it up and got it cleared it out. Got it half way working but you know you
got to be on an even keel. I mean we’re sent over there and the government doesn’t back
with us that they ought to do and it’s bad news when a third or fourth world country, if
you even wanted to call them that, has got better weapons then you got and they’re
getting help from home, from your home. Rich, you can’t, I’d love to be able to describe
to you how it feels, but there is no way to do it without you being there. You talk about a
betrayal, a stab in the back and then it’s your own weapons you know are not as good,
there not anywhere near as good as the ones they were sent to replace. There was nothing
wrong with the M-14. The Army did the most griping because the M-14 was heavy and
they said, “Well let’s do the M-16, it only weighs five or six pounds and you can carry
that much more ammunition because there is smaller ammunition.” Well that is fine but
the gun has to work and when I think of the initial attack, the initial siege that started at
Khe Sanh, and of course this went on, we got, seemed to get hit, mortared sporadically
for the next 77 days. But the initial siege, what sparks in mind the most vividly is those
stinking first aid kits by them little cowards back in California and M-16’s broke down
laying beside dead Marines.

RV: How did that affect your morale and the Company’s morale?

MB: Well we felt good that we held the hill you say, “Well, we’re Marines, they
ain’t going to whoop us” but there was a lot of concern and there was a lot of
consternation about because we found all these defunct 16’s. Everybody else up there that’s all we got was the M-16 and of course a few machine guns and you know all of a sudden you don’t get a real good feeling. You said man this guy’s gun here was half broke down, parts laying around with the guy and apparently in vain they tried to tear it apart in the middle of the night. So here you are stuck on this hill, who knows when the next attacks are coming and you got a rifle that maybe works, maybe don’t. You might as well be out there with slingshots and there wasn’t a lot of good cleaning gear up there and with the M-16 you got to keep it surgically clean which you can not do in a combat environment. I don’t care what you do, and that was one of the secrets to the AK-47 to our own M-1 gerund or M-14, you build a gun to loose tolerance its because you never know what it’s going to be exposed to, it has to have room to breath. You can pull the cover off an AK-47, which I have one, I own an AK now, which I felt un-American buying one here but then I thought well it worked though. You can could almost throw gravel in that thing and it would still shoot and because you don’t know where you’re going over there, you would be in the swamp one day, in the heat the next, in the rain, drop through the mud. Your gun’s got to work and the ones we captured off these guys on 861. Along with first aid kits we also took their weapons. We found AK-47’s that were just almost rusted shut that they didn’t clean them, didn’t take care of them. They’re exposed to who knows what, there is a lot of rust and crud, you kick the bolt open, throw a magazine in and bang, bang, bang.

RV: Did you all ever use those AK’s?

MB: Yeah, they let us shoot them just from the top of the hill and so if you guys want to put a few rounds through them but you will not take them on. Some of the guys wanted to take them on patrol when we get squad sized patrols because the AK, what few we captured, that became a high commodity said hey man these things work, ours don’t. But like I said they make a very distinctive sound and if you get into a fire fight or a village or something in the village or something and that AK makes such a distinctive sound, if you hear it the instinct is to turn around and fire where that came from. So that’s why they wouldn’t let us and it was hard for people to leave an AK back in their own hole, a captured AK because they got ammunition for it but the word was that, and it came all the way from Division that they can be kept as souvenirs but you will not use
them in combat because of the sound they make and you will draw fire from friendly
forces.

RV: That could be very dangerous.

MB: Yeah, you could kind of understand their point but in ours these things were
[those AK’s were] in pitiful shape but still shooting reliably. You get our M-16’s a little
bit sooty or dusty and it’s going to quit you so you know when you remember your
buddies splattered all over the field you say, “Man I want to take this [AK] into combat.”
You got a point and they got a point but after 9/11 went down here a couple of years ago
and I decided to get an assault rifle, it was a no-brainer. You can buy AR-15 which is a
civilian equivalent of the 16’s at any gun show, there is, incidentally we have big gun
shows out there in Phoenix and there loadable but there was no doubt in my mind where I
was going. I said, “I’m going to get me an AK, it’s not American, but I faced enough of
them over to know that they work.”

RV: Yes sir. Now why did you feel like you needed to get assault rifle after 9/11?

MB: Well just for a little extra firepower. Of course, fortunately, with the
Second Amendment and as long as we can, that’s something that we need to keep that
we, man oh man and they got people trying to reclaim it, trying to rethink what the
Constitution means but you know if you think about it they hit the Trade Center and they
flew a plane into the Pentagon. But if you’ll notice the one thing that the terrorists have
not done and I predict that they will not do is take any of this crap street to street because
the whole world knows, whether they like it or not, the whole world knows that America
is heavily armed. Any street in any town, there is a least two or three good old boys,
drinking coffee there in the morning, got a plaid shirt and jeans and boots and John Deere
hat and 30/30 hanging on the wall, they know that. They’ll never, as long as we are able
to keep the freedom, they’ll never do that and the Second Amendment [take it into the
streets] and I’ve talked, you know it’s hard to talk to Liberals, it really is about the
Second Amendment. I’ve talked to people about it, I said, “It’s the most important one
that we have in this country, and they say, “Well sure it is because it’s your pet thing”
and I said, “No, it ought to be your pet thing too whether you own a gun or not.” If you
really look at everything, the Second Amendment is the only one we have that can
guarantee we’ll always have the rest of them. You lose that, you ain’t got to say in
anything. You get the wrong people in power and in fact, we’re not too far from them feeling the waters right now with this patriotic act, there wanting to come into your house anytime without, and search without a warrant or anything. They’re wanting to tap into your e-mail, now you think it’s going to stop there, it ain’t going to stop there. They will be tapping into your phones, there might be somebody listening to you and I right now and that’s ok, I don’t really care, if they want me they can come try to get me (laughter).

RV: I doubt that is happening.

MB: But you never know, they’ll be into your mail and when you start giving up Benjamin Franklin himself said, “Those who are willing to give up liberty for a little bit of freedom even if only temporarily deserve neither” and that’s hard, you know if you look at it that’s how the Third Riche got started. Their wanting to tap into everybody’s business but there is nothing being done to shut the borders off, people are still coming in illegally, you know they’re going after the wrong people just like the anti gunners who there. You turn in all your weapons thinking that is going to take care of the crime situation so they must assume that all the hoods are going to turn their weapons in too and we’re all going to play by the rules, which we are not. One of the great liberals of our time, Ann Landers, used to throw in her columns all the time her anti gun rhetoric, “We need to follow our Canadian neighbors in the north”, well our Canadian neighbors to the north got a huge gun ban up there, they were forced to turn a bunch of them, those guys turned them in and now with the media, again or media [supports it but], what they don’t tell you is the crime rate got shot through the roof up there now because [criminals] run through the neighborhood with impunity. Who’s going to stop them, with what, so you know?

RV: Let me ask you a couple of questions getting back to Vietnam. Did you ever hear in the Marine Corps, ever hear any incidences of fragging, anything like that?

MB: Almost.

RV: Really?

MB: Almost, we had a Company Commander that if given the opportunity, nobody looking he would have been fragged.

RV: Really, can you tell me why?

MB: I can tell you exactly why.
RV: Ok.

MB: This is the guy that took over from Jasper. Captain Jasper, he was a good guy; he was wounded during the siege. We got this other guy; Snead, J.C., Captain J.C. Snead and I will give you his name: Snead, and in fact he is a member of our Khe Sanh organization. If I ever see him I am going to knock his lights out. This guy was a glory hunter and he made a statement and it got all over the hill and it was to verify that he would trade a truckload of Purple Hearts for a Medal Of Honor and this guy would, and even after Khe Sanh, he would volunteer us for everything. He was arrogant, he was dictator, but he had a few company stooges around him that he kept like his own personal body guard so you really couldn’t get a crack at him but if there of been an opportunity and I had thought about it. I’ll put a round in this guy myself, especially after we got back, we finally did get back to Da Nang after Khe Sanh and the guy that I loaded ammunition for when my 16 quit and I managed to make it back out on the trench. I stayed and loaded for him, I kept tabs on him while we were going to Khe Sanh because we’re on the same hill and everything and he was getting to be a short timer and whenever, if we ever got off that hill and got back to Da Nang, he would be a short timer and he would be going home and I said, “I would like to have that rifle, I would like to have a 14.” And he said, “Well you catch me before we go and we’ll just swap guns and I’ll turn yours in and you can have it and we did that and when we went back up to Hue after that, you know I think about old Snead and I would say, “You know this turd gives me half a chance and he’s going to catch one and with an M-14, that’s 7.2, 7.62 millimeter bullets and that’s the kind of hole it makes. The AK-47 is also a 7.62 millimeter bullet, just different sized case and a 762 hole is a 762 hole and everybody and his brother, if they look at the front of the sky later they’d think some gook got him because that’s the size of the hole that would be going through them.

RV: So you all were upset with gentlemen because he put you out in action too much or put you more at risk then you thought you needed to be?

MB: Well more at risk I mean this guy was willing to, I mean he volunteered us to do things that you ought to be going in there, going with a Battalion. Oh we’ll do it, we’ll do it, well you know he wanted a medal, he wanted recognition [glory] at whatever cost of the guys.
RV: When did he take over command of the company?
MB: He took over command of the company just shortly after; he missed the
siege because Jasper was hit. Jasper was wounded and had to do go down and they sent
him so this would have been late January, early February.
RV: Mr. Bradbury, let’s take a break just for a moment please.
MB: Okay.
MB: Well just kind of where we left off, I’ve heard of fragging, I don’t personally
know of any. There would have been had even of us gotten a clear shot at Snead.
RV: This is something that you guys discussed amongst yourselves and if there
were an opportunity you would take it?
MB: Yeah. Well I don’t know that the whole company would take, there were
several of us, “I’m going to get a shot at that asshole”. You know this happens every little
[conflict] of time, its not just in the, one of the things I remember in time whether it is in
combat or not, at any rank, you’ll get a guy, for example, who is just a Buck Sergeant and
back in the states he would be carrying out trash cans. Well, in a place, in a remote place,
where not a lot of people would want to be, he might get put in charge of something that
he wouldn’t get to do back in the states. He sometimes they’ll let things go to their head
and they become there own little dictator or Snead figures it’s time to write his name into
the history book, he’s got an opportunity and he’s got a whole company here to do it with
and boy he’d get all the accolades and he wasn’t thinking a lot like a team member,
Snead was for Snead and we were going to be his method to greatness. We had some
good CO’s, Captain Jasper was a good CO and then after Snead left and I don’t know. He
left after our operation at Hue and it’s just as well because maybe he thought he got
working with Kenneldy, yeah you’re a dead guy then if we get in another skirmish or
something. I don’t know but his Executive Officer, Captain Salisbury took over and
Salisbury he was a good guy, he looked out for the troops and you know your people
make you or break you and Salisbury was a good guy, but Snead, man there was a lot of
people that didn’t like him and he had reached a point where he had more to fear from us
then he did the gooks. Maybe that’s why they, got filtered down to him and “Man, oh
man maybe I’d better leave or get transferred or something.”
RV: Can you describe basically after January 21st what happened on the hill, going through the siege?

MB: Yeah. We would get mortared, oh once, twice, maybe three times a week. It would be sporadic; they wouldn’t hit us with a lot because they expended most of their, a good portion of their ordinance trying to take everything over. They were still reserves out there to where they’d hit you every now and then and they did some psychological crap too. At night, in fact, I talked with Doc and a few other guys at our reunion back at Charleston about this. At night you would be out there and they had these wood weed whistles, just a little (whistles) then some other one would answer with the same thing over on another slope, like two guys kind of communicating in code or something and it’s way in the middle of the night and you know sound travels far at night if you can hear them out there. You knew it was gooks and I think it was just to keep everybody’s nerves on edge like you know to make us think that they’re getting ready for another night attack or something so they would just be out there just doing that. You couldn’t see them out there, you didn’t know where they were coming from and for the remaining three, four months we were up on the hill, we continued to refortify. They would try to shoot choppers down, resupply choppers, in fact they did shoot one down, a big CH-46.

RV: On your hill?

MB: He was approaching the hill and they shot him down and he managed to land on a ridge just southwest of us and they scrabbled out of there and so we covered them. We gave them some support fire from our hill and then so we need to blow that chopper up so the gooks can’t get any use out of her blowing up so we had a 106 recoilless on top of the hill and we used it to blow the chopper up. Then another chopper was able to come in and extract those guys that got out but you couldn’t always, that became a problem sometimes because whenever a chopper would come in and the only way you could get to supplies whether it was food, water, ammo, was by chopper. You always looked forward to looking at the slings because most of our supplies come in these great big red bags. So if you seen a yellow bag that’s one that they had mail from home in it, that’s when everybody, boy you hope to see a yellow bag because you could be getting a letter or something but they would be coming in, sometimes they be getting potted at and shot at and so supplies sometimes became an issue up there.
RV: Tell me about being mortared. What was that like?

MB: Well being mortared, they used 61-millimeter mortar and they also used 82 and they were really, I think, the most dangerous weapon they had even though they had rockets and they had other things, other kinds of weapons. The mortars, the ones I think we feared the most, because the gooks were very good with them, they could drop one right into your pocket and they weren’t sophisticated either. We captured one on patrol one time after a firefight and all it was just a tube and like a string out in front with an aiming stake, I mean we’re not talking state of the art stuff, it was like one of them would get out there and run the stakes back and forth and go, “Yeah, that looks good” and drop one in and they were real good. You would be going along in the day there digging a hole or filling sandbags or whatever you do during the day and yet guys out there in the LP’s which are your Listening Posts and you could hear the little bloop way out there and you knew what was coming in and you got the fear of the word “incoming.” They say Incoming and immediately everybody would head for cover and they would, there is people they call walk the mortar [rounds] over the hill. They would hit one short and then they would hit one up a little bit, kind of wanting to see if they could catch somebody out in the open and you hit us around 2 o’clock in the afternoon and you could almost set your watch by it, there for a while. But we were fortified enough, we had enough sand bags, big sandbags, we filled sandbags for forever so we had plenty up there and then we had the PSP which is like a steel, a steel grating with holes in them which were good for construction. We would have them fortified and we would have more sand bags on top of that but we were, unless you got caught out in the open you know we got to where the mortars weren’t off, they need to be respectful but not really need to be scared because as long as you heard them before they landed you could get out of the way. That brings me to a situation I was wanting to tell you about and I thought about the other day, I said I got to remember this when Rich calls. We got mortared there one afternoon and the groups were walking over the hill and you know you just jump into your hole or if you’re on a detail on the other side of the hill, just whatever bunkers are closest. Well I jumped into this one and Staff Sergeant Ackers, he was our Platoon Sergeant, he jumped in there behind me and he was a black guy. Well I guess it don’t matter if he was black or not, but he jumped in there and we were just seeing kind of keeping our heads covered, our
helmets, flak jackets and the gooks are walking the mortars or they four or five rounds. 
Bang, and then another real close bang and you feel a little dirt and dust come down
through the sand bag and they dropped a couple more and Ackers is sitting there, now.
We’ve been going through this since the siege, we’re sitting there and Ackers looks at me
and he says, “Boy, this is some shit ain’t it?” I said, “Yeah” He looks at me and he said,
“Bradbury I don’t think you understand me, this is really some shit.” I said, “Yeah, yeah I
know.” He said, “You still don’t understand, I don’t think you get what I am talking
about do you Bradbury?” and I am thinking he is losing it and I said, “Yeah this is some
shit.” He said, “No this really is, you think about it, the Arsenal, the Arsenals the United
States has and we got to sit here everyday and take this shit.” Then I thought about it and
I said, “Yeah we’re a nuclear power, we’re a nuclear power, these guys are a fourth world
country, we could blow Hanoi off the map, why are we sitting here everyday taking it?”
Then I started getting mad you know, damn you know and that was during one of them
mortar attacks and I never will forget that and the whole time I had been over there, I
hadn’t even thought about that. I thought it was just us and them and us and them but
we’re the ones with the flares, missiles, and B-52’s.

RV: Right.

MB: Why in the hell are we out here playing in their sandbox, by their rules, don’t
shoot till you get shot at first, and can’t go over this line, you can’t go you know, we
fought a restrictive war over there. I’m thinking gah we’re the ones with all the [power],
these guys got a sling shot and we’ve got a 12 gauge shotgun, why do we leave our
shotgun in the closet and come out with a slingshot against these guys and play this
paddy cake, throw the lead back and forth. We would still hear Union in Forth Hill, we
were still the most powerful [country] on the Earth, why are, “That’s right Ackers, why
are we sitting here everyday taking this shit?” And that’s one of them events that you
know you might forget what you did last week but you remember certain things from 30
years ago, there just stuck in our minds because they make a point and I said, “Yeah, you
know that did make sense” We’re the biggest dog on the block and we let some
Chihuahua nip at our heels (laughter).

RV: Was that attitude prevalent amongst the men in general do you think?
MB: I don’t know, yeah, I think a lot of guys had to think about that, you know, when you’re an American and you have the military might available that we have and we ain’t using it. We’re just letting guys out there, in their back yard that they know better and they [gooks] know there backyard better then we do but we’re going to go out in the jungle and let them jump up under trees and under bushes and everything and just snipe at us, you know. This isn’t necessary, this isn’t necessary, man we got three or four thousand F-4 phantoms, we’ve got ships, we have the New Jersey over there with an 16 inch guns. You know, a B-52 fleet that you can’t believe, nuclear capabilities, and we’re sitting here with a funky M-16, flopping it out [swapping lead] with AK-47’s in this lousy, stinking, jungle, wait a minute there’s something wrong here. If we’re going to do war, let’s get it over with. You know Vietnam; from 1961 was basically from 1961 to 1975 that drug on 14 years Rich. There is no way that should have gone 14 years. We could have ended that thing in a couple of weeks and we ended up with 58,000 names on a wall for nothing. We didn’t win nothing and that’s another thing that the Vietnam Vet carries in everything. You’re going to talk to, every Vietnam Vet you’re ever going to talk to is going to say the same thing, you can carry this kind of like a shame that being part of the only war that we ever lost and you’ll have some guy that will want to say, “Oh we didn’t lose.” Hey did we win anything, you know, in ’75 we just packed up and left you know, and I said, “Did we come home victorious like they did in Desert Storms? Were there parades out there like there were for your uncles and your granddads when they come back from Europe? No, we come back and there was nothing but protest and baby killing assholes and you know the country hates you. If the country ain’t behind you and you got guys killed because your own weapons wouldn’t work and you got people sending aid and comfort to the enemy and the first aid kits and God knows what else. I said, “We didn’t win nothing.” There are times, it depends what I am doing around town if I’ve got to fill out a form for something or if there is a block that goes “Are you a Veteran” I don’t even fill that in.

RV: Really?

MB: Yeah, oh no, because the way we’re treated in this country. These Vietnam Vet’s, the first thing people think is you’re a baby killer or you’re a psycho, everyone of them is psycho, you got all these mental problems or something but you don’t even, oh
we got a lot of anger, the average Vet don’t have a lot, some got psychological problems
but there is a lot of pinned up anger.

RV: Why do you think the US public and also the US government for that matter,
feels that way or why do you think they think that way about you all?

MB: Well because the public didn’t get behind it, one thing you have to
remember in WWII, we were attacked. We had a lot at stake there, there were dictators
kicking the rear we’re in course Pearl Harbor changed a lot of minds. They got behind
everybody on this last one because the World Trade Centers were hit. Now when you’re
hit in your own backyard even the Liberals would jump up and say, “Hey wait a minute,
oh no we can’t let these guys get away with that.” Vietnam was the thing where, one of
the classic things, that our government does; is sticking their nose in places where it don’t
belong and a lot of people say wait a minute, why are we there and then pretty soon the
Soldiers and Marines that come back are just as guilty as the government in their eyes.
They say, “You guys over there doing all this dirty work” and you guys are doing, well in
the military you do what your told, or you’re a Court Marshaled. You really don’t have a
whole lot of choice. Public conception of war depends on “do we need to do that”, I said
when you watch the Trade Centers fall and all these people getting killed now the
average American wants to jump up and the first thing I want to know; who did that, who
did that, let’s get them. That wasn’t the thing in Vietnam, nothing was hit over here, and
so people say why are we there and after we were over there for a while, well I’ve also
said why are we here, you go through that country, Rich, and there, there’s is nothing
over there. There is rice paddy’s, there’s dikes, there is malaria, there is mosquito’s that
you can’t believe, there’s leeches. The real estate ain’t worth nothing and just grass such
and such you know, just miserable, miserable conditions over there and you say to
yourself man you know, you don’t want to seem un-American but you like you know,
man if the commies want this, let them have it. Holy crap, there is nothing over there and
the guys that supposed to be helping, the South Vietnamese Army, they always seem to
be coming the other way and they look clean and fresh with newer equipment then you
got. They’re going the other way, you’re going to where the combat action is and they’re
coming back.
RV: Did you ever have any direct experience with the ARVN or any of the other military forces in South Vietnam?

MB: Yes, we never worked with the ARVN but we didn’t even work with our own Army, we worked with just the Marines, but I’ll tell you who impressed me. We worked part of Khe Sanh and part of Hill 55. We worked with what they call the White Horse Division of the South Koreans and let me tell you something Rich, if you want to talk about the gung ho fighters. These guys are tough as nails and they weren’t there for just a 12 and 20 like we were, they were there for the duration and they were packing WWII carbines and stuff like that. They were just tough, one of the most, and if you got caught, if you was man and if you were North Vietnamese, you would rather get caught by the Marines then get caught by the South Koreans because they stretch him out on trees and work on him with knives. Men bleeding, men bleeding, feed them, they were tough little cookies and we worked with them and brutal little guys. I’ve always been glad that they were on our side, one of the most famous or infamous things that ever happened over there which is I’m sure you’ve heard of and you’ll hear different stories and stories but it actually happened at the Khe Sanh Base, not up on 861, but as I understand it, it happened right then at the base. It was a helicopter incident that was after the siege, the initial siege, going to try to over run everything, they captured some of them down at the main Khe Sanh Base also, and they grabbed this one guy and he’s equivalent, this North Korean or North Vietnamese guy, equivalent rank wise of say, a Major and they grabbed another guy that was a high ranking NCO.

RV: Whose they, the US Army or…

MB: No, the Marines. No the Army wasn’t up there with us [that I know of], this is a Marine function at Khe Sanh and word got back to us before we ever made it back to the States and read about different versions of this story. So I have to believe it happened right there at Khe Sanh because it reached up within a couple of weeks after it happened. Well they captured a bunch of them and they were going to send them back to Da Nang and then somewhere further south for interrogation, they wanted to get some information out of them. Well South Koreans have lost some guys in that skirmish too when they tried to overrun Khe Sanh and everything and they told them “we’ll get the information out of these guys if you want” and they grabbed this guy that would have been a Major,
equivalent of a Major, and a very high ranking NCO that they managed to wound and
capture. They put both their butts on a UH-1 Huey and they took off and they hovered
above, well up above the tarmac, up there and they started questioning these guys, they
started asking the Major about troop strength and what kind of equipment you guys have,
what is the game plan you guys got in mind? Of course the Major, being a good
Commie, he wasn’t saying nothing and they grabbed him and threw him out the door of
the chopper and you there about a 1000 feet over the tarmac and he splattered on the
tarmac just flatter than piss on a plate. So they started on this NCO which was equivalent
of a First Sergeant or a Gunnery Sergeant, he was a high ranking NCO and they started
asking him. Well he just watch his Major get tossed out the door, these were the Koreans
doing it, and so he knew if they tossed the Major out, they sure as hell toss him out.
RV: Now there are the Koreans doing this or the U.S. Marines?
MB: No, the Koreans. It was one of our choppers and our pilots but their
Commander assured us “We’ll get the information you guys want.” We don’t got to….
So they start questioning this guy and he spilled his guts, Rich, on everything, not only
troop strength but, all the different movements, how many battalions and stuff they had.
Weapons, everything that he knew that they were planning to do, so they got a wealth of
information out of this guy because he was, like I said, he watched them threw his Major
out the door. So we spilled his guts, told him everything to get all the information they
needed and they grabbed him and tossed him out anyway.
RV: Wow.
MB: Then they landed and got the information to our guys, brutal.
RV: You heard this story; did you witness it?
MB: No I didn’t witness it but I heard it from some of the replacements that it
landed at Khe Sanh and it come up to replace some of our guys that had been wounded
and killed and we they you know said we sent the Da Nang replacements and they were,
they had gathered down at Khe Sanh so they could get a chopper or get a way to get them
up there. So they were down there for a few weeks before they ever got to the hill and
with them came the story and then years later after I’ve been back to the states, I’ve read
this same account about the South Korean throwing guys out of choppers in different
places. It came right from Khe Sanh, right from the guys who were down there and came
up to replace some of our guys that were killed and that’s where I first heard the story so
that’s, and that’s you know that was long before I ever got the chance to start reading all
these other accounts so I have to believe that was the one. But I personally witnessed a
South Korean cutting up on North Vietnamese with knives that were still alive and I seen
that they had one of them spread eagled and that was at Hill 55 and I said man oh man.
That guy just screaming and the other guy slapping him in the face and then another guy
standing there with a notepad, was getting the information out of him and they were
going to cut him little by little and I said, “My God, these boys ain’t never heard of The
Geneva Convention but tough little guys.

RV: Was this stuff ever reported or was it pretty much tolerated by you all?

MB: Oh it was tolerated by us because we weren’t allowed to do that kind of stuff
and you know a Marine knows what’s required and it’s hard enough playing by the rules
and they said, “Hey whatever works.” You know because we fought to get it back to our
air and the feed him monk food, they would try to you know cream him to get him to talk
because these guys got to make this talk and of course the general pretenses is that well
that’s ok, the South Koreans are on our side and that’s good. They would come on patrol
with us anytime they want.

RV: Do you think the North Vietnamese in the Vietcong were aware about how
tough the South Koreans were.

MB: Oh I think they were; I think they were. I mean we’re just test around and I
think if the North Vietnamese knew there was a South Korean out somewhere in the area,
squad sized. They knew that we, there was a whole platoon of Marines somewhere, they
would go around the squad and mix it with us before they, you know. South Koreans had
a tremendous reputation over there and I heard about some of it and seen some of it, there
some fighters, of course, there tube is you know, that was a mysterious thing then
because they weren’t going back after 13 months, they were there for the duration.

RV: Mike, I need to pause for a minute to change out the disk, hold on just a
second.

MB: All right

RV: Okay, Mike, why don’t we continue? Tell me about you know, we talked
about being mortared, we talked just kind of living on the hill there and the resupply,
what else comes to mind when you think about life on that hill during the siege? What
did you experience, what else…

MB: Well we had some funny moments; you know you have to do things like to
keep morale up. We had a Navy Corpsman Tech; I don’t know if you met him back there
at South Carolina, his name was Doc Thomas.

RV: I don’t think I did.

MB: But he was our Corpsman, he and I we’ve been friends for years ever since.

We play little tricks on each other just to keep morale up and one of the things, Doc is the
instigator of a lot of it, and one thing he did, he dug hole there you know for his sleeping
quarters and for ventilation because he wanted to have some, he liked his chow hot. He
didn’t like to eat out of the cold C-rations can. Well now you know you can’t light up a
heat pad at night because you could see sparks and flames from a long way off so what he
would do is well inside his hole he’d light one up in there, well you couldn’t see it from
the outside, but to keep the fumes from being suffocated, he dug a small hole up through
the roof in his thing which come out on to the top of the ground up above him and he put
a, he found a piece of old galvanized pipe from some of our construction equipment that
they had and he built like a chimney. So he could heat his food and the smoke would go
up through the chimney out to the top of the mound, the dirt mound and what a bunch of
us did, we took a piece of cardboard, a big piece of cardboard off of the C –ration carton
container and we wrote urinal on it a and we just hung it around his chimney (laughter).

Well he saw it before the guys started using it and so we would do stuff like that just to
try to keep morale up. We would also get a hand grenade, one time we pulled the
mechanism out of it, exploded the blasting cap which is what sets the grenade off, and
then screwed the top back on it so now it’s defunct and we had this guy named Goodman,
Goodman is sitting in a bunker that one day and Mike James and I were, we already had
it rigged up and then it had John’s motor with it. So James he pulls this grenade out and
he starts flipping it up and just playing with it a little you now and we’re sitting there and
Goodman he’s kind of nervous, he says to me, “You got to play with that?” and he says,
“Ah it’s ok.” and he says, “Look, I even took the pin out, as long as I keep my hand on
and the spoons don’t fly off and you know then he put it back in and then take it out, and
put it back in and then on cue he pulled the pin and dropped it, he goes “Oops” and the
spoon flies out, well Goodman he’s getting up off the deck. He’s wanting to run out of
the bunker and the three of us, James, Snowder, and myself, we all start out the door and
each one of us push Goodman back on the way out. Well he fell down and he got up and
I’d push him down because I am scrambling out and then we all three of us left and
Goodman don’t come out behind him, we wait there and just as we peek back in and
Goodmen, he’s covered up. He’s got his hands over head, and he’s huddled in a corner,
he’s shaking like dog shit and peach stone. (laughter) We started laughing and boy he
about come uncorked.

RV: Really?

MB: Oh yeah, he started chasing us down the trench you know. Platoon Leader
Black said, “What the hell are you guys doing down there?” We would do stuff like that
to get us kind of break [break the tension], because we were stuck up there, we were
going to hold Khe Sanh and both the hills and who knows when the replacements were to
come or how long we were going to be up there, turns out we were there till May so…

RV: That’s a long time.

MB: Yeah and then we had a sniper out there that was pot shotting at the hills
with his AK but he’s up there a long way and he was a terrible shot. If he hit anybody, it
would be by accident and they was going to send somebody out there to kill him, see if
we could find a send a team up and get this guy but then it was decided they wouldn’t
because if we send somebody out to kill this guy, they might replace him with somebody
that could shoot. So the occasional round would come zinging up there and everybody
ducking and you know and then eventually we would come back out and we’d say man
and I think it was satisfaction enough for whoever that was out there because “Hey I
made all them Marines run.” But you he never managed to hit anybody so just any event
that they might have somebody who could shoot it was decided alright we will leave him
out there, if he hits somebody, we’l go out after him.

RV: Right.

MB: So we had him, never found out who that was.

RV: Can you describe the aerial bombardment by the United States around Khe

Sanh?
MB: Oh I sure can, I sure can. You see a B-52 struck down [strike now and then, but they], now 52’s didn’t strike at Khe Sanh, they struck over on Laos, Cambodia, out that way but they would strike from several miles from us and you could see the shock waves come off the mountains and you feel the ground rumble from miles away. Now most of our air support, when we needed air support, come from 3rd Marine Air Wing in Da Nang and they sent F-4 Phantoms. What I remember about them and what separates from the Air Force from, the Marine pilot, these guys would come in hot an low, we’re talking say 50 to 100 yards over the terrain and they would come down into the valleys between the hills lacing napalm. In fact I got some pictures that I took with my little Kodak over there, in fact, that reminds me I’ve got, I think I’ve told you, when you get all done and you give me the address and everything, I’ll send copies of this stuff to you guys because I had an old Kodak that I still have. I took some pictures over there, up on the hill and some air strikes and they took some good viewing and one of them was a chemical drop but these guys would come in so fast on these F-4’s that you know just shooting up the valley with their cannons and dropping napalm and they were so low that if they were slow enough which they weren’t. But if they were you could probably read what was on there helmets I mean they would get some aping butt down through these, down through the valleys and then you see gun ships, some of the Huey Cobra’s sometimes they called in. One of the most impressive things I’ve seen over there was at night. We had a, used to, they had a fleet, I don’t know where they were out of, out of Saigon or Da Nang or someplace, of C-47s, they called them Puffs, and they had these mini machine guns on them. They were 7.62 electrically fired like a huge Gatling gun and every fifth round was a tracer and when they fired, it looked like a straight solid line coming down. A red line and they’d fly around at night and you could hear them up in the old reciprocal engines up there, just kind of groaning around there and they would pick up infrared movements and of course they would have all the grids and they would fire at night and you’d always hope, man I hope they know where we are. They just laced on you, they could spray, they put a bullet in every square inch of a football field and anything moving around there, couldn’t live, but this wasn’t a every night thing, once every other week. I guess some Recon units report that we got some heavy concentrate
and gooks are in there and you hear them up firing, flying at night over the valley and say
oh here comes Puff, everybody get in your bunkers, just in case.

RV: What about friendly fire incidents, anything that you remember?
MB: No, no I’ve heard of it like everybody else has and I understand that we have
some of that in Iraq. No, not even by accident I don’t think even with artillery and Camp
Carroll was like 23 miles I think from us and the big 175’s and they were right on the
money. They hit where we were, practical guys would call in, I don’t, no I don’t know,
I’m sure it’s happened over there, I don’t personally know of any friendly fire.

RV: What else about the siege do you want to talk about?
MB: Well there’s not that much to talk about except we were all glad to finally
get out of there.

RV: What happened when you left, how did that happen?
MB: We were replaced by another outfit, I want to say the 7th Marines, I don’t
remember now but they came up and I remember we went from our hill over to 881. It
helped them on a big push clear out some gooks and then we all walked out of there,
when that was all over there, when it was all over, we went on down to the main Khe
Sanh Base. They loaded us up in trucks and they took us back to Da Nang and when we
got back to Da Nang we got rid of our short timers and you always look forward to going
back to Da Nang because it’s always between operations. Da Nang meant showers, Da
Nang meant hot chow, Da Nang meant sleeping on cots and tents and that’s when that
guy came by when we were getting ready leave and I was walking back to the chow tent
and a guy comes up behind me and say, “Hey” and I turn around and I wish I could
remember his name now but he says, “You still want my M-14?” I said, “Yeah” and he
said, “Well I’m leaving the day after tomorrow.” He said, “Where is that piece of shit you
got?” I went and grabbed my M-16 and we swapped them over and I said, “You know
this gun was signed out to me” and he said, “They don’t care” he said, “As long as I turn
one in, so we would only be Armory, actually we had the card [signed the card] and
switched. Said okay this guy is going to have a 14 you know and ammunition of course
was no problem even though we only had very few 14’s left in country because it shoots
a 308 Winchester or 7.62 Nato, which is the same round that the M-60 Machine guns
used. So when you got these people out of ammo it never, I asked him about that, “Do
you have any problems getting ammo?” but no they don’t come out boxed anymore. He
said, “It’s the same round as the M-60 and you’ll never find a machine gun team with the
ammo humper, he’s the third guy on the end that humps a lot of ammo, that we wouldn’t
be willing to break off a 100 rounds and give it to you, you know, just stuff five year
magazines, you’re good to go and them guys hump a lot of weight, a lot of weight and the
ammo humper, man he’s packing 3,000 or 4,000 rounds sometimes or 300, 400, rather,
and he says “You won’t find doing ammo, a person who ain’t willing to give you a
hundred rounds, to get it off there back so from that point on I had an M-14.

RV: Did you carry that the rest of your tour?
MB: Oh absolutely, I slept with, oh Rich, I slept with that thing, if I went to the
john because they were a highly sought after thing too but you couldn’t use the AK’s
because of the sound but everybody knew that old 16 was [just jive] alive when you
trained with it in states and almost everything, and we were having so many problems
with it exchanging and boy if you could get your hands on something that did work, you
didn’t mind carrying the extra four pounds of weight, five pounds of weight. I virtually
slept with that gun [M-14], I said, “It was staying with me until the day I left,” of course
being combat set up, unlike most of the state side M-14s, mine had a selector you could
shoot full auto but of course you couldn’t really shoot too much full auto because it
jumped all over the place because of the size of the cartridge. But beautiful weapon and I
carried it to Hue to Quang Tri, to Hill 55, Hai Van Pass and I was on Hai Van Pass when
I finally rotated out of the country, but that 14 never left my side, boy from the minute I
got it.

RV: How did it perform for you?
MB: Oh perfect, perfect. A M-14 is a modified M-1, same, virtually same bolt
receiver and everything, they just took a M-1, rather than have [and in place of] an eight
round clip, [the 14 has a 20 round] it’s got a 21. Magazine got a flash suppressor. It’s a
beautiful, beautiful weapon. It was made in 1957 and Marine Corps had it go up in the
60’s until mid to late 60’s. That’s when the good M-16 started phasing it out and that was
a political thing was McNamara, Eugene Stoner who designed this thing with no chrome
chamber, and people ask about that and McNamara you know he says, “Well, you know,
if the gun needed a chrome chamber, I’m sure Stoner would have designed it.” Well
Stoner didn’t know his ass from a hole in the ground about rifle design and Colt didn’t know anything about building a rifle. Colt built beautiful pistols but they had no experience, at that time, in building rifles and it was one of them things where it went to the lowest bidder. The gun cost $101 dollars, the M-14 cost a $168, the D.O.D, was looking at well look how much money we’re going to save here and when a Stoner is selling things, if you know, “My M-16, here it only weighs about five and a half pounds and look how much more ammo you can carry for it.” Well that’s a good point, but the gun doesn’t work well and it doesn’t perform the way that it was shoved down the people’s throat, the public and the military, it all just tumbles [“The bullet tumbles”] in bullets and all this crap. I’ve seen gooks get drilled two or three times, dead center into the chest at short range, taking the fourth round, third and fourth rounds [taking 3 or 4 rounds before finally] there dropping, that is not good because the longer, he could be clinically dead but as long as he is still on his feet he could still toss a satchel charge at you before he goes down. You need to be able to take him out at 300, 400, or 500 yards if he be and drop him and if your gun gets a little dirty, which it does in combat, you can’t stop every 15 minutes, tear it all apart and clean it, the thing has to work. The 14 is built with loose tolerance, just like the AK, kind of like the M-1 and it just shoots and shoots and shoots and when an M-14 quits you Rich, when it quits you, the only thing that you need to do is check the magazine because you’re out. You lost count of rounds and you know and when it’s empty it’s empty, that’s when a 14 quits; is when it’s empty, no matter how dirty it gets, that thing just. It’s a weapon that did not need to be replaced and the military has never owned up because they made a poor bargain and they paid, and in subsequent years they chrome plated chambers and they changed different kinds of power but the tolerances are still, still built with the same tolerances and tolerances are very tight, the Germans learned that with the Luger, the Luger, everybody loves the Luger Pistol but it was replaced by the P-38 Walther that had loose tolerances because they just [found that], finely precisioned weapons do not work in all environments. They just don’t, and the thing still, just a 223 and you better hit it, and 30 calibers then you would 22, it was a big mistake. A big mistake and just for the record do you know what the Iraqi’s, I mean we beat them because we, this time we used the superior [air and] fire power over there but you know [the enemy was still] there using [AK’s] out in the desert,
and Osmin bin Laden and all them guys, there still using AK-47’s that are still being built
today, that gun was designed way back in 1947 and is still being built today. The one that
I just bought is brand new and it ain’t no different then the ones we captured up there, it’s
just a, it’s a crude looking, there ain’t no fancy frills, no fancy stock but it just shoots, and
shoots, and shoots and I said, “So if it ever comes, if it ever does come down to the street,
or whatever, I’m going to have something that works.” It’s commie made and God help
me for not thinking American but you know, when it comes down to your life it’s got to
work. But the 14, I love the M-14, like I said it was a little heavier but you know I’m an
old Bazooka man and when you’re already humping the gear that you’re humping, an
extra four pounds in your rifle don’t mean jack and the thing is to have the gun there
when you need it. No surprises, no more of this getting caught in a bunker, getting off
one shot and then it stops, like what happened up on 861, but that ain’t going to happen
again. I said this thing weighs another four pounds, that’s fine, but I’m going to have a
gun as good as his. In fact, well a 14 is better, really, because it shoots a bigger cartridge.
It’s the same size bullets as a [the AK’s] 30 caliber but a bigger cartridge so it will get up
there further and do more damage and it will do it reliably just like the AK. I don’t trust
the 16 and thank God this guy remembered and he yelled at me from behind and he said,
“You still want this gun, just like when we were in Da Nang?” I said, “You bet ya.” We
went over there and we exchanged on a card and that never left my hands until the day
before I left.

RV: Did you turn it over to somebody?
MB: Yes, oh yeah. I had guys clamoring on my coat tails too. They say, “Mike,
when you get ready to go, I want that gun, I want that gun.” I said, “That’s cool, I’ll pass
it along, but you aren’t getting it beforehand. (laughter) You ain’t getting it beforehand
and you better be with me in Da Nang you know when we get ready to go.

RV: Tell me about Da Nang, how long were you there when you went back from
Khe Sanh?
MB: Khe Sanh, we were there, I think, about four days. I thought it should have
been longer.

RV: Right, before you went back out.
MB: Yes, but like I say we had a Captain Snead who said, “Oh let’s get in on this, I’ll get my boys in on this, you know, so we weren’t back. We were back there long enough for a few days of hot showers, and picking up the new guys and getting rid of replacements and then we were on our way to Hue City.

RV: How did you treat the new guys?

MB: Good. Well we were glad to see them because they were replacements and of course you know when you get to be the guy there is always somebody taking you under their wing because they might need you to cover their butt and they’ll teach you things that you don’t always learn at Pendleton. You know you learn things back in training, but once you actually get out into the combat area, there is a lot of things [more to learn]. Because there are always things the troops are discovering that haven’t made their way back to the states yet so you brief the new guy all that you can and you always, if you can, you try to have him, have the new guys close to you know so they can witness first hand what is going on because three weeks from now you might be in a spot where he has to back you so he needs to know what to do so you know train the new guys just as well as you can.

RV: Were the others in your unit kind of the same way, they wanted to take them in, show them the ropes and be as effective as possible?

MB: Oh yeah, we’re all, yeah, that’s one thing that separates us from the other branches like we’re all brothers and to think we had, all you got to do is go into any parking lot or any city, any town and look at the back of pick up trucks, on the windows of cars, you’ll see Marines stickers. You’ll see the, you know, my son is a Marine or Semper Fi, you see a lot of Semper Fi. You won’t see that, you won’t see cars running around and pick up trucks and stuff with Army stuff on them, and Navy stuff and Air Force, there’s no pride in them outfits but you’ll see Marines having, you’ll see a guy wearing around Marine Corps t-shirts and it is very big into that, very big into that, Marines are a proud outfit and we’re brothers. So this new kid that is coming over from the states, he might be a rookie but you know three days from now he’s going to be a veteran because he might be taking fire right along with you so it’s important that you get him broke in right so he knows what to do. Because you can’t watch him all the time and he may have to cover you, he may have to cover your butt so you know don’t shy away
from these guys, get them involved because sooner or later they may, that young kid might be the difference of whether you come home or not.

RV: Right. Was there any noticeable tension or any problems between those personnel on the field, like yourself, and then those in the rear who were always in the rear when you went back to Da Nang for example?

MB: No, not really. I guess when you went to a [rear] echelon back there I mean they knew that they had it a lot better then you did so they didn’t, they went out of their way to treat us good so really I don’t remember any tensions at all. If you’d be out of supplies is not a problem, you know, if you need something, you got it because they know that it could be them out there. No we didn’t, no I didn’t notice any problems with anybody in the rear.

RV: Well Mike why don’t we go ahead and stop for today and we’ll pick up tomorrow, okay?

MB: Okay.
Richard Verrone: This is Dr. Richard Verrone, I’m continuing my oral history interview with Mr. Michael Bradbury. Today is October 28, 2003. I’m again in Lubbock Texas, Special Collections Library Interview Room on the campus of Texas Tech University. Mr. Bradbury is in Apache Junction Arizona. Sir yesterday we left off, you had come back from Khe Sanh, gone to Da Nang and we discussed a little bit there. I wanted to ask you one other question about Khe Sanh.

Michael Bradbury: Ok.

RV: Did you and your men, when you guys came off the hill and eventually made your way to Da Nang, did you understand the significance of what had just happened and how the Khe Sanh siege had played out United States and kind of what you had actually accomplished?

MB: No. We didn’t find out any of that till later, in fact, you know I, through the history channel on TV. and just books I’ve read, I’ve learned more about Khe Sanh probably in the last 15, 20 years then when I was over there. Again, when you’re a Lance Corporal you don’t get told anything about nothing it’s just hey guys we’re moving out.

RV: How about today, how do you feel about it today, what you all did?

MB: Well I understand the importance of holding the ground because you need to hold higher ground because it’s a lot easier to defend from up top then it is from the bottom but its hard to look at that because when I think about Khe Sanh which was the biggest fight that we, that the Marine Corps had over there. You’re a part of that but you look at it overall, the whole Vietnam thing, we had no business being over there. So when I’m thinking about Khe Sanh, yeah we did, we extracted a lot of lives, we lost, but we
lost a bunch of guys and it was all for nothing. In a way it was kind of symbolic, I suppose, or Khe Sanh, you know, when I go to San Diego, to MCRD [my last trip to MCRD in San Diego, for example] sometimes I’ll bump into people over there and you talk to some of the active duty people and for example, that they’ve named a street after us [on the base] at the Marine Corps Recruit they go over there and they got the Khe Sanh spelled wrong.

RV: Really?

MB: Yeah and I went into the Public Affairs Office there and told them about that and he said, “Well that’s the spelling we have. Are you sure?” I said, “I was there.” And I said, “We lost too many guys up there for that name to be spelled wrong on that street.” So they said they would look at, some other guy knew a lot of paper work; you know, get sent to headquarters and said, “Well how many of these have you done? I said you know “Iwo Jima Avenue and Guadal Canal Avenue is spelled right, you know, we lost a lot of guys defending that piece of real estate and it ought to be there.” It’s hard for me to say Rich the significance of what we did at Khe Sanh because you have to encompass the whole war. When you’re out there swapping lead with guys that you don’t even know, guys that you don’t have anything personal against, these are guys that didn’t attack the United States and we’re over invading into their own skirmish, not that I’m standing up for them because I ain’t. But those guys, and I’ve thought about this over the years, you’re shooting at guys that may be in peace time, you and him might have been friends, if you know these guys, you might of gone and fished together or something. They got a wife or a girlfriend, they got family just like you do and the truth is know they probably don’t want to be out there anymore then you are. In subsequent years back here, well in fact, not but a few years ago I lived in a neighborhood where I had this, a guy across the street from me, he used to play loud music and he had wild parties and boy we used to have some go arounds. And finally I went to the police a couple of times, then finally the Sheriff called and I said, “If you don’t do something about this guy, then don’t come after me when I do.” Of course with that, “No you can’t do that.” I said, “Look man,” I said, “but I’m losing a lot of sleep, he’s a pain in the butt, I’ve spent 13 months in Vietnam killing guys I didn’t know for no reason and the government was paying me to do it. I got a reason here.” And I thought about that, what was gained, what it was for and then, and
we gave it all back, we left our equipment over there, just let them take it over and then
they took the thing over anyways. So, yeah Khe Sanh was a big thing, it was a big fight
but it won nothing, it said they rate it in Marine Corps history along the lines of Guadal
Canal, you know the Chosin Reservoir. So the difference is that like with Iwo Jima and
Guadalcanal that was on our way to stopping Japan that was trying to dominate the whole
world, including us at Pearl Harbor. I mean there was reasons for that, there was really
glory here. There was no, and again you know like we talked about yesterday no matter
how many medals were given out and how many accolades, we still came back here to
nothing, to an unappreciative public. There were no “Welcome Home Johnny GI”, none
of that, and of course if you did that today it would be treated shamefully so you know I
don’t look at Khe Sanh the same way as say you know my uncles would have looked at
Iwo Jima, the whole. We lost a lot of men, there was a lot of sacrifice, but you know but
was it necessary, no it wasn’t because Vietnam wasn’t necessary.

RV: Can you tell me, I’m sorry go ahead.
MB: No I’m just saying that’s just how I…
RV: Tell me about the relationship you formed with the men up on the hill, 861,
and thereafter. What was that like?
MB: Oh it was tight, it was tight, you know you pick, when you live, eat, and
sleep with somebody 24 hours a day. You’d become tighter to these guys then you would
a wife or a girlfriend or something because you know back here in married life, you
know, your in your house maybe half a day and the other half you’re out working, you
don’t see them. Well here you’re with these guys 24/7 and your sharing C-rations and
you get down to sometimes when your sharing the last canteen of water before you get
resupplies to you. You get to know these guys and you know, you know that you’re out
numbered, you’re always going to be outnumbered because Marine Corps is a small
outfit. You know that from Boot Camp and so it’s essential that you, that each man look
after each other and…. The Marine Corps is not a bunch, it’s a breed, and we’re a family.
Today, 30 years later, we see each other in stores; we don’t even know each other
personally, but we see each other’s tattoo’s, t-shirts, which we still wear after 30 years
which none of the other branches do. We still got stickers on our cars and a guy come by
and see a Marine sticker on a car and he’s got one too, he’ll give you a thumb’s up, you
know, we’re all brothers. I will tell you something that was refreshing over there that you
do not see anywhere is it doesn’t matter if you’re black, white, or whatever, I’ve never
seen any prejudice in the Corps, everybody was olive drab, every man, I was brother,
because you were dependent upon him and you know I think if the war did anything, it
showed me a lot because I grew up being prejudiced there in San Francisco where I grew
up at. If the civilian world could see how guys, how man is capable of getting along and
working with each other, I mean it’s very possible because we did it. Now while we’re a
Tight Alpha, that’s probably why the Marines always had the success that it’s had over
the few hundred years because we are a family. We’re not just a bunch of enlisted guys
all together. You know everybody is you know, you be your initiation, those who make it
through boot camp and through the training, we all, there are no black guys, no white
guys, no Hispanic’s, we’re all Marines and it’s not that way when you go to anywhere
else so it was, yeah we were all family and of course, and we have the association as you
well know because you were there. That’s where you met a bunch of us and that felt, I
think some of us have kept personal contact with each other, Doc Thomas and I, so you
develop relationships so good that you really won’t see anywhere else I don’t think.

RV: Well let’s pick up with after Da Nang. You said you went up to Hue, is that
correct?

MB: We went to Hue.

RV: Ok, and what was your assignment there in Hue?

MB: I’m not sure, they just said, “Ok guys we’re heading out.” Sometimes you’ll
find out you’re going to Hue City. “We’re going to do some clear and sweep” or I call it
with the proper name, let’s go do search and destroy and we went up there, that was the
second time in my tour that I actually got to shoot the Bazooka you know in actual, in
anything other than practice.

RV: Was this in May ’68?

MB: Yes, this would have been, let’s see we got back from Da Nang, got rid of
the replacements, well we got through picking the replacements, got rid of the short
timers, yeah it would have been probably around late May of ’68. We headed up to Hue.

RV: What did Hue look like?
MB: Hue had already seen some battle, you know there already been some skirmishes down there. A lot of burned and destroyed buildings and there had been a lot of, a lot of it looked like the war had, just not trusted at all. There was a Cathedral looking old church where which I had to help destroy because we took some sniper fire out of there. But other than that it was kind of, almost looked Medieval. I got some pictures that, matter of fact I’ll send you guys copies when we do this package and everything. And there is some old Chinese, well I don’t know, they all look Vietnamese really, kind of Chinese looking Pagoda temple that was still standing and it looked like something out of an old Charlie Chan movie, in places, and course then it was of course surrounded by jungle and you know palm tree looking things, I don’t figure they were palm trees, they were some other variation of it.

RV: Do you remember how the civilians treated you all?

MB: Yes, just at a distance except for the kids. The kids, no matter where you go, because they were hungry and we would be and they would always be, especially if we were on foot or riding in the back of a truck or something, the kids would always come with there hands like this “Hey GI, you give me chop chop.” Now chop chop, that means food. You know sometimes we tossed them a can of C-rations or something or whatever but you had to be real careful. Let me tell you about that at Pendleton too because they [the gooks] would arm their kids with grenades, a kid that doesn’t even know what he’s doing, they pull a string, now when I say they pull a string, the gook grenades were like the old potato mashers that the Germans carried. The grenade itself set on the end of a long handle, handle about six inches long and it was a hollow tube handle and inside that handle was like a twine. A hard you know very firm piece of twine and you would pull that point from inside the handle and then you could either toss it or whatever you were going to do and they were quite effective because like tossing a hammer, centrifugal force you can throw one of them pretty far and what they would do, they would tie one of these to the back of a kid or stick it underneath his shirt and they’d pull that string and then send him over to a group of GI’s that were standing around. So they “Go get some chop chop, go get some chop chop,” and make this kid come up and you know it’s hard to turn your back on a kid and he walks in there among you and unknown to him, and he would blow up and take a bunch of you with him so you had to be real careful and when
you got into places like Hue. There you’re getting into not just NVA but VC, which
means that you might be looking at guy that’s a farmer and I mean he’s waving at you,
he’s out there with his water buffalo and he’s waving at you during the day time. He
might be out there laying traps at night so you know you never knew whom you were
dealing with so we kind of waved at the people but we wouldn’t get in close to them.

RV: What did you think of the Vietnamese civilians in general during your entire
tour?

MB: I thought they were a people that were caught in the middle of a bunch of
crap. They strike me as just being people who are trying to get along and would have
been just fine if some war wasn’t going on. All of a sudden there were commies that
want to take their country over and there’s you know, they were helpless, they were there
to endure. They had no say what was going on in their country, didn’t know if they were
going to get blown up or their village was going to get set on fire or who knows. The VC,
of course, they used them a bunch, it was only to cooperate or they would be killed and
stuff. So you never really, from our stand point, you didn’t trust any of them but you felt
sorry for them because you knew most of them were just innocent people who got caught
up in crap that wasn’t of their own making and the poor guys had no place to go. They
lived very poor, they lived in grass type huts and shacks, stuff put together with
cardboard, sticks of bamboo. The monsoon were coming and wash half villages away and
whatever possessions that they had which wasn’t much, and then they would have to
rebuilt somewhere but they were mainly farming people who just trying to get along and
all of a sudden here are these Commie’s wanting to take them over, and their own army is
multiplying and here come the Americans and there’s. You know, you felt sorry for them
but it makes you appreciate your own freedom that we have in our country, which aren’t
so safe now anymore. So you say man, boys, there for grace of God I could have been
born here in Vietnam or someplace you know look at what my family has. My family
back home is eating turkey and they’re going to the movies, enjoying their hamburgers or
whatever they’re doing. They’re going out boating for the weekend and this and that and
these people over here got nothing plus they’re being shelled, they got shells flying over
their head, there having to evacuate villages because what little homes they have are
being burned either by us or by them because of the firefight. You know, you felt sorry
for them and you’re thinking over what and by the time [about a lot right now]. I got
back to Khe Sanh, and we’re going through Hue and Quang Tri, it is, a lot of things are
stuck, a lot of, with me, my attitude was different when I come out of Khe Sanh because
I’ve seen the carnage, the useless of it, the uselessness of it, the first aid kits which told
me that our people didn’t appreciate, far as I was concerned our people didn’t appreciate
what we were doing over here. The North Vietnamese had decided to take over
everything and I said you know, there is a lot of people over here dying for nothing and
these peasants, they’re caught right in the middle and all they wanted to do was farm a
little, grow their rice, and try to eke out a living and here is everybody and their brother
swapping Bazooka rounds, artillery, air drop, this is their home and why is this real estate
so important to the Commie’s? What is over there here that makes it, and why are we
over here? Even if the Commie’s took it over, there people would be, the Vietnamese
people would be better off because there was a bunch of them over there today, just
Vietnamese civilians that are walking around with no limbs because artillery fire is
indiscriminate. You’re shooting at the bad guy, they’re shooting at you and your mark
shifts are off a little bit and you blow up some little shack that didn’t, people, family, is
huddled together and there’s a lot of walking causalities over there or the people who are
not coming back, they just got caught in the middle of it, had no choice because it was
thrust upon them so I felt sorry for those Vietnamese people, just themselves.

RV: How much did the man in your unit share that feeling?

MB: I don’t know, I would like to think that it was kind of a mutual things
because there was a lot of general feeling, well I am glad it’s them and not us, at least
we’re going to get to go home, if we’re lucky we’re going to get to go home so we don’t
get killed. There wasn’t too much talk about the Vietnamese people getting killed but at
the reunion you know we’d kick that around a little bit at the reunion so I would think
that that feeling was pretty much mutual. There was more anger among the Vet’s about
anything, about the way we did things and mainly about the way we’re being treated
today and just forgotten about.

RV: Right. Tell me what your impressions of Vietnam, itself was, the country.

MB: The country was humid, it was hot, it was humid and sticky during the
summer, then you got the monsoon rain. The land wasn’t good for growing anything but
rice and star apples. Star apples were, well there almost shaped like an, I’d almost have to
draw a picture of one but they had some trees you’d see star apples and stuff. The country
is loaded with leeches, snakes; well you had to watch out for Bamboo Vipers and stuff.

RV: Did you see any wild animals, any snakes?
MB: Yes, yeah, saw one Bamboo Viper.
RV: Really?
MB: Yeah, we just kind of let him go because we were in a position there where
you didn’t want to fire any shots from where we were at the time. Sometimes you get in
them places where you don’t want to make any noises if you don’t have to. So you had
to, along with watching out for punji pits and booby traps, you had to watch out for the
bamboo viper, but I only saw one of them. You had, what they call Rock Apes, and Rock
Apes are like a derivative of almost like a small orangutan. They would be in the trees
and they would throw stuff at you, actually toss stuff at you and that’s why they call
them, I don’t guess they call them Rock Apes in the medical book or archeological books
or whatever but that’s what we called them and then the only other animals we saw over
there were Water Buffalos. The farmers would either use those to pull their little make
shift plows and stuff and you would see some dogs. Sometimes you would see a couple
dogs run in the village.

RV: Well tell me about Hue. What kind of action did you see there?
MB: We got into, we were on the outskirts of Hue and we need some, I was back
near the rear of the column and the only action that we saw in Hue ourselves was on this
one particular day. We heard the Machine Guns up at the front of the column [open up]
and they were, you could hear the M-60’s chatter and everybody just kind of you know,
everybody got done, looking for coverage, looking both ways and everything. We were
laying along a dike and this was the second time in the six or eight months that I had
already been there that I got called for rockets up and word came down. So myself and
our Assistant Gunner, we went running up there, by the time we got to the front, we saw
there was a, there was a fire coming out of this church and it was an old, I don’t know
what kind, Buddhist Church or whatever it was, I don’t know what it was, but we were
drawing sniper fire and so Lieutenant he said, “We need to take it out.” You know
Machine Guns were heavily pinned down and I had some second thoughts and I didn’t
know the Lord back then but even then I said, “I don’t think this God is going to smile on us taking out a church because this a house of God to somebody but on the other hand you’re drawing sniper fire. So I opted not to go with the LAAW rocket, to go with the big tube.

RV: Now did you say that out loud or were you thinking that?

MB: I was thinking that. You’re not going to disobey orders, lieutenant says take it out, well you take it out because that’s what you do, in the Marine Corps we don’t have encounter groups or discussions about anything. If the guy over you only has one more stripe over you do, it’s the same as if he was the Commandant as far as you’re concerned and that’s what you do. So we went with the big tube and I put two rounds through it and the second round did the most damage and the guys who were still in there, there was a few, they went running out the end of the building in a panic you know and as they did our machine gunners chopped them up. That was kind of a spooky part, a little bit for me because the terrain where it was, I had to stand up to make the shot so to clear the back blast and boy you hate to stand up, you know. Everybody knows to lay down, lay down a good layer of fire for you but you never know if there is some gook sitting in the tree someplace that you didn’t see and they tell you in rocket school you always want to make your first round count because if you don’t and there is still some of them out there all of a sudden you just told them that there is a guy out there with a big rocket tube so you want to get him before he gets a second shot. Well, first round took out a substantial part of this building but we still, but lieutenant said, “Swat them again.” Which means there was still some more building, part of the building left and I said, “Oh my God, I got to make a second shot and I just made the first one, everybody and their brother knows I’m out here with, because it makes a horrendous noise. There is no recoil on a Bazooka, no recoil at all because it all goes out the back, usually, whole tube but a tremendous noise and flash and when the thing hits it just scatters block and brick everywhere. So I had to make a second shot so I did that and there was some guys that ran out the, out the other machine gunners finished them off. Now that was the only action that K-Company saw [in Hue City].

RV: How long were you in Hue City?

MB: I don’t think we were there more then about a week.
RV: And then you moved north?

MB: Yeah we went to Quang Tri from there.

RV: Ok. What was you assignment there? What did you all do?

MB: Oh I don’t know…

RV: You went to Quang Tri town or up into Quang Tri province?

MB: Well up in the providence, we weren’t right in the town. We relieved another group of Marines that were there and they moved on and we sat in there for couple three weeks and we just run a few day time patrols and I don’t know. I think it was just, you know, they shifted some of the units around and some area had been a hot spot for, you know, you needed to hold onto it like you know when we left Khe Sanh, we didn’t leave until one of the other units came up and relieved us. This hill was hard fought for, it’s vital. We got to, even if there’s nothing going on here, we need to hold it to make sure they don’t get a hold of it. One of the things that happened at Dinh Binh Phou with the French was that they, the French didn’t believe that the Vietnamese would drag artillery up the slopes so they never thought about taking the higher hills. Well they found out wrong and from the higher elevations, man, you can launch shells a long way. So even like when the thing was over at Khe Sanh before they finally evacuated the place for good, we still had guys up there holding it so, but we go to Quang Tri we relieved, that was an outfit, an area, that had just been fought for also. A lot of them were tired, weary, they were going to send them back and get rid of some of their replacements, give them a little R&R time and I guess we were probably the nearest outfit there and of course, Captain Snead, “Oh yeah, we’ll do it, we’ll do it, we’ll do it. So we ended up taking over Quang Tri. Quang Tri was ok, we didn’t get into any fire fights with anybody, in fact that was a fairly fussy, it was uneventful, which was fine with everybody you know we finally go somewhere everybody and his brother ain’t trying to kill us. So we ran some patrols out of there and we just kind of occupied the place for couple three weeks, got in some letter writing time, got some hot showers.

RV: How much contact did you have with home?

MB: With whom?

RV: With home.
MB: Oh not as much as I liked to, depended on the chopper, whenever choppers
could reach the ply and then sometimes we would be so deep in some place that they
wouldn’t send choppers. In fact, a lot of your, a lot of food and ammo and you don’t
worry about mail until you get back. If you get back because you know some places you
go you don’t want to see choppers because you don’t want the gooks to see choppers
because when they see choppers they know that there might be somebody in there to
report and we don’t want nobody to know that we’re there. So whenever we got back, but
communication was good, whenever we got back into an area like Quang Tri or Dong Ha
or someplace like that and we were going to be there for a little bit and it was a fairly
secure LZ, yeah we’d get mail, our mail ok.

RV: How important was the mail to you

MB: Oh it was vital, it was vital because nothing made sense over in ‘Nam and a
letter from home told you that there was something to come home too. Even if the streets
were full of protestors you knew that if you could get home and get home, you know
that’s where your girl was, where your family was, it gave you some kind of hope and
you didn’t feel like things were so desolate. At Khe Sanh it was tough to get mail because
every chopper that they sent [was shot at], Khe Sanh was vital to the gooks too and you
send a chopper out, I mean he knew, the guy flying it knew he was going to draw some
fire some place. So we had a hard time getting supplies in and it was important to them,
you might recollect U-boats and this in WWII, the idea was to knock out the convoy’s to
starve Britain to death and choppers seemed to, the gooks didn’t have in it the supply
system we did so we’re up there on the hills and they see choppers coming. That means
the Marines of, that I don’t think they cared about cutting off our mail, but every
chopper represented more ammunition for the Marine, more food for these guys, more
medical supplies, we wanted to try to keep the guys marooned up here so maybe we can
regroup and try them out again, which never happened. But they knew that that’s where
our supplies were coming from so you see a chopper coming, man, he was… I often
wondered if they paid them guys enough, probably not they were paid for their rank but
you couldn’t, man, I would never have wanted to fly a chopper because you were just
such a target, especially the Medevac choppers.

RV: What was your experience with the medevac dustoff choppers?
MB: Well fortunately I didn’t have to ride any but they draw fire. In fact we had guys that were hurting and needed medical help and we couldn’t get them off the hill as quick as we’d like to down to the main Khe Sanh base on account of the intense fire for the choppers but it got down to where they bring a Medevac chopper. He would also bring in a sling sometimes with extra ammo and food so when he came in to pick up the wounded we could just go ahead and lay down a heavy fire all over the valley and just try to keep everything close so he could land, drop off, and you know of course he’d bring a brief supply of amino, filled it up, but them boys did their job. They were, I can’t say enough about the Medevac guys because you know you’re a target and the gooks, and this is not new in warfare, they would rather wound you than kill you if they could. Because wounding you, they know that Americans don’t leave their dead laying around. If you could wound a guy, that’s going to tie up two, three, more guys to take care of him and if you wound him serious enough that’s going to bring in a nice fat easy target in a helicopter. So if they could wound you, that’s even better then killing you because then they can entice more in and of course now we had a strict code of conduct though about our own guys that tell you when you get into combat there is two guys that you be sure you watch out for. You watch out for your Corpsman, you watch out for your radio man, don’t let anything happen to them so if a Doc would have to drop down and take care of somebody, whoever is closest to him, get over there and watch his back. Because you might be the next one hit and if the Doc gets hit before you do and he’s not of action then you get hit, who’s going to take care of you, some machine gunner? So you watch out for your Doc, but the gooks used that too because they knew we took care of each other so he could just wound a guy that’s going to tie up two more guys. That’s going to tie up the medical guy and maybe one or two guys to guard him and if you wound him serious enough that’s going to bring in a chopper and oh what an opportunity we have here. RV: Let’s talk about; just for a moment; during you’re down time and even when you were in the field, what did you all do for entertainment? How did you occupy your time?

MB: Nothing, just b.s. about back home. There were no cards to play or nothing and obviously no radio’s or TV’s or anything like that, you know, and today, and I’m not knocking it. I’m glad to see that they’re living a little better, we’ve got enough, we did it
for, you know the guys could watch the Super Bowl even in Iraqi situation and they live
in air conditioned thing and I’m glad that they didn’t have to live like we did but we did.
Now we didn’t have anything really to occupy time except just each other. You talk,
everybody talk about back home or b.s. about what he used to do when he was in school
or what he’s going to do when he gets back. And that was good because if you guys talk
about what you’re going to do when you get back home, that takes your mind off the fact
that you might be killed, that means that you’re planning on getting back home because
your attitude is good and you talk about oh my girl this and your going to do that and
then we’re going to do this. I’m going to build that hot rod when I get back and it’s just,
you know, that’s pretty much what you do. Just down time is any day that you didn’t get
shot at, you were never really down because while some of the guys are resting or
sleeping at least a third to a half of the rest of the guys, at any given time, are on watch in
the holes, you know. So you just sit there and you just do your job and you think about
back home and stuff but you didn’t have any form of recreation until you got back to Da
Nang, in between operations.
RV: And what would you all do there?
MB: Back there they would show outside movies. They’d have a film projector
and we would all huddle and it would be some movie that you wouldn’t even go to see
today. Just some lame duck thing, but to us it was entertainment and then you could shop
at the PX if you wanted to buy something at the PX you know like toothpaste or maybe
even a can of pop. They used to, back in the rear we would get, you could have a can of
pop and a can of beer each day out of this free cart that you could have either one of each.
Or what some guys do if they were beer drinkers and the other guys weren’t, well the guy
would take a Budweiser, and an orange soda and he said “Well, I will trade you. You
don’t drink beer? Well tell you what, I’ll trade you my orange soda for that beer you got.”
So he’d end up with two beers and the other guy would have two orange sodas and that
would work out pretty good.
RV: What about drug and alcohol use?
MB: Well the only alcohol I ever seen over there was just beer because that’s, and
they only give you two cans of it a day so there wasn’t. I’ve heard about drug abuse, I’ve
never seen it, I’ve never seen it. I don’t know where the guys would get it, you really, you
know out where we were, but no I heard about it. You hear about so many things in the
media and people ask you. You know when I got back they say, “Hey you know we read
about this in the Times or the Chronicle.” I say, “Wait a minute, where did you hear
that?” “Well that’s what the newspapers…” and I say, “Man, you can’t, don’t take that as
gospel.” We had a lot of coverage on Khe Sanh for reporters who never got up there.
Most if not all the photos you’ll ever see of Khe Sanh were taken by guys like myself that
submitted films into different places for archives or actual Marine combat photographers.
But as far as the stuff that you hear in the newspapers, they always painted a darker
picture sometimes then what it was and I get a letter from home. I get a letter from home,
my mom and dad they would write and they said, “Oh Mike, man, we’re hearing you
guys are this, that, and the other” and I would say, “Wait a minute, are we talking about
the same outfit here” you know. I would write back and I said, “No no, that’s not so.” So
we had a lot of straightening out to do when I got back because you go to remember the
newspapers are, the news media, in this country, is fairly liberal and you know people
dwell on bad news. One of the TV evangelists, John Hagee said one time, “If you want
the blues, watch the news.” You can’t turn on your television Rich and hardly ever and
see a bunch of good thing that happen in the world today, everything is tragedy, that’s
what seems to sell. Vietnam was not a popular war so if you can paint the picture with
different shades and this and that and make it look darker then it is, you know. You like it
evil, more riled up but I blame the media for a lot of that because we came back and we
were painted as guys who burned down villages, and killed and maimed women and kids
and I said, “Where in the hell is this coming from?”

RV: You didn’t see any of that?

MB: No. I saw a village get burned one time and we sent our Kit Carson scout in,
a Kit Carson scout is a former North Vietnamese, a VC, who would take in under what
they call a Chu Hoi program and that’s the guy who defected. He’s had enough, and we
had a kid with us that he would be so upset with his own outfit that he’d be glad to work
for us. Of course they would do reindoctrination and to show his loyalty he always wore,
these guys always walked point. And the old man would send him in to a village we’re
coming through some place where we hadn’t been and he’d get, this guy would seek out
the village elder and tell him. He wouldn’t say how big, a unit of Marines coming
through, “If you guys are hiding any VC in here, you need to flush them out, let us know because if we draw any sniper fire, out of here…” These village elders, you know they would say, “Oh no, no, no there is none here,” but they might have been scared, didn’t say anything because they might have somebody with a gun on him at the time. But the Chu Houi guy would do what you tell him, he’d say, “Now, if we draw any sniper fire, we’re going to level this village, because we’re not losing a bunch of guys over a bunch of b.s.,” and we went through this one village and I wish I could tell you where it is but I don’t remember. But I remember going through and we drew some fire and you heard an exchange of fire, I didn’t always get up, I wasn’t always up in the front of the formation. They kept the hard weapons near the back of the formation, I mean I was on all the movements, all the patrols, but they usually kept the machine gun teams up near the front, that’s where your initial contact, that’s where you want your machine guns. The hard weapons, they’ll call you up the 50 or 60 yards to the front of it if they need you to take out something hard but anyway I heard lots of fire going on up there and then word starts rolling down through here, all I could hear “Up, Up, Up.” And I thought, “Oh rockets up, and here we go again.” By the time it got down to me it was, “Flames up, Flames up” well here comes the guy with the flame thrower, what the heck, and before you know it, man, the building. By the time we get everything settled down, the column started moving again. We got to the village and it was on fire and so, but we knew that we know. We knew a lot of what had happened but that wasn’t near the ordeal that the media reported, now if the media had known about that, and one of the reasons that you hear about Lieutenant Callie in the Army and all them guys in there that you didn’t hear about us, we didn’t take the press with us. The Army liked to take the press with them to try to glorify all their events. We didn’t take that, in fact, most places we were, the press wouldn’t go anyway if they had any sense but we went on through there and you know the whole village would be on fire. But if the media had gotten, media for example, had gotten a hold of that there wouldn’t of been anything mentioned about that [the sniper fire] we took, that we give them warning first, and still took sniper fire before that so they said, “Oh the Marines just went in there and charged the village, killed all the…” That’s how it would of came out in the news, that’s why the public was very misled, very misled.
RV: Did you ever take any R&Rs?
MB: Yes.
RV: Can you tell me about that?
MB: Yeah, I went to Hawaii. I got to go there and actually, and actually I, first I violated the rules. I guess I could say that now because it was always “You were not supposed to go home” but Hawaii was expensive and I said, “Screw this, I’m going to go home for a few days.” So when I got into a Oahu I went ahead and bought a ticket, flew back to California, spent a few days with my folks, and then flew back to Hawaii and then took off from there. On back to Da Nang, because I couldn’t stay in Hawaii, I want to go home.
RV: How was it when you went home?
MB: Well everybody was glad to see me, and they were telling me, “Do you have to go back, do you have to go back?” I said, “Man, I ain’t supposed to be here.” And that’s where... This is after Khe Sanh and they, my mom and dad showed me a lot of pictures from the newspapers and talked about this and that and the other and I said, “No that isn’t right, this isn’t how it’s going.” I remember my dad asking me, “Mike, what the hell are we doing over there?” I said, “You know, I don’t know.” This is after Khe Sanh and after the exchange I had with Sergeant Ackers, you know about all the firepower we have but we’re taking this every day and I told my dad, I said, “Dad, I don’t know what we’re doing over there,” I said, “We’re just killing a bunch of people, getting a bunch of people lost,” and he says, “Is there oil, is there gold over there, is there mine, what’s,” I said, “There’s nothing over there but leeches and snakes and swamp.” I said, “Man if the North Vietnamese wanted it, God, man, let them have it. Jesus this ain’t worth fighting over.” I said, “But you know dad,” and this was when I was a little more flag waving then I am now. I said, “I’m sure the government knows what they are doing,” because I was still a kid, you know, and I said, “Well we don’t understand everything but I’m sure the government knows what they’re doing. We wouldn’t be over there if there wasn’t a reason.” Well guess what you know, and it was tougher leaving then because then I’m home amongst friendly people and I said, and I had already been over there. I think that’s why they don’t want you to go home on your R&R, because you get back to the states and you get out of that crap and they say your going to go AWOL or
something. You say, “Man, how can I get back here, amongst the girlfriend, and the roast
beef and everything and then willingly turn around, go back someplace where I know
what it is over and I may not come back. That’s why they don’t want you to come back,
but I went ahead anyway and I went on back. I said, “Well you know, don’t want to be
AWOL.

RV: Did it help you when you got back in country?
MB: Yeah it did because it just made me even more aware. So now I have got to
make it out of here because, especially now you see how the other people live, how the
Vietnamese and then you come back to your own taste of reality and say, “Man we got it
so good over there. I got to get back to that, that I hate to be over here, now for sure I do
not want to get knocked off or killed.” You’re really a lot more aware of it when you get
a taste of what the real world is and it is not like over there and said I got to get back to
that. So I’m going to not allow myself to complacent or lackadaisical and you get into
day counting, how many I got left, how many I got left you know. I said, “I got to get out
of here.”

RV: What do you think of the policy that you would do 12 or 13 month rotation,
did you think you knew in WWII that you served the entire conflict, did you think that
the policy for Vietnam was appropriate or did you think that the men should be there for
the entire duration of the war?
MB: Well I probably should have been over there until it was done but now when
I look at it now I’m glad then because Vietnam drug on for 14 years. And didn’t have to
simply because in WWII we were going all out to win it. It didn’t matter what we had to
do including dropping the A bomb at the end. We were in to win, and here we were just
dilly and dally. We were [Vietnam was] a test bed and you know something else I found
out and I’m sure it’s no surprise to the American people but there was a lot of people
back here in the states, a lot of entrepreneurs that were making money off that war, a lot
of money, man. The oil companies supplying fuel to the jets, the people making the
armor, the people who made your C-rations and food, there was a lot of money to be, a
lot of people made money off that thing to keep it going. And we weren’t doing anything
to win this and after Khe Sanh I was glad there was only going to be a 13 month simply
because we’re not fighting this thing to win it. We’re just going over to hold a piece of
ground, you know, and we’re still dickin’ with these guys, [in World War II]. We had to come from way behind and it only took us four years to whip both Germany and Japan from across a great ocean, but that’s because everybody was behind us back home, the women were working in the factories, building the airplanes, people were rationing. Whatever it took to get that job done the people were behind us and we weren’t pussies, we had guys like Patton you know rolling through everything you know ain’t no rules there. You know, you’re going to waste this line of this parallel [no lines of parallel], bologna, we’re going after Hitler and here at Hirohito and we’re going to knock these guys out, we’re going to end this crap. Well I didn’t see that in Vietnam and so I’m glad it was only 13 months. I said, Man you could be here forever and your chances of getting back would almost be nil because we’re not doing anything and we found that to be true when we walked out of there in ’75. And if you see, looking at the monuments that they have in DC, I’ve never seen them in person except in pictures but you look at the Iwo Jima memorial and some of, and one they’re doing for WWII and Korea and all and Civil War and ours is just a big slab wall with 58,000 names on it for nothing, for absolutely nothing. So in retrospect I’m glad that we didn’t, if we, well I’m sorry we was over there to begin with, if we had to be over there, I’m glad that we didn’t go more than 12, it was called 12 and 20.

RV: Right. Let’s get back to Quang Tri, you said you were there for two to three weeks and where did you go from there?

MB: We went to Dong Ha and we operated out of there, ran a few patrols. We had a skirmish across the dike, exchange of fire, and of course we didn’t have any of artillery with us because we were mobile at the time. And we called in a couple of air strikes and they nape’ed them, napalm, and that took care of that. Really there, for my unit, there was no more that I could consider major heavy fighting from that point on. We got into a situation at Hill 55 which was an almost Bazooka thing, that’s an interesting story I need to tell you about.

RV: Ok. Go ahead.

MB: We got to Hill 55 and the South Koreans had just had a skirmish there and what they had done, now they were attacked by a wave of them [gooks], and they opened up their own gates and let them in and then killed them all hand to hand when they got
them in there. And they still had a couple of the them that weren’t dead and just still
spread out on some make shift poles when we got there. We walked in and it looked like
walking into a zulu camp or something and there were your dead gooks strung out. Dried
up, and just dry blood laying everywhere and, you know, the South Koreans used them
for target practice. You know they were just, holy mollies for sitting in with the South
Koreans so we’re good to go. So we probably don’t have to put anybody on guard
tonight, you know, with these guys here. While I was there, and I wrote about this in my
book, if I ever get that finished. I’m sitting here and I got maybe about two months left in
country so I could see the light at the end of the tunnel. Ok, I’ve already been through
several skirmishes, the big thing at Khe Sanh, went home to see the folks which I wasn’t
supposed to do but and then came back. I’m still ducking and dogging and I’m ok and I
got about two months, ok. So if I can just wind up these last 60 days or so and then I’m
home free, I’m out of here. Little to my [one night], I was sleeping, looked at my watch
and it would be on more into the evening and they came and woke me up and they said,
“We got some action.” “What do you mean action?” “Gooks are out there.” He said,
“Grab the tube.” I went out there and you could hear there was a tank out there, just out
past the perimeter and it was dark, you know this must have been 10 o’clock at night or
something and you could just hear the tread on this thing just clank a de, clank a de, clank
you know and everybody was on alert. They got a hold of CP and their radio man was
trying to figure out what was going on and the Captain ordered rocket team because
anytime you’re dealing with a tank that’s you know.

RV: Right.

MB: Now I’d never shot at a tank except at Camp Pendleton, we use to take them
old derelict tanks that they were going to scrap anyway, use them for targets. So anyways
I grabbed the big launcher, which doesn’t matter because at night you can’t see down the
sights anyway. So if your going to shoot at something you’re almost using Kentucky
Windage. So I said, “John Bosch, now your going to have to assist me down there.” And
we you know go down there and they get us down there along in the trench there, close to
where this thing is and they said, “He’s out there maybe 70 yards.” And I’m thinking oh
man, not now, you know, I’m two months away. I don’t need this and you have to
understand in rocket school, we learned a lot of things about the two different tanks that
the gooks had, they were all Soviet made; the T-72’s and the T-76’s and it’s hard to tell
the difference at night. The 76, they use to tell us they had an infrared thing in it to where
it could pin point heat and flash so if you ever fired on one of these you want to hit him.
Because if it’s one of the T-76 with the infrared, they’ll know where you are and they’ll
swing that gun around and you’re going to be in trouble. So you need to, you know [be
on the money], and a Bazooka is capable of taking out a tank but you got to make it hit.
Now this is at night, Rich, at best you can see a silhouette sometimes and not much of it,
and you kind of look for the sweet spot and the sweet spot on a tank is where the turret
reached the body. That’s where the armor is actually definitive [most vulnerable]. You’ll
hear these old war stories and if, I don’t know who made it up, but about knocking the
treads off the tank, well that’s you know. That’s stupid because that gun turret can swing
360 degrees, you know you could knock the tread off a tank but he can still kill you. As
long as he can swing that gun and operate that thing, you can’t get out of his range, they
can shoot several miles, some of them. So, you know, and they tell you that the spot to hit
a tank is where the turret meets the body and to be sure that you get him the first time
because it’s a T-76. And the guys who’s watching the infrared, there’s a little infrared
screen is alert or awake at the time, he’ll see where that came from, he’ll swing that gun,
and your butt is in trouble.

RV: Could you see the tank?

MB: I could see the tank, but like a dark silhouette, you know, like you look out
in your back yard at night and you got no lights except the moon light and you see
somebody coming up the road. You better see a pick-up truck trucking up north of the
vehicle but you can’t see a definitive outline. So I’m out there and Bosch pulls out one of
the rockets there and 3.5 launcher, there a big 90 millimeter rocket. I mean more then
enough to use up, this isn’t a job for the LAAW Rocket, this is for the ol’ tube so we lock
and load. You get the thing [He locks it] in there, taps me on the helmet which is a sign
that okay, your locked and loaded, armed and lever is up, you can squeeze off whenever
you’re ready. But we hadn’t got the word to fire because word came down to just lock
and load and be ready. So I’m out there listening to this thing and you could still see him
moving, barely make him out through the darkness and he stops. He just stops and he is
sitting there idling and idling some more and you know five minutes seems like an
eternity at that point. A million things are going through your mind, man, you know is
this one of the 76’s, it’s got the infrared? Is this, you know, I’ve got to make this shot
count, how the hell am I going to do that? I can’t see through the sights. I know right
about where he is. I can see his silhouette sometimes through the clouded moonlight and
he’s out there running and I said, “Man, oh man, oh God, I only got two months left and
we got to get into this.” We’re waiting and waiting and waiting and Bosch, he gets over
there close to me and he leans over and he says, “Brad, Brad.” I said, “What?” He says,
“Remember back at Pendleton, remember at school where they taught us about these,
about them tanks?” I said “Yeah, yeah.” About a minute goes by and he says, “Brad,
Brad.” I said, “What?” He says, “Brad, you wouldn’t miss would you?” I said, “Shut up”,
geez, you know and we’re waiting and waiting and pretty soon the word comes down to
stand down, unload, he said, “It’s one of ours.” and what it turned out to be was an Army
tank that had gotten lost out of his, got separated from his formation and was wondering
around in the middle of the night.

RV: Wow.

MB: So our command post finally found out, got their coordinates, called him,
called their radio man in the tank and they shut the thing off and they got out and left,
couple of our guys escorted them in, said, “We don’t need you guys running around in
the middle of the night and go over a land mine or something. You almost got blown up
here, you know. So the guys got another tank, came in through the wire and they just
spent the night with us, and, you know. South Koreans who knows what they were ready
to do, they were unloaded too so but, fortunately nothing started. So then the next day it
was bright sun shiny out and you know they climbed back into the thing and I guess they
got a hold of there own unit, they rolled off somewhere. But in subsequent years at
Marine Corps Reunions, sometimes, you know you get talking to some of the new guys
or whatever you know and they say, “What did you do in ‘Nam?” “I was a Bazooka
Man.” “Oh.” One of the reunions some guy says, “Hey did you ever get a shot at a tank?”
I say, “Well,” I say, “Almost, one of ours!” (laughter)

RV: Wrong one!

MB: But oh, I tell you, Rich; I must have aged ten years.

RV: Really?
MB: Oh right there because it’s the middle of the night and if you miss and he’s got an infrared, which is sometime heat seeking, with your body heat and you don’t. You know it becomes, the advantage quickly shifts if before you can get reloaded again you know he can get one off at you and probably hit you. Of course, tanks shoot big enough rounds whereas if they’re just close, they do a lot of damage and when you get down to your last two months you don’t even want to see a gook. You say, “Man I’m this close now, don’t nobody start nothing and here we are in the middle of the night and this thing is out here running in idle, I can barely see him. I can’t see him down the sights, and I’m thinking he’s a enemy guy, there is no reason to believe he’s one of ours, you know, and I got my finger inches from the trigger. I’m locked and loaded and a million things running through my mind, this is going to be it, if I don’t get this guy, I ain’t going to get out of here.

RV: It came down to one shot you thought.

MB: Well if he had been a gook guy and it would have been an infrared after my first round if it didn’t hit exactly where it needed to hit and you couldn’t guarantee that in the middle of the night. You can’t, because [I’d have been in deep shit] we didn’t have the infrared stuff, the starlight stuff then on some of our weapons that what they have now so. But the tanks were fairly well equipped and his gun shoots anywhere from a 105 to 120 millimeter, well bigger than ours [rockets] and he, you know, he’s got some armor around him unless you punch through that little sweet spot. And at night then, you know, in the daytime you can pinpoint your shoots but at night when all you can see is a silhouette you don’t know exactly where that thing is and your sights are no good. You had pretty good optics on them old 3.5’s but it’s strictly daytime.

RV: Now did you go back to your tent and go to sleep after that or did you stay awake all night?

MB: I was awake all night, I went back into the bunker they had there and I just, I broke out in a sweat and Bosch is in there with me, we shared that, shared a bunker, because we stayed as a team and we just sit there just kind of looked at each other, “God that was close.” “Man, I thought I was going…” “Jesus, man, I don’t need this, I got two months left...” and Bosch had five or six months left, he didn’t make it out. He was killed before he got out. Of course we didn’t know that at the time but man I said, “Man this is”
and it was one turned up to be one of ours and said, “Don’t need this.” I said, “I just want to go home after this.” From Hill 55 we went to Hai Van Pass and I finished up my last month or two up there and…

RV: What were you all doing up there?

MB: We’re relieving another Marine outfit, we’ll pick the high ground that overlooked the An Lo Bridge and the main [road]. We were up there with parts of, I think, 2/26 was up there also and they were down, further down the road and the idea was to, it was a vital bridge, you know, but we used transportation to make sure the gooks didn’t get a chance to blow it up. But we had plenty of Marine elements all over it. Then on the other side of Hai Van we had one of the Army units over there so there was enough Americans over there where, I guess, where they didn’t mess with us. So I guess my last month wasn’t too bad. It was just get up, in fact, I didn’t have any duties up there because I had a bunker up way up there on the top of this one hill, along this dirt road and there were several other units surrounding. You weren’t going to get called out even to stand and watch it because you had enough infantry with all the units that were there. So you were going to sleep well at night and just kick back and do what you’re going to do in the daytime if you were a rocket man unless they needed you. Unless they drop a rocket in somewhere so I got to say my last month or so at Vietnam wasn’t too bad.

RV: Mike why don’t we take a break for a moment?

MB: Sure.

RV: Ok. We left off sir with you were basically getting ready to leave. You said that last month was pretty uneventful.

MB: Yeah, yeah that was, well I figured they owed me that after the tank episode, so yeah the last month was uneventful, that works on you too a little. You get down to the last five days and you got all these things running through your mind you say, you know, “I made it through all of this now watch something happen now before I can get out of here.” That only really comes to fruition when you finally go back to Da Nang, turn your gear in, second to the last day you turn in your rifle. In which case I swapped with another guy so he could have my M-14, I took his M-16 and turned one in, which worked out neat because they issued me a 16 when I first got there so I turned in a 16 when I left and then you really feel vulnerable because now you got no arms, no armament at all and
when you walk to the runway. They had contract 707’s to come in and get us and all you
could picture is going down the runway and having some gook on the end of a runway
somewhere, taking a pot shot and hitting the [fuel] tank and somehow you were going to
have to put up with this whole mess only for them to get you when you left.

RV: Now did you think that was a possibility, did that go through your mind?

MB: Oh yeah, a lot of things go in your mind, you know, because you put up with
so much crap, you say, “Now I’m finally going to get out of here.” You say, “Oh no, it’s
not, it’s not it because it’s going to have to end on the plane. The plane was loaded it’s
got Marines and Army guys and stuff and it was dead quiet on that there [board], even
with the stewardess going back and forth, it was dead quiet in there. You didn’t hear
nothing.

RV: Why was that?

MB: Well I think everybody was thinking the same thing, maybe, because when
we got off and the gear come up into the well and we started to climb out and peel out
and then everybody just broke out into a big cheer. Just from dead silence to a big cheer.
I think everybody was sweating because Da Nang does take rockets from time to time. So
you’re thinking a million things when your, and 707 is a big target, pretty hard to miss,
and so, you know, you see gook sitting on the outside of the city, maybe, with a 122
missile or, and they were very good with those too, and mortars. I said “Watch us get in
the oil mound, watch us get to the end of the runway and because it’s night shoot, you
probably know this, it’s a chance to get a 150 of them in a whack or whatever.

RV: How did you feel knowing that you were leaving? What was going through
your mind?

MB: Well in a way I was sorry to leave because I didn’t feel like we finished
anything and I left some friends back there that wasn’t their time to leave yet and I said,
“Oh man, I hope you guys make it home, I hope I see you guys again.” Then it switched
to, “Won’t get on… there’s the end of the runway.” I said, “I hope we make it out of
here” which was probably the only other time besides when I was in Khe Sanh where I
ever actually felt so scared. Scared to any degree, watching half of the mountain, you’re
loader was killing a bunch of us and no way to fight back, you know, because we’re not
allowed to take weapons back to the states. Which was good for Berkley College that we
weren’t allowed to do that. Like I said, finally when it got airborne and flying out, it was
almost like on cue the whole plane just let out a “yea” and people started loosening up, all
the stewardesses, you know. They were all happy because they didn’t want to be there
neither and we flew into Okinawa and we were there for four days, got one night’s liberty
at Okinawa.

RV: What did you do?
MB: Well an old buddy of mine that I was in Barstow with was stationed there
during this whole time and he took me out and showed me the town. We went out and
had a few beers. Went to a cathouse and just partied; we had half an inch of kind of a
funny little looking half (indiscernible series of words). We had this one guy that was so
damn drunk he’s just raising all kinds of cain and, back in the barracks and some of us
were in there playing cards. And this guy had been a, this guy, oh, I don’t know, he was
always that was embarrassing people. And so a couple of guys went out of the barracks
and they got a pick-up truck, they got it out of the motor school, probably stole it. I’m
sure they did, brought it back, and this guy had already passed out in his bunk and they
picked up his bunk and he’s laying there in his skivvies, picked him up, bunk and all, put
it in the back of the pick-up truck, and they took it over in front of the officer’s club,
dropped it off, in front of the officer’s club and took off. They came back in there with us
playing cards. A couple of hours later, this MP pick-up truck pulls up and now this guys
is in his bed, he’s feeling conked out, half in his bed, but he’s half awake now too
because he doesn’t know what’s going on. The MP came in and they got him out of the
rack off their truck and they said, “You guys know anything about…” “Oh no, no, he’s
always, this guy is always [doing shit like this] want to do these things, you know, he
probably did it himself.” Well that was [a typical day together] kind of, you know,
laughed together but the four days in Okinawa we just kind of reindoctrinated. They
checked us all over medically and they said, nobody had any Malaria or anything like that
when we come back and then they gave out orders, also. Ok you guys, some of the guys
are getting out of the Corps and some of you guys are being sent to Pendleton and so and
so, you, you, and you you’re going to this outfit when you get back so when you come
back off leave. You know everybody was going on leave, they went back, so you know,
and I was being assigned to Camp Pendleton so I knew where I was going and then on
the fourth day you took off, they flew us into L.A. We all kind of scattered and went our own separate ways.

RV: What was it like getting back into the United States at L.A. Airport, did anything happen?

MB: Well I didn’t see any protestors in L.A. I guess they didn’t know when every flight was coming in. So we just, so for me, that again was uneventful but I made a connecting flight from there into San Jose and I flew in there. Visited awhile, went and picked up my car and drove to Camp Pendleton to check in, but there were no great public receptions either. It wasn’t like with WWII, of course, there again, you know when the guys came back from WWII and Desert Storm we had already won something. So all the crowds were out there to welcome everybody back and even Desert Storm, you know, the Marshal Islands and their minted special commemorative coins and this and that. Vietnam guys were all just a bunch of scum bags, baby killers, and psychos, and so we just dropped off into obscurity which I’m glad there is outfits like you guys who are trying to make sure that that doesn’t continue. Somebody will know we were around, maybe for the right causes, we’ve been dislabeled for, just years, you know, we’re all a bunch of mercenaries or something.

RV: Tell me about your transition back into life in the United States. You stayed in the Corps for another year?

MB: Nope. No, I stayed in it for about another eight months. I only had about eight months left on my enlistment.

RV: Did people ask you about Vietnam and what you had done there?

MB: Yes.

RV: Civilian or military or both?

MB: Well civilians while I was home and you could see right then that when you really knew that you were misrepresented because they would say, “Oh did you guys go cutting ears off people? Did you guys do this, that”, you know what I am saying? “Where are you getting this?” I said, “No, man, it wasn’t like this, it was like this.” “Oh, well heard you guys get fresh food, I see you heard it the other way around too, said they were bringing you guys out fresh food, you guys were having hot meals.” I said, “No, that was wrong too, because this is how we lived.” I said, “You know, the Walter Cronkite reports,
they tried, maybe tried to do what they go with whatever facts they think they have and
then if it doesn’t sound juicy enough they’ll make something up, because I’ve heard of
crap that I’ve never heard of over there so no this is how it was. You get this from the
horse’s mouth because I just came back, and so you get that. When I got to Pendleton and
checked in there, I was stationed in Camp Margarita and Pendleton is made up of several
different camps and Margarita was a staging area and they put us in, oh what do they call,
a short timers platoon, those were the ones that only had several months left. But they
would have us train, help train some of the other guys. In the outfit I was with, there’s
was 3/27 and there was a 3/26 in ‘Nam. The 3/27 was getting ready to go over and so
they had us old guys working with the young guys, trying to help teach them the ropes for
their training and of course there was always no shortage of questions from the newer
guys, they said, “Oh you guys were at Khe Sanh, you guys went to Khe Sanh! You know
that’s something.” “You know, I’ve seen a couple dozen operations over there.” But all
anybody wanted to talk about was Khe Sanh because, I guess, that because it was the big
one so that’s the one you always get asked about. They say, “Well, so you passed along a
gunner?” I said, “Well, no they taught us in San Diego. He said, “Don’t listen most of
that’s good” He said, “but let me tell you what else we found over there.” You try telling
him, you try to help him along. He tried to get a bunch of us to reenlist as a short timer
and the idea was to entice us with $3500 bonus and another stripe. Now $3500 is a lot of
money in 1969 and there was like, I think, 22 or 23 of us and none of us were reenlisting,
we think we had enough of ‘Nam and said we ain’t going back because we knew if you
re-uped, you were going to be in with the 3/27’s and you’re going back. I said, “No, no,
we just come out of that crap.” I said, “We’re not going back.” So what they did, and this
is probably the best deal I ever had in the Corps. They put us in barracks by ourselves,
just all the old farts, and you know I say old farts, we were like 23, 22 considering that’s
nothing, and they’d only use us about twice a week. Well we’d go out and we’d do close
order drills and do calisthenics stuff, but they would have us go out twice a week,
sometimes only once a week. They would load us up in a truck and they would take us
over to San Onofre where some of the young guys were training and they’d use us as the
bad guys. We would be the guys that would lay along the trail with blank ammunition
cords and then we’d wait. Then the new guys would come in formation and we’d ambush
them and everybody would be exchanging blank fire and they would have field judges out there to say okay, you got killed and what we should have done. Usually we would have to let them know, we would have to let the instructors know where we were going to be, but sometimes we didn’t and we surprised them coming out of chow hall one morning before they even got out there, but that’s how they used to do with us. When I was a young guy training in Pendleton and we would be going through these war games, it was always a bad guy shooting at us, I was just wondering who’s the bad guy out here. Well they just told them Marines who had already been there and so we got to kind of play. We got to kind of be the gooks and we made good gooks because we had been over there and you learn some of the things over there that you can apply back here. So when we laid at some places on the trail, whatever the exception, so once and sometimes twice a week we, you know, they’d take us out there and we’d be the bad guys. We would shoot them up for about an hour, put us back in our truck, bring us back and we would be either playing cards, or going into town, or you know. So about my last, oh my last probably three or four months in the Marine Corps was pretty good duty because I just got to be kind of a Caucasian gook. (Laughter) So then that’s it, nah, this ain’t for me and I’m going to get up and go ahead and get out and went on back to California to the Bay area.

RV: Now you end up joining the Air Force, is that correct?
MB: Yes I did. I was, see I was out for two years. I had a hard time finding a job.
RV: Was that related to your Vietnam experience or just in general?
MB: No, that was, I think, well a lot of it was Vietnam experience because you know when I went into the Marine Corps, I went in right out of high school. So I didn’t have a trade and all I did in the Marine Corps was shoot a Bazooka, that was my main thing and you know what, let me tell you what. When you look in the help wanted section of the newspapers, you don’t see many calls for a Bazooka man. They’re just not out there. I called an employment agency one time and they said, “Can you operate heavy equipment?” I said, No, I could blow them up though.” If I ended up working in a warehouse, standing in a lumber mill, and just dead end jobs, and so I ran into a old high school buddy of mine and he was home on leave. He had joined the Air Force the same time I went into the Corps and he was still in, in fact he had just reenlisted and he was home on leave. He said, “You ought to come join the Air Force.” “The Air Force, them
candy asses, I don’t want to join them.” He said, “Well you say what you want but let me
tell you what, you live better then I am sure you guys did, and you got hot meals and
you’re living in nice facilities and stuff and they’ll teach you a trade, if you learn a trade,
you can apply it to the outside. What are you doing right now?” I said, “Working in a
lumber yard.” “Working in a lumber yard, you’ll work there until you dead.” He said,
“You ought to think about it.” So I gave it some thought and I said, “Man, you’re right
and I’m not getting anywhere here.” So I talked to a recruiter and he said, “Well we’ll
send you somewhere to school.” I said, “I don’t think I need to go to basic training.” He
said, “Nah, if you’ve been through Marine Boot, you don’t need to go anywhere else.
We’ll send you right to school for four weeks.” Sent me to supply school, which I wanted
to be an aircraft mechanic and there weren’t any openings at the time. They said, you
know, you could cross train later so I did that and I went into the Air Force as a supply
technician, worked that for a few years and then eventually crossed into Air Craft
Mechanics and then finished out my career as an air craft maintenance man. That’s when
I retired in August of ’88.

RV: Let me ask you a couple of questions about war after you got home. Did you
keep up with what was happening?

MB: At first I didn’t, because I didn’t care anything about it but then I watched,
you wonder about your old buddies, you know, I wondered who was over there, what are
we doing. After a while, after a few years, you would see something in the paper and it
wasn’t, it kind of faded away from my memory until I got to Italy. One of my Air Force
assignments was to send me to Italy. I was there for a year and half, ’75 to ’76 and while
I was there in ’75 the news came that we walked out of Vietnam, just left and then it all
resurfaced. I said, “My goodness.” I said, “So we just left it?” We left a lot of blood and a
lot of, you know, we left a lot over there! I mean we just left, we didn’t, you mean like
we evacuated, like we just packed up, and said oh ok well, we’ve had enough and we’re
going to go, you know. You talk to guys today, say some of the Vets, and say, “Well we
didn’t really lose that war.” Well yes we did, I don’t care how you, you know, we didn’t
win anything, you know. We got 58,000 plus who didn’t come home except in a body
bag, you know. So what are we, you know, and so at that point Rich, I had pretty much
erased then most of the bad feelings and memories out and then that all resurfaced when
we just left. I was expecting us to basically prevail somewhere because we’re the United
States. This is America, man, we don’t lose things, we win things, you know, we don’t
mess with nobody, but when somebody messes with us, we just don’t do this. It’s such an
empty feeling that to know that we’re all over there but not with backing guys got hit,
guys limping around the rest of their lives, there hobbling along with limbs blown off,
and stuff and we just walked out, we just, 14 years against a third, fourth world country
that we could of annihilated in two weeks but we stayed there for 14 years. Drug it out,
lost all kinds of guys, spent all kinds of money, and just left, you know, and oh man, I got
heated up over that and said, “Man this is, I can’t believe that I’m seeing what I’m
seeing.”

RV: How do you feel about your own personal service over there?

MB: Well it was an experience. I’m proud to be a Marine but I hate that I killed
for no reason. Vietnam taught me a few things, it taught me what I am capable of and it
also put in a hard lesson not to follow the government. Nor take everything they do and
say as gospel and, but I would never, and I won’t, I will never pick up a weapon against
somebody else [unless we’re in a direct] and get in another attack. We’re either going,
and I’ve talked to my son about that, said he’s looking at joining the Navy, and I said,
“Well if you do that, that’s fine, don’t make a career out of it.” First of all, Sam doesn’t
honor his promises, and they’ll promise you the moon, but it won’t be there at the end, is
a death to finding out now. I said, “The people who should have been busting ass and a
lot of them never served a day in the service, they have no problem at all about sending
young men into harm’s way for there own little games.” and I said, “We’re sticking our
nose into places where it don’t belong,” and I said, “I believe the freedom’s we have here
are worth fighting for, but it used to be America, I think it use to be a sensational thing
but I am never going to get involved in anybody’s problem.” Said, “Now, “I’ll fight to
the last shot if we ever get invaded in this country but that’s what it’s going to take.” I
said, “This crap [that’s been going on] with this going over, you know, and the
politicians, they’re not the ones going to fight this, they get their kids out of serving as
well and all of this. A lot of these little crooks that are career politicians of the Kennedy’s
in this world, Schumers and the rest of them, Bush’s too. They’ll send you into places
that they get us involved in all because [of political greed and hidden agendas], well we
signed all these borders we’ll send them too. What do you mean you’ll send them, you’ll
work, you know if America fits your personal pocket or something, is that what we’re
dying for? So we can make money or what, you know, they’re sitting back on their fat
butts watching TV, watching the Rose Bowl, and these poor guys who are over there
ducking, dodging bullets. We’re still losing guys everyday in Iraq, you know, it should
be, we should, very strong military, and we shouldn’t be afraid to use it, but it needs to be
for us, not for everybody else. We can’t be, it’s stupid to be the world [police] force and
when I looked back at ‘Nam, staying in Vietnam say okay I went over there, right or
wrong I did it but by god if I’d ever do it again. They’re going to have to come our shores
and say, “We’re taking you guys over.” Then I’ll stand up, I don’t care if I’m 60 years
old, I still got personal weapons. I’ll go out there and fight ahead of some of the active
duty guys but damn if I’m going to give them back, involved with some other, somebody
else’s skirmishes. That was, you know, it was, and there’s stuff when you’re talking to
people and they say that they’re going to get a straight answer from you because [you
were there, it’s hard.] the say well, “I’ll just ask a vet why were we there?” I got to stand
there and tell them, “I don’t know.” “You don’t know, you were there, you don’t know?”
Well, no I don’t and nobody I was over there with knows but I know that we’re, how
we’re treated later on, this is really a bad deal, it really is because [they lie to you to get
you] one of the things that they get you to stay in with, and I did that in the Air Force, I
wasn’t planning to make a career or nothing but in the military service you don’t make a
lot of money an if you decide you don’t like it, you don’t just give somebody a 30 day
notice and leave, you know. You can’t just quit, you got to stay and serve out your term
and while you’re in the service, you pull up stakes every three, four years then get into
places that maybe you don’t want to be, or countries where, you know, Americans all not
well liked. If you have a family, a wife and kids, and you got to uproot them out of
schools and everything and like I said, you don’t make a lot of money, there’s not a lot of
future. If you live long enough, you stay in long enough to retire, you can’t live on it. It’s
not enough money unless you’re a Colonel or something you can’t live on it so to keep
you in they know they have a lot working, a lot that they have to compete with because
they know as you do that your a civilian counterpart that you went to school with is got in
on the ground floor and there an executive somewhere making all kinds of money and
you’re thinking you know I could be out there doing that. Why should I work for pennies and a couple of stripes? So they coaxed us over for it. They say, “Well but you know, if you give us 20 years, your going to have free medical and dental work [for life], you’ll never have to worry about that. That’s worth a lot of money, you know, it may apply then because it’s expensive, of course today it’s really expensive. Well you get down to the end and everything changes, everything just changes. Now you’re doing out of pocket, you’re having, you still get your own insurance, you can’t, the VA is so under-funded that you know you might as well not have a VA because it takes you six or seven months to get in to see somebody. And to the average Vietnam vet, we’re not psycho, like a lot of people think, when some of you guys interview us, or people talk on the streets they say, “Oh man, all them guys from ‘Nam, they’re all drug nuts, they’re all screwed up”, there is just a lot of anger because you got. Especially the guys who made military careers because your over there as part of a war that never really was declared but we fought a fight that nobody else wanted to fight, that’s why there were so many protestors and everything. Most people in the country, and its human nature, don’t want to go out into combat, they you know, given your choice you’d [most people would] rather spend a day out on the lake fishing then out there having some guy try to blow your head off, but somebody has to do it if we’re going to preserve the freedom. So we have in this country so when you look at that and you guise it as Patriotism or whatever I guess but the Vietnam vet looks at that and he said, “Ok, well I was willing to do what, but most of these guys would rather go to college, but I was willing to but they didn’t want to so they could have what they have and maybe we could have what we have and along the lines I was promised by our government that if we would give them a whole 20 years and go to Korea and go to everywhere else [we were assigned] and reload of assignments and give up 20 years of your life and that’s a long 20 years because you, because there are no eight hour shifts in the military, but they could almost work you around the clock sometimes and put up with the crap. A lot of people like to be an individual, grow beards and stuff, well you can’t do that in service, everything is spit and polish and you adhere to, and adhere to, and adhere to, and you put up with undue amount of crap but you do it and they keep you reenlisting because you kind of have something on the end. Now you’re not going to have a lot of money because you ain’t going to make a lot of money, your
civilians counterpart is but you ain’t, but your going to have, with the medical problems you pick and those who have Agent Orange are really going through that right now.

RV: Do you have an...

MB: You can have something on the end of it, well you ain’t going to have nothing ahead of you because you put all this time in and you find that all the rules have been changed. Now you get to do some out of pocket and [all you’ve got going for you is] your going, you know, what you got at, the VA, yeah you got six or seven months at a time to wait until you get in to see somebody. And you come back to the states, Rich, and nobody gives a rat’s butt. You got people protesting, you got people who sent food, aid, and comfort to the enemy when you couldn’t get shit brought in with your helicopters.

Ok, and you remember that but you remember you sacrificed and sacrificed to keep doing this and then it’s not there at the end and you’re taking six or seven months to just see somebody. You’re watching the VA clinics, happen to be closed down but we got billions of dollars for Iraq, and we got billions of dollars for Africa and all the illegals in the world can come over the border, walk into any hospital along the south and say, “No habla, no habla,” and they get in and they get free medical care. The felons, the convicted felons, in prison get better care then the Vets do and they don’t have to wait months for it and it’s free. The Taliban, the captured Taliban in Cuba, the Red Cross was there. The ACLU is there just to make sure that they got everything that they [need], the illegals are getting free care and the Vets are sitting [aside] with all kinds of ailments, you ought to see it in the Veterans hospital. If you’ve never been to one, guys walking around there with arms missing, legs missing, hasn’t been able to see a doctor. Can’t afford to have a look at a civilians program because you haven’t been building a nest egg and you haven’t been building a nest egg because you don’t make a lot of money in the service and when you do retire, you realize what little retirement pension you got, it doesn’t, it might make a house payment and that’s about it. You still got to out there and compete with 20 year olds for jobs and trying to get hired, as a Vietnam vet is tough. That’s why I was telling you yesterday, a lot of times I don’t put down on any paperwork that I was a veteran just for that reason, because the way you’re treated. They looked at a 45 year old guy, 40 or 45, he gets out of the service and one thing the employer sees, he sees a guy that once he gets trained, he may not be with them very long because the guy’s only going to get 15
years out of you, maybe. He’s going to build enough you know to, I told them guys “We ain’t going to get a lot of years.” Then there’s the stigma in the mind among the people that these Vietnam guys are baby killers or psychos, you know, he’s probably not right, you know. We’re just as normal as anybody else but in our minds, man, these guys ain’t, and it’s tough sometimes to compete for jobs when you’re at that age and you got to do that because your medical is not free as it was promised. Everything changes, but we got money for everything else but not for the vet.

RV: Do you suffer from any disabilities, you mentioned Agent Orange and you mentioned the PTSD, the dreams that you had. Can you tell me about that?

MB: I didn’t have, the only event, that one dream up to about gooks being in the trench that lasted for a couple of years. I would have it almost once every other week, but the Agent Orange, we were sprayed with that up at Khe Sanh, it was a defoliant. Well you go through an area that’s supposed to be clear, well that stuff hangs around for months, it’s still breathing and, of course I have cancer from that and the diabetes from that. They linked both of them because there is no history in my family at all and they told us two reunions ago, the only head in Chicago, got a representative there from VA, talked to Khe Sanh Appreciation Memorial in Chicago. I don’t know if you were there for that. They told us he said, “If any of you guys have got any form of cancer,” which I didn’t know I had at the time, “or diabetes or anything like that, and especially if there’s no history in your family anywhere of it, you need to get to the VA because they’ve linked it with [Agent] Orange and you guys were laced in it up at Khe Sanh, it was one of the heavy regiments [targets] so you need to get down there.” So I’ve got some problems with that and see that’s another thing with me personally, not only do I carry the anger from being lied to by our own country, and betrayed but I’ve got a potentially terminal illness from this and I still can’t hardly get in to see the VA. Now yesterday was the first time I’ve been to see the VA in a while. And I watched on TV where the illegals says you need to get all this for free and we’re sending billions of dollars for this and billions of dollars and this is all “not the governments money, the people’s money” but I kept hearing it all through Bush’s campaign and we’re closing down VA clinics but we’re giving medicals for everybody else and I said, “You know does a Vet count for anything in here?” Not that we’re anybody special but you know if there weren’t any Vets we
wouldn’t have what we have. I saw a bumper sticker one time said, “Next time you’re in
trouble, call a hippie.” Who’s going to stand up and defend this country if you didn’t
have people willing to do it and you won’t find a Veteran, including the one your talking
to right now. You won’t find a veteran that wants anything lucrative nor does he want
any pats on the back, “Oh you guys are great, we’re going to give you this,” you know,
you talk to anybody, all he wants is what was promised him. He said, “We sacrificed for
this, we got shot at, some of us got chemicals but we did this so the rest of this country
didn’t have to, so maybe our sons wouldn’t have to and you guys said you, there would
be some [free and ample] medical on the end of here so if we have problems and it ain’t
there. We often feel like we’ve been used and lied to”, which we have, and this thing
about the PTSD and all these other, all the psychological problems, I think most of that
Rich, I feel is just anger. When you get it, when you talk to a vet and you get deep in on
conversation and a lot of us, this stuff comes from the service because it’s stuff that’s
happened and it’s stuff that a lot of us have kept dwelling on. So when you start bringing
it up and he gets to ranting and raving you say, “Man, you know, because you went
through this and that and this is what they did, we’re being screwed.” Something
awesome when you’re talking to a civilian that comes across, the civilian says, “Man this
guy is nuts.” No this guy ain’t nuts, this guy has actually done there shit and he’s been
hammered and he’s been kicked off to the side like he is yesterday’s garbage. Maybe they
hope if enough of us die off there won’t be any need for anymore clinics or anything like
that. They’ve had to close some of them that worked and nobody’s asking, there ain’t a
vet nowhere asking to go to the Mayo Clinic for some disease that was caused by the
military which Agent Orange is certainly is, but nobody is asking oh well I want doctor
so and so at the Male Clinic, no, just, and I don’t expect those 50 million dollars
compensations, [The Japs think they should have]. Well we can compensate to death
means, I suppose, we can for WWII we can compensate everybody else who thinks they
got it coming but the best thing to even ask the Vets. All the Vets care about is a fair
shake, you know just deliver. You know we delivered our end of the bargain Uncle Sam,
how about being even with us and for the American people not to look, not be looking at
us as a bunch of mercenaries because we weren’t but that’s how we were portrayed, we
were portrayed as the bad guys.
RV: Well tell me what you think about the movies and the books written on Vietnam.

MB: I haven’t seen a movie that I thought was close. I haven’t seen a, oh, I saw, especially the Rambo ones, and I will tell you about that one with the rocket launcher through that deal there. *Full Metal Jacket* was entertaining but there were some fallacies. Did you see *Full Metal Jacket*?

RV: Many times.

MB: Well there were some fallacies. It was entertaining I suppose.

RV: Was the first part the Paris Island Marine Corps Basic Training; was it accurate to a point?

MB: No. Well some of it was, the DI physically slapping people around, the screaming and yelling, yeah that was pretty accurate. In fact the guy was so good I said, “Man, I bet that guy is a real DI because they couldn’t train an actor to go up there and try to hit”, but the guy who played Gomer Pyle that fat guy. Okay the guy couldn’t move any. In real boot camp he wouldn’t make it past the first week, he’d never been up for the whole duration. Near the end of the boot camp when he’s got a full loaded magazine, he’d never have needed that because every round at the range is accounted for. Every cartridge case is accounted for but he’d of never had a full, he wouldn’t have had any live ammo at all and the other thing I had to laugh at was the DI came down through there during inspection and found a jelly doughnut in this guy’s locker. I said, “Where is this guy can get a jelly doughnut in this guy’s locker. I said, “Where is this guy can get a jelly doughnut, you’ve never seen a jelly doughnut in a Marine Corps mess hall. Everything is lean and green so what did this guy, sneak out the base away while we all go to Circle K or something, you know, where did this guy get a jelly doughnut. He’s yelling at him, “What is this?” He says, “Jelly Doughnut, Sir.” “A jelly doughnut, where did it come from?” And I’m thinking, “Yeah, where did it come from?” It didn’t come from the chow hall buddy. So that was, he almost got the ‘Nam scenes, I don’t know where that was filmed, but it was realistic looking.

RV: It was supposed be in Hue City.

MB: Yeah, well ok, that could have been because most of that was real looking, but I thought about that, I said, “Well yeah, but you know, I wonder if the North who runs Vietnam now, would allow somebody to come in and [film there]...
RV: Now they didn’t film it there for sure. It was just the depiction was supposed
to be Hue City after Tet.
MB: Yeah, right, but some of it looked real, I’m not sure where that was.
RV: Well so many movies help shape the public’s memory of events,
especially…
MB: Yeah these guys are running around town, they run around this town with
the hookers and stuff, and I said, “Man we never got to live like that, I’d like to have been
in that outfit.
RV: Any other movies that come to mind, or books that you’ve read or heard
about that?
MB: No. Well, the only film that I ever watched on Vietnam was if there was
something on the History Channel. I’ve got to where I don’t believe Hollywood so I can’t
say that there aren’t any good movies, there might be. I’ve heard, “Hey Mike, you ought
to see that one. That was pretty good.” I say, “Yeah, I bet it was. Was it a Arnold
Schwarzenegger Terminator movie or something, or who was in it?” There is no
substitute for the real thing if you notice, you got to be there as it happens, and then, too,
I don’t, having gone through the real thing at Khe Sanh, mainly. You know I don’t have a
great aversion to watch those, although when History runs things on Tet, I’ll watch that
just to check for accuracy or to see if they might, is anybody in there I might know? Of
course, they didn’t film anything on 861 or 881 because there, you know, there were
never any cameramen VP there. The only pictures that exist up there are aerial photos and
just snapshots by guys like myself might of taken up there. So…
RV: Would you ever want to go back to Vietnam?
MB: Nope, but we had a guy that did and I got a, his name was Dennis Mannion,
and Dennis; I got a copy of the video that he took up there. He went back there, back to
Khe Sanh and back up to 861 and it shows in the film where it’s all grown over. That
gives you a forgotten feeling too because it doesn’t look like a battle field anymore, all
grown over and flowers growing up on that thing now, unless you knew where it was,
you would never know there was a war ever fought up there. He found a couple of C-
rations things and a few other mementos that he brought back. I don’t personally have
any ambitions to go back over there, I think once is enough.
RV: If you had to speak to say a class full of high school students or college students about the Vietnam War, what would you tell them about it?

MB: I would tell them, if you guys are wanting to know anything about it, you talk to a vet, don’t believe what you read in the papers and then be proud to be an American, stand up, stand up for the country. Stand for our country, not everybody else’s. These politicians will get you killed in a minute for their own personal agenda and there, you see, and they aren’t the ones that have to do this. Abraham Lincoln, during the Civil War, one of things he said, was that “it’s a rich man’s war but a poor man’s fight”. You know, and the draft dodging Clintons of this world and the [poor combat troop] Air National Guard Bushes of this world signed over to do all dirty work. He doesn’t share in their dreams of political ambitions and personal glory and accolades, he’s stuck out there dodging the bullets. If it were the Senators and Congressmen that had to go do that, they wouldn’t be so quick to get us involved in things. When it’s somebody else, but when you got the option to send somebody else to do your dirty work, it becomes easy. And if you’re going to do that, you need to take care of the guys who are willing. Most people are, most Americans, they like the color TV’s, they like the SUV’s, they like all the things that we have. They’d prefer not to have to duck and dodge bullets. Thank god there are some who are willing to do that and the ones who are willing to do that, we need to honor our promises to those people. If we tell you we’re going to expose you to this and that, you might be maimed the rest of your life or whatever but we’re going to take care of you, you know, your going to get your hospital visitations if you’re sick from the stuff we did, or you’re missing limbs from what we’ve done, don’t worry, you know. We’re not going to make you rich, but we will see that you get the medical care and stuff you need. They need to honor that, they need to honor that, man, there is people making hundreds and thousands of dollars a year who have never had to risk anything, you know. I don’t regret somebody that but if I’m going to give somebody 20 years out of my life, in my case, 22, I duck and dodge everything that is coming and put up with the crap. I expect Uncle Sam to honor his end of it when the time comes.

RV: Have you ever been to the Wall in Washington?

MB: No, I haven’t been to that. I’ve been looking at going, in fact I almost went this last time I thought about going right after our reunion but it was the 4th of July
weekend, everybody and their brother would be there. And also, if you remember, the
East Coast was under heavy storms and rain, there were towns being flooded out so we
decided, I was going to do it on this trip.

RV: Have you seen one of the moving Walls?
MB: Yeah.

RV: What has been your experience there?

MB: The moving Wall came through Boise, Idaho when I was living there and I
don't know, that didn't do too much to me. Said, “This is nice that they’re doing this but
it ain’t like the seeing the real thing. I need to go back and see the real Wall.” I always
wanted to see the real Wall and I want to see the Iwo Jima Memorial. At Paris Island,
while I was back in Charleston, during that reunion where I meet you, they took a trip to
Paris Island for a little day trip. They had dedicated a range to the Khe Sanh fighters, a
big monument out there. So we all gathered around that for a ceremony and then I think I
told you yesterday that MCRD that had misspelled Khe Sanh on one of the boulevards,
you know, and [I let public affairs know about it too] that got the most [of all this year
and time] and I still feel bitter about the whole thing. It still mattered to me that that sign
was not spelled right.

RV: How did they spell it, do you remember?
MB: Yes. It is K-h-e, which is correct, and then the second part of that, okay, they
had S-a-h-n and it should be Sanh and it was a girl Lieutenant Captain in there who I was
talking to and he said, “Are you sure?” I said, “I was there, you bet I’m sure. This is one
of the big Marine training bases, this is where you take recruits and make Marines out of
them and things here ought to be right and we lost a lot of guys, we lost an awful lot of
guys there defending that piece of crap up there. We lost too many of them for that sign
to be reading wrong.” He said, “Well it’s going to take a lot of paper work and we’ll have
to go through DC.” I said, “Well somebody needs to do that because that’s wrong and
especially at a boot camp where you’re teaching guys Marine History, that needs to be
correct.”

RV: Mr. Bradbury is there anything else that you wanted to discuss that we have
not talked about, anything about your Vietnam experience?
MB: No, I think we pretty much covered it all. I don’t think, well like I said, I will do something like that again even if I was young enough to. I’ll stand up and fight for us if I had to come out of a wheelchair, I’ll stand up and fight for us but it has to be for us now. I will never again, and I’ve talked to my son about it, and I said, “Never ever again get involved in somebody else’s thing”. And I said, “and you can’t believe our government at all.” Big Brother, is what we usually call them is just that and I said, “Don’t misconstrue that because your talking to a real American.” I love our country, Rich, I really do. I love everything we stand for but I don’t trust the government because they’ll smile at you and then they’ll ram you in the back at the same time. And you know that’s where, and you’ve talked to Vietnam vets and that’s why a lot of you, you probably find that you talked to a lot of guys that don’t want to talk about it at all because of the anger, you know. And you get a lot of us talking and, man, you’ll bring up stuff because we didn’t have to deal with the same things that our WWII guys did. They had the country behind them. There was patriotism, we were defending America and everything was right. The cause was right, you know, and everything here was wrong and we were labeled wrong and we were just cast in a real bad shadow and then lied to when we got back and the average vet has turmoil inside and so a lot of them don’t want to talk about it. I’m willing to talk about it for as much tape as you want to run and the reason I’ve done that, and you’re going to talk about me, you know, me being flexible. Hey man, I am one of them guys where there is nobody more stirred up or pissed then me. But if there’s a chance that this story, the real stories are going to get told out there so maybe some generations are going to look and say, “Hey you know what, these guys weren’t the mercenaries my uncle and aunt said.” An uncle and aunt who’ve never been over there, all that is what they heard in the paper and you guys are trying to tell our story, then our story ought to be heard. Not from the Chronicle, not from the New York Times, not from the Saturday Evening Post, from the guys that were there and I understand why most guys don’t want to talk about though because you really get ticked when you haven’t been ticked in a while and when you start talking about it, the more you think about it, the more angrier you get and you say yeah and you bring. Sometimes you’ll bring up things yourself that you haven’t thought about for a long time because you’ve been angry and then you turn on the news and here is all this foreign aid to these people, all these
supposed “allies”. You know this of course but these huge fires that we got going in California, you notice all these other countries that are coming in to help us especially since 9/11. Well there all right there, yeah you bet ya, “Yeah, what do you guys need?” Bologna, you’ll never see that, foreign aid goes one way. In the midst of our fires, in the midst of 9/11, if Ecuador would have had an earthquake we’d of still sent some people down and some money and some food and supplies to help them people. There’s not a country on this earth that we haven’t helped, somehow or another, some way or another. But it never comes this way and we got a government now that is more interested in helping infrastructure of other countries than our own. Giving free medical and medical to me is a big thing because it’s something that I need right now with a line of other guys and, you know, and we didn’t get rich. We didn’t make a lot of money as military people, our civilian counterparts did, but we knew that we weren’t going to get rich but they said, “You know, you guys will have medical problems like everybody else,” we didn’t know what extent because this is before we even knew about Agent Orange and God only knows what kind of chemicals they are using now over in Iraq. It makes me wonder what lies are they telling the new guys today to try to keep them in, but it’s just a real, a real bad deal.

RV: Well we’ll go ahead and end the interview now. I want to thank you for your time and sharing your stories with us. Thank you very much sir.