Kim Sawyer: This is Kim Sawyer conducting an oral history interview with 
Butch Morris in the Special Collections Library at Texas Tech on February 20, at 12:45
in the afternoon, year 2000. This interview is part of the Lubbock area Vietnam
Veteran’s Oral History Project. Mr. Morris, where were you born?

Butch Morris: I was born in Snyder, Texas.

KS: In Snyder, Texas and did you spend your early years in Snyder or did you 
move around?

BM: No, ma’am we moved around. My dad was employed in the oilfield and we 
moved quite extensively until I was about in the seventh grade. Then we moved to 
Monahans and I lived in Monahans until I graduated high school there.

KS: What was it like growing up in Monahans?

BM: It was about like any small town. There was the drag, the wam, everybody 
went to and I enjoyed it. In high school, I was a member of the band and I don’t know 
about now but I know back in those days Monahans had a really good band.

KS: What instrument did you play?

BM: I played the tuba. We got to march for the Cowboys way back when they 
played in the Cotton Bowl. We took different trips and stuff and I had a pretty good 
childhood I think.

KS: What about brothers and sisters?
BM: Yes, I got two sisters and one brother and they are all older than I am. I have a sister that lives in Slaton; one’s in Lovington and my brother lives in Austin. My brother is a Vietnam vet too. He’s about fifteen years older than I am and his experiences in Vietnam were somewhat different than mine. I would say I had a pretty normal childhood as things go. Of course when I graduated high school the Vietnam War was going on and of course it was on TV every night.

KS: What year did you graduate?

BM: In ’68.

KS: ’68, okay. So you mentioned that in high school, did you follow the war pretty closely, like you said it was on TV and before you graduated had you decided to volunteer?

BM: Yes, I pretty well had my mind made up what I was going to do. I enlisted in the Marine Corps and I had to go to Abilene to take my physical. Well, I was going in on that 120-day delay program, well that’s what I had told my parents but I didn’t have any intention of doing that. When I left and went to Abilene, I knew I was going in right then. But I thought it would be easier on them to think that I had awhile to stay and I thought well, if I was going to get it started.

KS: Did you do this directly after graduation or did you have any time in between?

BM: No, it was about six months I guess later.

KS: So can you talk a little bit about when you first told your parents that you were going to volunteer, how?

BM: Oh, my mother was very unhappy and my dad was a World War II vet and my mother was totally against me volunteering. She knew that I wanted to go in the Marines. She had known, or she had other friends that some of their sons had been in the Marines and had been in Vietnam and she even had some of those people talk to me, trying to talk me out of it.

KS: Did it have any effect on you?

BM: No, I was going. I had my mind made up. It’s funny too, ever since I’ve been a little kid I’d always wanted to be a Marine because you had this idea of the pretty uniforms and the honor and stuff that goes with it and that’s what I wanted to do.
KS: Did you read a lot about the military growing up?

BM: Yes, ma’am. Well and I like history a lot and that’s where I had read a lot about the Marines and what they had done in World War I and World War II, in Korea. That was just part of it, that’s what I wanted to do. When I got to Abilene and had my physical and told them I wanted to go in, it made me feel bad because I called my dad and told him I’m not coming home. That was only the second time I had ever known my dad to cry. He cried at his mom’s funeral and cried that night. Of course all the things that’s going through your mind at the period of time. When, I came home after I was discharged from the service, it was back in the days, we didn’t have the accordions that go after the planes that people walk through. Back in those days it was walking down a set of steps but when I got off the plane at Odessa-Midland down there my dad was standing at the bottom. It just dawned on me, it just came into my mind, he’s the only one that really knew what I had been through.

KS: Him being in the?

BM: He was in the Army in World War II.

KS: Did that influence you, as well into joining the military, was it a family tradition would you say?

BM: Yes, ma’am I think so because my brother was in the Army, my dad had been in the Army, of course I wasn’t in the Army. It was just part of the, this is just something that you are supposed to do. I guess that I really didn’t have any, as far as I was concerned, I didn’t have any choice, it was something that you were just supposed to do. If we’re going to enjoy this country, you have to be prepared to defend it and that’s what I thought I was going to do. Of course I did not believe in the domino theory, you know first Vietnam, what’s next? Thailand, who knows? I just felt like maybe we stumbled and that’s what he was always making a big deal about it.

KS: Did you have many friends from high school that also volunteered?

BM: I had one and as a matter of fact, he was already scheduled to go in and I didn’t know it. When I went to the bus station he was there and we went in together and we were in boot camp together.

KS: Do you recall his name?

BM: Cotton Haydens.
KS: Cotton Haydens.

BM: And I don’t know if Cotton was his right name, but that’s what everybody called him, and we went through boot camp together and I didn’t see him after that. He had a different MOS then I did, I haven’t had any contact with him or anything.

KS: I wanted to back up just a minute, you mentioned that you followed the war with the TV coverage, so you were in high school when TET…?

BM: Yes.

KS: And could you talk a little bit about that and what the general feelings were, maybe you and your family watching the reports?

BM: Well, my mother didn’t watch it. My dad would and I would watch it and the main thing that I was interested in the TET Offensive of ’68 was the combat base at Khe Sanh because the Marines held that base, and that’s what I wanted to do, so that’s why I kept track of Khe Sanh pretty good. Those guys didn’t lose it and that was part of the influencing factor for me to go in the Marines. We took it and we held it and you had a backbone, get ready to give it back to you, because you’re not tightened. Of course I realized a lot of it was funny, but a lot of people think that the Marines are a little bit of you know, because you don’t know much except take that hill but I think its all in good humor with the other services. Yes, I followed Khe Sanh really close rather than the atrocities that were happening in Hue, around Saigon and stuff and that’s what I was talking about, awhile ago as far as, Bosnia, somebody has got to stop that because those are innocent, women, children and men who are dying and they don’t have the capability at that point to defend themselves so somebody has got to help them. It’s just a matter of, oh I guess I would say the code of the west, somebody needs help, you help them. Of course I didn’t know at that time that some of the South Vietnamese units, they weren’t really that interested in helping themselves. They were reluctant I guess you would say to fight a lot of times. I know it got to the point, because we would take them out with us and teach them how to go on patrols and run ambushes and I finally told my platoon commander, I’m not going with them any more because if you get hit they break and run. If you take them out an ambush they might go big bang, they get over there and they blow up a rubber air mattress and take their boots off and open up cans of chow. I didn’t need that, because it was too much of a distraction. They really didn’t like it that my
platoon commander, my platoon commander really didn’t like it, but he accepted it and let them think about it. When I was a squad leader that is, he let me run my squad the way I saw fit and he didn’t interfere. When I told him that, then he didn’t make me take them any more. Which I was glad because if you’re counting on somebody to help you and you look up and they’re not there, it can give you a real sinking feeling. That was straightened out, I guess probably at about June of 1970 or maybe just a little bit earlier. I quit having to take them with me because I don’t have any respect for the South Vietnamese Armies. I did for the North Vietnamese because I knew what they wanted and they knew what they were willing to go through to get it. Now, this way with their atrocities and stuff like that, they’d handle it but I still had more respect for them than I had for the South Vietnamese. I’ve heard people say that the Vietnamese people were stupid. No, they weren’t. They were, in a lot of ways very ingenuous as far as what they could take and use against you. If you left it laying around, you probably going to get it back.

KS: Now, if I could back up just a minute, you went for your physical in Abilene and how long were you there before, the next step was boot camp after Abilene?

BM: Yes, ma’am. Well, we got to Abilene that afternoon and they put us up in a hotel and I guess the next morning we had our physicals and then that night, or late that evening, they put us on an airplane and flew us to Dallas and then we flew from Dallas to San Diego.

KS: Was this summer of ’69?

BM: No, ma’am it was in January of ’69 when I left.

KS: Could you talk about your experiences at boot camp?

BM: Well, in Whitens, going to Vietnam was sort of like a tip dove through the tulips compared to boot camp. In Vietnam they let you go buy a bag. When you were in boot camp, have you ever seen the show Full Metal Jacket?

KS: Yes.

BM: That drill instructor in there, that’s pretty much they way it was. If there was anything that they did, they probably hit on us a little bit more than they did in the show. Looking back, the way they treated me in boot camp is probably one of the reasons I got home because of the discipline, and the self-discipline that they instilled in me in youth.
There was time in ‘Nam if I hadn’t followed the orders I probably wouldn’t be here today. Let them give one of these orders, it never entered your mind, I’m not going to do that. I just did it. Well, the reason I did it is because I guess what I learned in boot camp and that’s why I made it back. The fence at Fort Beus and the minimal abuse at boot camp, even with all but the Marines, instilled it in you to go to war. We were told well you just can’t do that. You can crawl through the obstacle course with machine guns shooting over head and C-4 blowing up around you but you know if you stay low to the ground that you’re going to come through that and it might get you used to the sound of combat, it does not get you used to combat. But I think they did their best to prepare us for that. I feel like because of my training, that I was prepared to do about as well as you could get.

KS: Now had any of your superiors in boot camp, had they had experience in Vietnam?

BM: Yes, we would have sessions at night, the platoon was about eighty guys, and they would have us gather up at night and let them talk about new things around there and I knew at one time they even showed a TV show, they brought a TV and chairs because in boot camp back then, there was no liberty, even on base liberty. You didn’t make any phone calls home, and you didn’t, what they call Poubate, like candy or gum, you didn’t have that, no movies.

KS: What about letters from home?

BM: Yes, you got letters, but you couldn’t have packages from home, just letters.

KS: Was that typical of all of the branches of service or just the Marines, do you know?

BM: I think probably just the Marines. I was there ten weeks and they said that boot camp was actually eight weeks long but they had two weeks or processing, well during that processing we did everything that we normally did every day. So you couldn’t tell when it was processing or when it was regular boot camp

KS: Could you describe your typical day at boot camp?

BM: We’d get up about ten minutes till five and by five o’clock we had to have our racks made and our gear put away and be dressed and be out on the roll call in platoon straight with just the area in front of the call signs. The first thing we had to do is
the morning stand, and we’d go to the bathroom as a group and then they would march us to the chow hall, we would have chow and after chow we would go back to the bathroom, or we call the head, and then your day started out with, you were either doing close order drill or some kind of physical training. Normally they got parts of both of them in everyday and then every now and then you would have classes, you would have instructors showing you how to take apart your weapon and I think we had some Madre in classes in boot camp. Of course we had to be in water survival training, because a lot of times Marines are stationed on ships, you’ve got to know how to swim. We would do those different kinds of things during the day and then this would last until about seven thirty or fifteen till eight at night and then we’d go as a group to take showers and shave and then when we got back we had free time starting about eight thirty and during free time you had to write a letter home and tell them how wonderful it was and how well you were being treated. Whatever time you had from then, you had to polish your boots or polish your brass or clean your weapon. Then about ten minutes till nine, we had hygiene inspection where we had to stop up on our foot locker and they would walk by and run their finger down us, up and down, your bottom duck tape and then about nine o’clock it was lights out. They didn’t normally mess with you after lights out.

KS:  Was this Camp Pendleton?

BM: It was in San Diego, where Marine Corps Recruit Depot, like that. Then after I graduated boot camp, then we went to San Diego. First thing we went through was an infantry training regimen there and it was, as far as the discipline and all it was quite a bit better because, and I look through us when we graduated boot camp, we were Marines now and they treated you with a little more dignity, little more respect. I think infantry training regimen lasted about three weeks. We took extensive classes in map reading, weapons training and in defensive weapons.

KS:  What were some of the weapons that you were trained to use?

BM:  Well, we used, taught how to fire the M-60 machine gun, of course the M-16 rifle, throw hand grenades, how to use claymore mines. We fired the 3.5 bazooka but we never used that in Nam, because we had wall it was kind of and it was like a bazooka but it only had one round in it and it was disposable, if you fired it you broke it up. The best thing to do was bury it. Then the M-69 grenade launcher, we fired the .50 caliber
machine gun and flamethrowers, we did flamethrowers. Of course we saw
demonstrations of different weapons being fired, like a tank identifier next size or the 5 to
106-recoilless rifle but that was about the extent of it as far as weapons go. Then you
were taught pretty extensively in learning patrols and learning ambushes.

KS: The strategy involved?
BM: Yes, ma’am.
KS: Could you discuss it a little bit, what that entailed for instance.
BM: Like on patrols, of course you’d have a map, that would help us and you
would map out your, they would give you patrol map and then you’d map it out on your
map and then, we didn’t do it in the States because we didn’t have the radios but you
would go to say Checkpoint Alpha, Checkpoint Bravo. Well, they knew where you were
at when you told them that, if you read your map right, if you used your compass
correctly, that you were at the right place, which is very important because if you got hit
and you needed air support or artillery support, or you needed more guys to come in and
help you, they had to know where you were and how to get to you. So, they stressed that
a lot. We went through three different things. We went to the infantry-training regimen
and then we were going to the basic infantry training school and then we had advanced
combat training. And all three of those, you went to different places to do them, but yet
you were still in Camp Pendleton, but all of three of them stressed map reading and like I
said that was very important because you had the means to let them know where you
were at and of course if you needed a fire mission or air support, sure you make it right
where you’s at. You didn’t want it dumped on you. I think that’s one they stressed it so
much.

KS: Did anyone have trouble with that particular skill that you recall?
BM: Yes, because some guys can’t triangulate your position. Well, you have to
be able to pick out two landmarks that you know are on that map and which ones they are
and then you’d shoot an azimuth for this one, then shoot an azimuth for that one and then
where they crossed, that’s where you were and some guys had trouble. If it was say six
hundred meters high as opposed to three hundred meters high. If they set the azimuth
over on the hill then it triangulates your position from someplace you’re not there. They
had trouble with that. I was lucky because it just made sense to me what they were doing.
The other thing that they had and they also had in Vietnam, the maps that we had were absolutely wonderful, they were, the most minute detail, that map would show it. Like if you were on patrol and at someplace during that patrol you were supposed to cross this river and right there was this river, find a little S, well if you had shot your azimuth from that, you crossed and you saw that little S in that river and, I was very satisfied with the maps that we had. Of course that was just one, good. So that was pretty easy. Now, if you had the Monday night it was a different story that you had. You can’t, where your landmarks, can’t see them, of course it’s dark everywhere, it’s not light. Of course we never operated, well except one time, we operated close to the provincial capitol of Khe Sanh and that was the only time that we got close to a big village, maybe that was classified as a city and we only did that one time, that was right at the beginning of TET and the rest of the time we were out in the middle of nowhere. You’re not going running across with one or two, three or four people. Like when you’re going out on an ambush, you would go out late in the evening and just before dark you’d try to get to your ambush site, just before dark and you would stop short of it, then when it got dark you went ahead and moved over into your ambush site. But you were able to say where you were going and now that you were there. At night it’s very critical that you know where you’re at because you’re probably not going to get much help on the ground if you get into trouble, it’s probably going to come from artillery or air support, so that was pretty important.

KS: Any other things come to mind about your training and your advanced training?

BM: I know a lot of it, and it wasn’t as far as doing physical exercise as far as squat thrusts and push-ups and stuff like that. We didn’t have an awful lot. We had an awful lot of walking and they called it at a round step which is just about a, if you’re at the back of the column, you’re at a dead run all the time, going up and down hills. Well, that puts you in really good physical shape. Actually, I was in better shape after I left the training schools then I was when I got out of boot camp because it was, first of all you got to eat more and in boot camp, they would tell you, you didn’t do anything unless it was by command and I mean anything. Well, you’d go through the chow line and then you’d get to your table, well they’d tell you to set your tray down, then they’d tell you sit down and then tell you to bow your heads and they’d say a prayer and then they’d tell
you to eat and you had to get on with it. Because you didn’t want no one saying, get up and get out. Well, that tray had to be clean before we left. A lot of times you had done so much running and physical exercise and all that you didn’t get enough to eat. Well, after we got to the training regiments and stuff at Camp Golden, first of all we had a little more time to eat and then we could go back for seconds, and then like milk, you could drink as much milk as you wanted to, so it was, you got in really good physical shape and you needed to be but other than that, I met some really good guys. Of course, I don’t know what it is, when I got out I didn’t have any desire to be in contact with any of them and now that I’m older I do. My best friend in ‘Nam was from the Bronx, New York and he went home about three months before I did and I was really glad because he was nothing but a screw up. He got in trouble all the time and he would make it up to squad leader and then do something, and I always got him back in my squad because I knew how to take care of him. As much as I loved the guy I was really glad to see him go home. His name was Jose Lopez and when I got back I was at the airport in Los Angeles and I called information for Bronx, New York, I was going to get a telephone number to call and she asked me if I had an address and I said, no, Jose Lopez is all I got. And she said, sir do you realize how many Jose Lopez’s there are in Bronx, New York and I said, no ma’am, she said pages of them, so I never have had any contact with him. I really loved the guy. I probably loved Lopez, more than my own brother, we were that close because it was one of those deals that if one of us had something to eat; we both had something to eat. If one of us had water, we both had water. It was just, I know why I bonded with him so soon when I got over there. I guess maybe because I was born and raised in Texas and I was used to being around Hispanics, maybe that was it, I don’t know.

KS: Did you have any time off before you went to Vietnam after you completed your training, or did you go straight?

BM: No, I had about well, I got through with training, it seemed like it was about June and I had volunteered to go to Vietnam and they wouldn’t let me because my brother was over there.

KS: Is that standard policy?
BM: I think so and I kept bugging them to let me go, that’s what I joined the
Marine Corps for. I didn’t join to stay here and play silly games like going out on the
movies and all that, that’s not what I joined for. Well, the man kept me, it was funny, I
left, he got back in the States about two o’clock that night and I left at eleven o’clock that
night. He got back at two o’clock in the afternoon and I left at eleven o’clock that night.

KS: What is your brother's name?
BM: Billy Morris. It was a hassle for me to get to go because I didn’t think they
were going to let me go and that’s what I joined up for. But they finally gave in.

KS: What did you do while you were waiting?
BM: Oh, I was with what they call part of permanent personnel. I was with the
27th Marines for a while and then they disbanded and went over to the 28th Marines, of
course all this was in Camp Pendleton and we went and played silly games, we’d go out
on the dunes. I didn’t want to stay a week and pushing grunt patrols and ambushes and
attack hills and to make all so silly about it is a lot of times, we would have what they call
blank fire in your adapter, for your adapter. We didn’t have any black ammo either, so
you’re going to go up on that hill and boy, bang, bang, bang, bang. I thought, this is
ridiculous; I’ve got to get out of here.

KS: Were there a lot of people in your situation that were kind of on hold before
they could go?
BM: Well, a lot of the guys were probably when we went to the 28th Marines,
about half the guys there had been to ‘Nam and they were still in and then about half of
us hadn’t been to ‘Nam, there were quite a few of us. There weren’t a whole lot of us
jumping up and down to go but like I say that’s a personal deal is what I was saying.

Because I knew when I joined.
KS: Now, these guys that had already been to Vietnam, what kind of
conversation would you have with them, would they talk about their experiences at all?
BM: Some, but not a lot. The biggest thing that I noticed about those guys was
their attitude towards the Corps. They were what we call short-timers and all of the
discipline and uniform that you like, they weren’t really into that any more. They were
ready to go home and it was hard to make them, like we’d go on a three mile run, we
would be strung out for three miles because they’d get tired of running and start walking
and what are you going to do with the guy, he’s getting ready to get out. So they just
didn’t care and I could understand that. But most of them wouldn’t talk about their
experiences in Vietnam. Every now and then you’d get a little bit, seemed like most of
the conversations I had with them concerning Vietnam was like, they’d be giving you
hints on map reading, ambushes, how to set them up, stuff like that. They didn’t go into
personal details of what they had done. But most of them were pretty good guys, they
were just ready to get out, and I don’t blame them. If you weren’t going to make the
Corps a career I would see no reason for staying because you're out playing silly games.
They weren't into it any more. Of course I got back to the States on December the 1st and
I was out on December the 3rd, on my way out. I was very satisfied coming back.
Because I liked, I got out on the 3rd of December and I actually should have gotten out on
the 27th of January, you’re real short and they don’t have anything for you to do. And if
you go to school, even if you finished the school it was time to get out so they gave me
an early out. I heard, I don’t know this to be true but I heard that the Corps was giving up
to two and a half years at that time, like if you went on a four year enlistment, they were
giving two and year cut because they had so many guys in that place to put through. One
of the problems that the Marine Corps had then, one that it has even to this day, they
don’t have the money that’s available to the other services. The Army, the Air Force and
the Navy would be just as happy not having the Marine Corps because that would release
that funding to them, once the Marine Corps doesn’t get it because in Desert Storm out of
ocean I don’t know if you paid attention to it or not, but like the Army had the Apache
helicopters, the Marines had the Cobra helicopters, the same helicopters that they used in
Vietnam. But they call them the Super Cobra because they added another engine and
they changed the armor around a little bit. But I used to tell and I still do, we were poor,
the Marines were and we just didn’t have the resources and they still don’t I think it
better but its still not as good as it should be. I think as long as there is that cotton fishing
between the other services, its going to be tough for the Marine Corps to survive because
there’s this trick, money they’ve been running so the Army can do something because
Army can do something about it. And we’ve been criticized a lot for going in for the
dead, find the body, buts its just an unspoken word, you do not leave anybody. If there is
enough of him to being back, you’re going to go get him. If you lose two or three in the
ten, that’s just, and I guess maybe a lot of people may think that’s stupid but that’s just
the way the Corps is. If you go, you’re coming back because you’re one of us and we
will not leave you. This might sound strange but I believe that if something happened to
me in ‘Nam, that I would still come home. It was a certain amount of comfort in that, I
really can’t tell you why but I knew I would be back in here in the States. That’s one of
the things I love about the Corps, it hasn’t changed from 1775; this is the way it is and
that’s the way it is today. That won’t change, might be a lot of other things change, that
won’t change and I have no doubt about that because as long as, well and this may sound
sacrilegious and it’s really not, but the Corps is almost like a religion and you become
bound to it and you hardly see anybody with those bonds any more. There is a saying,
once a Marine, always a Marine and that’s very true and what’s funny about is like a lot
of, you can meet a World War II veteran, being a Vietnam veteran, your wars may have
been different, and they’ve been fought differently but there was a common denominator
to it and that was boot camp, you can always go back and talk about how you were
treated in boot camp, hadn't been changed. They beat on those guys fifty years, they beat
on us thirty years ago, it sucked. I’ve heard that they all do that, but that doesn’t mean
they don’t do that.

KS: Maybe they just don’t tell everybody they do it. Could you tell me a little bit
about your rifle training?

BM: Yes, in boot camp we were in San Diego and when it came time for rifle
training they took us to Camp Pendleton and we were on a firing range for two weeks
because one of the sayings in the Corps and its very true is every Marine is a rifle, it
doesn’t matter whether you were a truck driver or a helicopter pilot or a clerk, you’re
going to learn to shoot. I guess its still the M-16, you’re going to learn to shoot that,
you’re going to become proficient with it. Everybody goes through the same thing as far
as rifle training. If you don’t qualify they’re going to keep on you until you do.

KS: Do you have to repeat the training, or you’re there as long as it takes?

BM: They’ll, what it was called back then, they would drop you from the platoon
and you would have to catch up with the platoon behind you to go through rifle training
but you were going to become proficient with the weapon. Even though you might say,
qualify as a marksman, you were at least more than qualified there. That’s sort of like
that set in stone rule of the Corps, every Marine is a rifleman. With the size of the Corps and what they are expecting to do I think it was a very good policy, because you don’t ever know when you might need that desk clerk or that gun, to stand beside you in that fox hole, and you need to know that he knows how to shoot it, because you life may depend on it and I think that was one of the Corps very good policies, and its still that way until today

KS: Any problems with the M-16 that you recall?
BM: I know that in Vietnam, we had to keep it extremely clean and you also had to keep your magazines clean, because they were some kind of aluminum and they would corrode some, they would get where the spring wouldn’t make round feed into the weapon. You had to keep it clean or it could get you in trouble in a minute.

KS: These were problems you didn’t have during your training?
BM: No, see when we qualified, we qualified with the M-14 rifle and the M-14 is an excellent piece of equipment because the day we qualified it was raining and it was sort of like, kind of like chaff or whatever it was that we laid on but we were in the mud, in the prone this, well that weapon got some of that in there and it still fired. That M-14 was just an excellent weapon. The problem being in Vietnam, it was too heavy for a lot of the terrain it wouldn’t get through.

KS: How much does it weigh do you know?
BM: Loaded, I think it weighs about ten and a half pounds.
KS: What about the M-16?
BM: It probably weighs about eight, eight and a half and it’s not as long. Another advantage that the M-16 has is you’ve got a selector switch or had a selector switch on those models that you could go from safety to full automatic to semi-automatic. With an M-14 you had to use an external piece on it, like pull the off pin. Of course the M-14 shot the same size round as the M-60 machine gun, which the M-60 is an excellent piece of equipment too. Of course you have to keep it clean but it’s not as bent as an M-16 is.

KS: How long was your infantry training, how long did that last?
BM: Probably about three months and then I was with the primary personnel, 27th and 28th and then when it got time for me to go to ‘Nam, I think I go twenty-one days
leave and when I came back I went to what they call a staging battalion, in staging battalion, I think it was about three weeks went off.

KS: Was that in the States, that was before?

BM: Yes, that my brother was still in Vietnam. We had refresh courses on map reading and finding buttons and stuff like that and then during staging battalion they made sure that everybody had a real weapon and that your insurance was in force, it the military sure. The one thing I disagree with in the staging battalion, everything that you had as far as what you got in the States, as far as your utilities and your combat boots and all that, like your combat boots, you were going to have what they call a junk in the bucket where everything you’ve got to laid down except what is in your wall locker and there’s certain order. Well, your dress shoes and your combat boots, the soles and heels had to be good. Well, I know like mine, I had to take mine down and have them re-soled and them when you got to ‘Nam you wore jungle boots so it didn’t make any sense, it was a waste of money and the Corps didn’t make any money off of you because you had to do it in town. Well, now there was a place on the base you could get it done but most guys took it to town. You get liberty on the weekend and dropped them off early in the morning and picked them up later that day. I thought it was ridiculous because combat boots just weren’t cut out of Vietnam, too much water.

KS: But you would take them with you, you took them with you?

BM: We took them with us. We left most of that stuff in Okinawa and then we took some of it with us on to ‘Nam in what we called a sea bag. I don’t even know what all we had any more. When we came home they had an excellent filing system because they went right to your stuff and got it for you, and it was all there, of course who wanted it. When I got home the day I got in, I dropped it off at Goodwill, everything except what I had on my back.

KS: Did you take a commercial charter to Vietnam?

BM: Oh, I guess it was a charter flight; it was in some Continental Airlines. We flew from El Toro Marine Corps air base to Okinawa and I think we spent either one or two nights there at Camp Buckner and that’s where we stored our stuff. And then well it was Continental that we flew on into Vietnam and landed in Da Nang air base. Coming home I believe it was a Continental flight and for some reason when we flew out, we
went to Okinawa, there was a problem getting a flight out or something, I can’t remember. We were on Okinawa five days. They really didn’t have anything for us to do, so we’d get liberty about nine o’clock in the morning and you had to be back in I think at three or something like that.

KS: Did you explore the city a little bit or did you stay on base?
BM: No, I explored the city. I guess I explored every bar on Okinawa. Over there in ‘Nam, you had to be an E-5 if you were in the Marines to buy a hard liquor, but you also had to be twenty-one. Well, I made it to the E-5 spot but I didn’t make it to the twenty-one spot, well then when you’re coming back and you hit Okinawa, they don’t care how old you are. I guess it was just blowing off steam for five days.

KS: At that point were you and your fellow Marines anxious to be there or apprehensive?
BM: No, we were ready to go home, once the plane got going to get your stuff and go home, because we really didn’t know and I don’t think we knew until like the day before we were, exactly where we were. We had a good time in Okinawa, but I love being sent home is great. Talking to my mom and dad when I hadn’t heard.

KS: Were you eighteen or nineteen, when you arrived in Vietnam?
BM: I was nineteen.

KS: Could you talk about your first impressions of Vietnam, when you stepped off the plane?
BM: The first thing that hit me, when we got off, because it was real high when we were coming in and then when we broke through the clouds, visually the first thing you hit was how pretty it was, everything was so green. The market hours were laid out, greenly, like the rice paddies and stuff and then when we landed at Da Nang and we got off, the first thing that hits you was the heat and then the smell, the smell, it was a big garbage dump or whatever, it really stunk. But it didn’t take you long to get acclimated to it. I guess one thing that helped me is I arrived there during monsoon season.

KS: What month was this?
BM: Oh, the monsoon, it was in December. Of course it rained all the time. By the time it got to be summer, we started getting some car, sort of I was in there in cooler months but it still got real hot, but by that time you sort of eased into it, which helped but
I know, during monsoons, I hated the monsoons and the weather more than I did the VC or the NVA. This is one thing that I never have understood because even then the United States was the most powerful and well equipped military in the world and it seems like that I got Vietnam and on December 1st and anyway I know for sure it was the 12th of February before I got poncho and with monsoon we worked out of a fire support base and normally we would stay inside that fire support base for like three days at a time. We would get haircuts and new clothes and boots and things and then update your shot record, if you need some kind of booster shot or something and of course you got hot food, you’d do stuff like get to go to the movie, it was sort of like an R & R deal and it would last about three days and then when we would go back out, we would be back out around anywhere from, might be four to six weeks at a time. I had a poncho liner, but I didn’t have a poncho and a poncho liner is nothing but a little old thing quilt and it doesn’t hold out the water. Well, and maybe so long after even a poncho but at least a poncho would keep your body heat in. I was telling you about Jose Lopez; you know how close we were. Well, he didn’t have a poncho either and if we were in place that was soaked, well we would try to hang a poncho liner over us and then we would sleep under the other poncho liner and it was, I mean Marines slept right up against each other for the body heat, so we weren’t exposed. I can remember one time at sunup we were sitting on the side of this foot long hill and I had my poncho liner wrapped around me, and your whole skin is just white because you know how you get after swimming for too long or something. I can remember praying, God, just let me see the sun, you don’t have to leave it out, just let me sit it, it’s still up there. And then every now and then it would break off and you’d get these big old, white, yellowy clouds and you had some time, it wasn’t going to rain the troops while they were out. Then it would back up. I don’t even remember just a flat, run-down run the way it was, just a steady rain and then it would sort of drop off to maybe a real light rain and then get back up to a steam. It was just miserable; because you’d think in a climate like that, that you’d be warm, but when you’re soaking wet. Then I hated it because you couldn’t, like I said we didn’t have any, where you lie down, that was your house and your bed. See we moved a lot, not moved far but we moved everyday and what happened I guess, already didn’t happen, when you moved you would move back to a place that already had foxholes dug because and then
you’d stay there at night, didn’t have to dig a foxhole, getting lazy for the books, but you
had to be careful because they would bobby trap the bottom of the foxhole and shoot at
you, first inclination is to jump in that foxhole, well if you hadn’t checked it out, you
were in trouble. The only good thing that I can remember about monsoon is a lot of their
booby traps, their fragmentation grenades, they worked on cool bricks and fuse, they’d be
attached to a string and then pull that string tight, was like striking a match, just like it
wet, that was always a good thing I can say about monsoons, is their booby traps didn’t,
and you got by a lot of times because of that. They’d throw one at you at night or
something, little different. I don’t know, one of the things, and I don’t really know how
to humor Brian Desi, but you go to sleep, but you’re not really asleep, you’re still aware
of what’s going on around you. After all that, you get really tired because like I say
every day you move and it gets sort of complicated.

KS: How long were you at Da Nang before you were actually assigned, until you
knew exactly where you were going?

BM: Probably I left out of there, the next day.

KS: So they gave you orders or did you have an idea what you would be doing at
that point?

BM: They just told me that I was going to the 1st Battalion, 2nd Marines and they
were working at a fire support base Ross at that time. They trekked us out to this place
called 11th Motors, well that’s where the helicopters would come in, they were taking you
back to the fire support bases that you would be going to. Well, then you would wait at
the fire support base and when there was a re-supply mission to your unit you’d catch a
ride on that re-supply and that’s when you go to the field.

KS: By helicopter or was this by transport?

BM: Yes, ma’am. Now, I say, the majority of the time where we worked I’m
going to say probably, ninety percent of the time we were worked there were no roads.
You were out in the middle of nowhere, so everything we got; we were dependent on
helicopter supply. So that’s another thing about the monsoon, if the helicopters can’t get
in, you don’t get anything to eat. It didn’t happen a lot, it might have happened two or
three times, four times maybe, I don’t know, but the most we ever get in a semi was three
days with nothing to eat. You can really hungry in three days and every now and then
you get lucky and maybe run across a sugar cane field or something. Of course sugar
cane is not real filling, but that’s all you had. The first company commander I had when I
got over there, his name was Louis Ambort and I won’t forget him because he took better
care of us than anybody I had the rest of the time that I was in Vietnam because his
theory was if you’ll eat four meals a day, I will order you four meals a day, C-rats and in
that stuff that I gave you, to the Archives, there is a, this right here. Okay, Lieutenant
Ambort, he didn’t order these guys to do that. They went out and killed a tank and my
mother would try to justify what they did, because what they did was wrong, it was
murder. Even when in a war zone, it would be murder. Well, they were so frustrated,
because of what was happening to us, because we were taking all these casualties and we
didn’t have anything to show in return and frustrations what caused that. Also, a donated
book called *Loose Bastards* written by Randy Harrington that they heard was the leader
of a killer team. I never did figure out how they got around it, but Harrington was found
not guilty. Since he was giving the orders I don’t know if he had anyone under him
found guilty, he had to have been found guilty but it didn’t happen that way. Of course,
he had no idea. Lawyers came from the States to try to help him. He also had Oliver
North, he had been in Oliver North’s platoon previously, well all of them want to shackle
here, I’m trying to help you. But it here it says [referencing an article shown to
interviewer] that he was blood, fight had a machine gun fire, because they hadn’t; even
been gone probably thirty minutes when this happened. Well, Lieutenant Ambort, raising
about relating his duty is when he found out the next morning what they had done, he had
a captured rifle sent out to the Marine, to the field, so he could say well, this is the
weapon that took fire. The serial number had already been registered with the provost
marshal’s office and they caught him. He didn’t tell them, go out and kill whatever you
find, he didn’t do that, Lieutenant Ambort was a good Marine but he tired to take care of
his men and that’s what got him in trouble.

KS: You were actually there when this?
BM: Yes, I was with those.
KS: The people that you were in.
BM: Yes, I was in 3rd Platoon and they were in 4th Platoon. And killer team, they
would ask for volunteers, does anybody want to be on the killer team.
KS: And what did that entail?
BM: Well, see if you went out on a ambush you took your own squad. Of course you had a radio then and an M-60 machine gun and a M-79. But on a killer team, you took four or five guys, you didn’t wear your helmets and flak jackets, you wore your assault cover, bush cover. You put that grease paint all over your face and all over your hands and instead of sitting up for stationary ambush you would go from village to village. You would go inside the hooches and stuff, and try to fix the VC and a lot of times it was very fruitful to do that, well, that’s what these guys were doing. Why they did what they did, I know why they did it, they were frustrated but then I don’t know why they did it. We were just tired, you can only get with them so long before the frustration builds up, but it’s like that. Did you ever see that show with a burning van, carrying a false sign, and how her husband, beat on her all the time. She found out, that’s the laugh, doesn’t make him laugh but that’s fine. I don’t know, the way I’d rather cross him, I was watching, you know back when they was having the Senate hearings over the Iran-Contra. Well, here came on two ways and they chose the nine and he was talking about Oliver North and I’m sitting hear thinking I know this guy, but I can’t place him. Then they put his name up there, Senator put his name up there, knew exactly who he was. He put on a lot of weight; his hair was grayer, parts of it. Then I went looking and found the book and I read the book and what he said in the book is not true either. I don’t know why; I don’t understand the need to lie. If he was found not guilty, he can’t be tried in a military court or a civilian court, any more than that is double jeopardy. He’s not going to be tried again for that crime, so I don’t know why he wouldn’t tell the truth. I have run it through my mind a million times trying to figure it out. What don’t you just tell the, because he said like North took a Jeep down there by himself and he went into this village and do you had any idea how much Viet Cong or the NVA would have loved to have a Lieutenant in a Jeep. He would have to have been flat crazy to go out there by yourself, on that aim you had to be crazy to go out there to start with because every time you turned around you could get shot at. I was worried, if you ever get a chance to read the book. He said other things like if I remember correctly, the guards would give him change for the Coke machines, the only thing we could have over there was paper money, you had military paper money. Well, back in those days, Coke machine wouldn’t take
that, anything so, we didn’t have anything so I don’t know why, I just don’t understand a
lot of the stuff he said. I’d really like to find that little kid, today. Of course I’m sure that
after this was done he got a letter of reprimand and treasure boat, his career was on the
rocks. I’m sure he got out shortly after that, but I know I can’t say that. He was so good.
We had walked into an ambush one day and they had us dead to rights. We were covered
up and looked to an angle coming in, artillery to start with. Well, remember I told you
about the map reading and all that. That first round was exactly where we wanted it.
Everything he did was, we didn’t ask for anything. He took care of us and everything. He
knew what the score was; he was calling the air strikes. As a matter of fact he called in
the artillery was so close that some of our guys being hit, but he had to be there because
that’s where it was doing good because they would try to get right on you to try to keep
you from calling in artillery or air strikes. They followed right in on top of you, just
excellent. I can’t speak highly of him enough. All he was guilty of up here was trying to
take care of his guys.

KS: Your missions were kind of based out of fire support base Ross, is that this
area?

BM: Yes, for about the first three months.

KS: Could you describe that base?

BM: Well it was a battalion sized fire support base. They had an artillery battery
there, four and fives and one or two 106s and had one 81-millimeter mortars. Of course
they had a bunk transporter, the chow hall there. It was small and it was only a battalion
size base.

KS: Would you say it was well protected, secure?

BM: I think probably as good as any base could be. They said we got, for some
reason, we weren’t any scheduled to go in, they just popped up one day and said we were
going in and we went in about three o’clock that afternoon. Of course, seeing our
clothes, we stayed out so long they just burned our clothes.

KS: After every time you would come back in?

BM: Yes, you had them on twenty-four hours a day for maybe four or five or six
weeks. I think that was part of the game too.

KS: What about boots?
BM: It just depends on your boots, you had them for about, of course the boots were, they were sort of like a badge of honor, the worse your boots looked, that meant that you had been over there longer, so everybody knew, I always used the term salty, if your boots were salty, it sort of commanded more respect because everybody knew you wasn’t a new guy. Of course they knew that over time boots wore out, you had to get new ones.

KS: How were the jungle boots different from the regular combat boots that you trained with?

BM: Well, on the bottom of them, the combat boots were fairly slick and the jungle boots were, the bottom of them, the way it was built, I guess maybe in a way you could say it sort of had treads on a truck and then the top of them were canvas, so they’d be cooler, lighter than combat boots. Then at the bottom of them it was so, I believe it was a steel plate and that plate was put in there so in case you stepped in a punji pit, it would not penetrate into your foot. Of course, the Vietnamese got smart too, and instead of just having, you know what a punji stake is. Instead of having the punji stakes just sticking right straight up, they’d have it sticking right straight up but they also would have it come in from the side and get you and pierce there, there was no protection. As a matter of fact I just had a friend die, well his funeral was last Saturday, he had stepped in a punji pit in ‘Nam and of course they dipped those things, they sharpened them and hardened them and then they dip them in whatever is convenient, try to set up kind of an infection. Well, Gordon, whatever kind of infection he got if I understand it correctly, is that it went to the weakest part of the body to rot, this is what I understand. Well he been dying for the last thirty-two years because of that and he told me why, that he tried like, just mega doses of antibiotics, like it really is an eight in every thousand die from this stuff.

KS: And what’s his last name?

BM: Bool. Yes, he was just really sad. I had a lot of respect for Gordon because even though he was blind I never heard him complain, never. To me that’s pretty deep guy. But anyway that’s what they did with the punji pits to get around the steel toe.

KS: What about other booby traps? I know you mentioned the bobby trapped foxholes, was there anything else you came in contact with or heard about?
BM: Yes, they would do stuff like when normally it was one of our guys hand grenades, that they would take a stick and type an ending on it and attach it to the stick, to the train, to the bar, or the band or you could make the things muddy. You just got this little arm sticking off, okay, that’s called a spoon; it’s got a pin through it. You pull that where you pull the pin out, well you’ve still got that spoon locked in your hand and you throw it that pin flies off and its got a deal that comes over it (claps loudly), and slaps and it starts powder train burning. When that powder trial detonates it detonates the whole grenade. Well what they would do is they would come across a trial with a wire, a real small wire. Then they have this hand grenade fixed to tree, a stick or whatever, and this barely holds the spoon down. Well, as you walk through there, it didn’t take much for that spoon to give. Then the one that did the most damage that I saw, it was one of those I can’t remember the date but I know it was a year, but I can’t remember the date, I want to say around June. We sat into a place we had selected before and because of the size hole that it blew we figured it was probably a five hundred pound bomb is what it was. I don’t know what you would say on that, except get it goo, but anyway we were moving into this grove of trees where we were going to set up, there were three oh one and what then.

I was a squadron guy at Da Nang and we worked in what was called the free fire zone where anything that moved in there was fair game. Well, mainly three or four guys after we put our gear down, we went to this little village, we had closed on it, to get water out of the well. And when we get water and none of those women were around and I can remember thinking, that’s odd because I know that it was getting late in the day and that they know when the sun goes down you do not leave your hooch; your troop might run across an ambush. I mean it registered on me, but then I didn’t think about it. So we got our water and we went back in and sit down and it was again my squad, these last one was an offering, anyway, I told Cochran to check that hole there, make sure there is no booby traps in it. And it was, I just wasn’t thinking because I had some kind of magazine, that I was ready and waiting for them, so you can hit me and I have a plan. So I was facing the list and I still had my helmet flak jacket and I had my legs crossed and I was trying to read this book. Well, something detonated and not made probably, was far superior to that stinging and the first thing that went through my mind was Cochran’s dead because while he was trying to find the booby trap he tripped and, but when I rolled
over and I almost just kept falling and falling and falling. Then it went through my mind
that I was dead, more quit than first I mean, quit falling, you know dirt and the thing that
quit, first thing you knew was you try to get your people lined up because they’ll do stuff
like that to you when the hit you, when you’re confused and all that. Well I heard the
guy on the other side of the, we call it platoon position, we called it the pause, a guy
hollers you corn dogs got a lot of dead guy over there. They say the corn that did more
than once; it went with the banana and didn’t get up. It was in proximity where he was. I
don’t know whether he set it off or maybe they were hung around there someplace and
did what they thought to me and detonated it. I don’t know, but the fungus nearly ate me
up for years. You know, he had been in country like seven to eight days and I knew
something was wrong when we went to get water but I was too interested in reading that
magazine to go over there and take the new guy, and say let me show you how to do this,
but I don’t know if it would have been different or something. He’s going to, just a kid,
but it airevacced seventeen of them guys, and a lot of the people.

KS: From that particular incident, seventeen.
BM: Yes, it blow the whole rab about as big as these two rooms and probably
eight or ten too. One of the things that I think, I’ve analyzed all of it, I think probably
what they had done is they had buried it too deep, but if they had buried it different it
probably would have killed all of us. And killed and wounded the company commander,
of course it killed the Corpsman, the radio kid it wounded. I mean the rifles were melted.
Well, I wouldn’t want to last one with the stuff we paid so, and I wanted to take it and I
never did. I never did do anything that I thought was, I never did anything that I thought
deserved a medal. I mean just didn’t do it, if I doubted it. This guy was not going to
Marine mistake. Needless as its going to be, call in the medevac. We got a hole set back
and we had about thirty guys in or platoon so we lost half of them they had it and you had
to set your holes back in the best you could, I’m not sure when it was covered but what
you had to do. But he never doubted it and everybody tell him to came in and got to clean
out and all those other guys. That guy got a bomb somewhere and he was so scared he
never even got it and I don’t blame him that he was scared, I was scared too, but it was
his place to say that was what we’ll do. One thing that they did after that is they took Qui
Nhon and I don’t know what they thought that maybe one of us going to do something to
him. Maybe just upset. I mean if he’d had been just a rifleman in one of the squads, I
don’t understand it. He was not in that position he was, and I’m going to lay here now, all
the other lights gone, I’ve got to think, holding. And proud and he looked at me, he said
can I have the lights after me. Normally, some of the things that you involved are some
burned into my mind I don’t remember doing them today, and why today. Don’t want
them, they had forgotten. I don’t know, I don’t care. But that’s one of the things that, of
course I don’t know if you want this in your history but that’s one of the biggest reasons
that I carry a lot of guilt because I didn’t go and I should have. That aim was two
millions lives and I watched the owl go, but every time we got a Corpsman, they were
wonderful detonating them, medic we have the value, that use them value. First thing
you look at him, hold on, are you familiar with the falg raising in Mt. Sirrabachi, where
they…

KS: Sounds familiar.
BM: The big flag raising.
KS: Oh, yes.
BM: That first time that you get on there, it’s got a hold of that flagpole, that’s a
Navy Corpsman so you looked at your Corpsman wider and you took their and so I
believe, I suppose right away.
KS: You were talking about Fire Support Base Ross and an incident that
happened?
BM: We got hit there that night. We found four VC the next morning in a
bunker. We started thinking we’d come in mortar fire at about one thirty that morning.
Of course the first thing we do is, you run out and you try to get the coimbecile, the
bunker and I don’t know who counted them but somebody said we took about ten of the
incoming mortar, like I say, I don’t know if I took the time to kill him or anything but he
said he was going to run out of the hooch, the hooch that we stayed in didn’t have a rack
or any bed, we slept on the floor, if it was anything you slept on the floor and after
you’ve been sleeping in the mud, sleeping on the floor is not bad, because you’re dry,
you’ve got a roof over your head but as soon as we came out of the hooch, they were
already inside the fire support base and this one’s shooting at us. And it was amazing
because they were everything, we got manure around us falling and we had heard that
they had breached the line at bunker fourteen. I don’t know who gave them the, I guess it
was artillery officer, so dateline. He called our old maid and every [?]. Well, common
sense will tell you that its that right there, those four Marines knew were in that bunker
were already dead and I think the decision guy made with the right one but I’ve often
wondered about how many nightmares he’s had because of what he did and he knew they
were dead, he knew that he didn’t come soon enough to rely on and I want to tell him
that, it’s die both of them crazy because he was probably never convinced himself that
they were really dead. Anyway, we finally stopped them.

KS: How many were there?
BM: There were four that went cow, we heard that there was a total of fifty inside
the lines and they had been there since ten thirty that night. They had gotten through the
wire and the, how could that be, you’ve got lives on the brink and one of the sayings that
we had, that they were so good that they could crawl up and steal your radio and leave
your music. I went to NCO, no, sorry it was land mine, warfare and demolition school in
Da Nang and they showed us a sapper that had come over to our side and it was in broad
daylight and we were sitting there looking through all this barbed wire and that guy came
through about seventy-five yards there in about forty-five minutes and daylight with us
watching and you still hardly see, so its. I don’t know if you, I want to say and it doesn’t
say hear, I want to say like we killed like thirty-four of them but I don’t for sure.

KS: Were you ever wounded?
BM: Yes, ma’am. I was, well it wasn’t too long after I got over there I was
walking home and I tripped a booby trap and I got hit but it was, I didn’t even get
medevaced. And my squad leader was walking right behind me teaching me to walk
point and he got medevaced. If he hadn’t had his flak jacket on, it would have killed him.

KS: Did you always wear your flak jacket when you were on patrol?
BM: Yes, ma’am. Well, unless we were on killer team. My helmet and flak
jacket were my two best friends.

KS: Any guys you were with choose not to wear it, for instance it was too hot
and heavy?
BM: No, well it was just a standard, wherever you’re going to take your flak
jacket. If this guy hadn’t had his flak jacket on, at the very least it would have paralyzed
him and it would have probably killed him because it traveled and went through it and it was right at the middle where his spine was, but it saved his life. Well, to me it would have paralyzed him or killed him. It blew me off the trail you know and I didn’t know it until things calmed down some and a guy come by and said you’re bleeding and I didn’t think anything else about it until about three years ago I went to the VA because my elbow started to hurt and I thought that was probably time for me to start having arthritis and they took X-rays and the doctor told me he said, well you don’t have any arthritis. I thought, well why is my elbow hurting and she said, you had three metallic densities in your arm and I said what are you talking about? She said, you have shrapnel in your arm. And I then remembered.

KS: And it never bothered you before?

BM: She said what it had done, when it went in it was hot and it sort of seared it over and there was calcium deposits had formed around it. And I never knew. And it’s one of those deals that, you get irritated with Vietnam because it won’t leave you alone, here after all these years you find out something more. It doesn’t hurt anymore. But the squad leader got the bulk of that thing. I think it broke his right arm and he had faces while on foot.

KS: You said he was training you to walk point?

BM: Yes, ma’am.

KS: Could you explain what that means?

BM: Walking point is like, when you got out on patrol, ambushing the first guy that goes and it’s your responsibility to find a way to get to the place you want to go to.

KS: How far would you be ahead of people?

BM: It’s maybe like fifteen feet or something, not a whole lot, maybe ten feet or so. I liked it and I don’t know what it was about it but I guess I walked point about three months. A lot of guys like, it’s a volunteer deal but if you don’t have somebody volunteer, you’re going to walk point today, but I liked it. Most guys would walk point like a couple of weeks or so, but I don’t know what it is I liked about it, whatever it was, I don’t know. But a good point man, like booby traps and stuff like that, that was just the longer the men going to hit that booby trap and that was the lieutenant’s fault, I thought.

What happened, we were called out, the platoon was called out, over on the field and
another company had some on the run from them. Well, we went out to set up a blocking
force; you’re not going to run into us. Well, I don’t know where they real thing showed
up, but on the way down that trail, I can’t remember if it was one or two, again older
women sitting up on the side of this cliff, berm, and of course we see them but there’s
nothing we can do about it. Well we went down there and set up a blocking force and as
we came of it, so the Lieutenant told us to, let’s go. So I asked him what was going to be
the direction of travel and he said go back the way you came from and I said no. I know
better than that, the way we’re taught, if go down that trail, you don’t turn around and
come back up that trail. And the squad leader turned in time, said the Lieutenant was
nuts, and he said I don’t care, go back that way. Well, we went back that way and sure
enough they had set a booby trap along the trail. That’s the way you don’t do it.

KS: Could you describe the terrain?

BM: A lot of it, well we worked in the Khe Sanh Mountains, which it was, we
ran into more jungle there and some of it was really thick. I had many places where it
was broad daylight but you couldn’t see because you were under that jungle and you had
to be really careful. I didn’t like that at all because you were completely disadvantaged
because a bunch of Marines going through a place like a bunch of water buffalo going
through, just thrashing and getting all the noise that you can. But then the rest of it, most
of it was very flat and it was a lot of rice paddies, most of them cut back. We worked in
one area where it was, I don’t even know the name of the valley on the other side of the
mountains, in was Antima Valley and on this side, but it looked like portions of west
Texas. It was pretty flat and then had vegetation every once in awhile.

KS: Now would you receive different orders every day when you would go out
on your, the missions where you would be gone for several weeks or would you just get a
general, cover this area in this amount of time or how would that work?

BM: We would normally, we had three platoons to a company, we hardly ever
worked together as a whole company and we did TET, TET starting because it was bad,
there was safety in numbers. But we would go out and we would be told to work an area.
The way we work things is, let’s say it’s the first night that we go out and we set up that
night as a platoon. You get up in the morning and the Lieutenant will have a place that
he want to go, the platoon leader, lieutenant commander, and he can say okay, we’re
going on then. We need to get over there, like a mile, mile and a half, two miles away.

You set up again, then they send out two patrols and leave on squad in the platoon position. They send out two patrols, two different squads. When those squads come back in, they get up and move again, a mile, two miles, whatever and you set up again and when you set up again, one squad stays in and it was normally the squad that stayed in at night and the other two squads go on ambushes and the day that you stayed in, that was your day off.

KS: Could you relax at all?

BM: No. But then the next morning when your ambushes came in, then you moved again, you would start it all over. You would just work all the way around. In a patrol, of course we call them klicks or a thousand meters but patrol that you would take out normally was, each one more than six meters long, in klicks, the lieutenant would give you degree coordinates, say this is where I want you to cover, but you would take and go, let’s say this is a map here you are. You’re over here, than you would come over here and go over there and then come in, come back here. You would always wind back up from where you started.

KS: How often would you encounter enemy troops or soldiers?

BM: During TET, probably during TET, we probably did every day and then we would hit times and I remember this most after June, that you might see one or two of them and take sniper fire or you might, or somebody might trip a booby trap or something, but as far as really getting into it with them, it might be two or three weeks. And then it might be two days and then it would be two weeks again before we got into it, it was just real sporadic. It was funny, when we worked north, that fire support base Baldy, which is also Guilt 51, if you were on the west side of Highway 1, which was the main highway, and there was a plain view that used to stop there and set booby traps, you had to dig through the asphalt, that shows somebody’s big hole, but it was funny. If we were on the east side of Highway One, we ran into a lot more personal contact with them, as far as ambushes and stuff like that. No, I’m sorry the west side is where we run into contact, if we worked on the east side of Highway One, what we normally hit was booby traps and it never did make any sense to me, what does that highway have to do with it? I don’t know.
KS: Did you always know, for instance if it was VC or NVA or could you tell?
BM: You could tell, one of the biggest factors that you could tell is like, if it was VC, just the regular old farmer by day, VC by night. They would take those AK-47s, had a thirty round clip, a lot of times they would shoot all thirty rounds at you and that’s it. Then they would go. If it was NVA, normally the NVA would stay and fight you. The NVA were tough. Of course I disagree with a lot of the things they did as far as torture and stuff. They were worthy of commending, they were good at what they did. They knew, the NVA knew that we got into it with, with what we had in our disposable as far as, we either had artillery support or air support, both and still stayed and fight you, knowing what was on the way. It takes a lot of courage. They were good at what they did.

KS: You mentioned that you were a squad leader, what did that entail, what were your duties, being a squad leader?
BM: Oh, you would work to, like the platoon commander would call you up and say, I want you to take out a patrol and here’s your grid points and then you’d go back in with your point man and if your point man was good, you could give him the coordinates and he could choose on the azimuths, draw his own patrol route. If he wasn’t you would help him to do it. But then like at night, if you had an ambush, you can take your squad out and you would, we called them holes, there wouldn’t be a hole there but that’s what we call them. Let’s say that you went up on the main trail and you go run once down the point you’re shake ambush, it’s like you’re going through this way and this way and here you are and you’re very adamant where you want to set up from, where you want to put your claymores out and then the guys you’re going to put in each hole, which ones you are going to put in those holes. Then of course you ordered re-supply for your squad and if any of them had something they needed, new boots and stuff like that, well you passed that on, I need a pair of size ten boots. I need three T-shirts, two pair of socks and so much footwear, whatever people wanted to get. I didn’t like being squad leader because you’re responsible for those guys’ lives and you can make a mistake and it can be very unforgiving. I liked walking point one each way, and I was squad leader probably four months or so, four or five.

KS: How would you be re-supplied, would they drop or would they land?
BM: No, the helicopter, those CH-46, C-night helicopters and they would come in and they would have a sling under them and your re-supply would be on there and then come swing in on the ground and get low enough where you could unhook the swing and then they’d land and you’d take all the stuff out of the sling, put the sling in the helicopter and that’s the best way we were ever re-supplied, because we were working in groves and if we couldn’t get re-supplied by air, we wouldn’t get re-supplied, but that was bringing it to you.

KS: So, would you get mail regularly when you were out in the field?

BM: Every time we got re-supplied we got mail. Well, probably 98 times out of 100 you’d get mail.

KS: Did you write a lot of letters back home?

BM: It would go in spurts, sometimes you’d write forever and then get on a kick where you don’t, but there is only so many times that you can say the weathers pretty and the foods good. I got medevaced one time, for two weeks I was in the hospital with malaria and when I was in the hospital I wrote a lot of letters. I’d probably write three or four a day, like to my mom and my sisters.

KS: Now, did you take any anti-malarial drugs or anything to prevent it?

BM: Yes, they had, what was it, seems like it was Sunday the corpsman would come around and give everybody a pill.

KS: Once a week?

BM: Yes, seems like the name was Primaquine or Chloroquine or something like that.

KS: It didn’t work for you?

BM: Well, and what’s funny, it didn’t work for the corpsman because they had medevaced me. It was sort of funny because I had been sick like two or three days and I can’t think or move real well and we were out on patrol one day and I came back in and after we got back in I walked to my corpsman that was with us. And I told him, boy doc I feel funny. He took my temperature and I had a 103.8 and he gave me four aspirin and he said go take these and lay down in the shade the rest of the day. I thought, now if I’m running a 103.8 there’s something wrong with me. So I went over to lay down in the shade but I buried those aspirin in the ground. Well, he came over in about twenty
minutes and took my temperature, it had went up to a 104. Well, that was classified as an
emergency medevac, well they sent out two CH-46 C-9s and two Cobra gunships and
what they would do is, the CH-46s would stay up there fairly high and those Cobras
would come down and fly around, try to draw fire. If they didn’t draw any fire than those
C-9s could come down and pick you up and the other one’s up there, just standby in case
something happened. When they picked me up they took me to LZ Baldy and told me to
get off. Well, I got off and LZ Baldy was a fire support base, Baldy was a regimental
support base, it was pretty big. Well, they set down at the regimental aid station and told
me to get off. Well, I got off and here come two guys running down and they had me sit
down and they started an IV and told me to get back on the helicopter and then the
helicopter took me to Da Nang, 1st Medical Battalion hospital. I think I was there about
two weeks.

KS: So they were just stabilizing you so to speak.
BM: Yes, trying to get my temperature down.
KS: And then they moved you.
BM: And then the time I hit Da Nang, it was like down to 102 or something, but
they had started the IV and of course in that helicopter there were no, there were holes in
it but there was no glass, and wind is, when you get up to about 5,000 feet of course it
cools off considerably. Well, I had that cool wind blowing on me, plus the IV.
KS: How long were you in the hospital?
BM: About two weeks. My fever broke after like two days or something like
that, and I didn’t feel bad but it’s like a fourteen-day treatment for whatever medication
they give you, I can’t remember.
SM: So were mosquitoes a big problem, insects, in Vietnam?
BM: Yes, we had insect repellent, we called it bug juice, but you could rub it on
your face and stuff like that.
KS: Did it help at all?
BM: Some. I know one guy, he had somebody rub it on his back and then he put
his shirt back on and I think he was covered up with a poncho that night, but the next
morning when he got up his whole back and everything was just covered in solid blisters,
big old water blisters and he had to be medevaced out and it was something I guess with the heat.

KS: Some reaction.

BM: Yes, he was miserable.

KS: What were some other illnesses that people were subject to out in the field?

BM: Oh, we had a lot of dysentery.

KS: Any skin problems?

BM: Yes, well, I had what we called jungle rot. I don’t know if that’s the right name for it or not. I told you, I said medevac made fun of you. It started right along in here and the corpsman that we had, he told me every chance I got to bathe and don’t wear my shirt. Well, we didn’t have anything to bathe in except rice paddies and bomb craters. Okay, get mortars, but it spread up my arm and started around here and then it went down my back and then it started moving, this way to my face and when it started up on my face I told him, I said you’re sending me in, you’re doing something. Well, the first thing they did, I can’t remember how you say it, it’s got that little green bottle of soap is it?

KS: Phisoderm, maybe?

BM: Excuse me, my being there. When they got that and that scrub brush I thought good, but he scrubbed all that stuff and put something on that that interacted, but he managed some kind metals. Anyway in about three days, it was clearing up. That was miserable because flies would try to eat you up, but it would break open and you would just be oozing sores and then crust over again and they would break open.

KS: Is there anything that could be done for that out in the field because at that point?

BM: Well, that doctor, he was a Navy doctor, he said what did your corpsman tell you to do and I said well, he said bathe often and don’t wear your shirt. Then I can’t tell you what he called me and he asked how long I had had it. Like I say, I didn’t get real concerned, until it started to get up on my face. I thought, we’ve got to stop this, I look like I have leprosy or something. But that doctor got really mad at me and the punishing, this is something that you might think is funny, they punished you by taking you out of the field and I thought well that was short. I had a Navy pistol at that point, I was sick as a dog and they finally took me in and they sent me to Da Nang and I went in like as an
outpatient. Well, they gave me some kind of medicine and told me to go on back to my unit. So I went back to where my unit is you know, well, I’m taking those pills and when you burp, it’s like you’re burping gasoline. First thing they do, I got hungry, because they make you hungry but I couldn’t keep water down or anything. I went around because I got higher than a kite and I thought somebody somewhere slipped me some dope or something, but it never dawned on me that it could be that medicine. So I went to the corpsman and said I think someone slipped me some dope. He said are you taking any medicine and he said that would do it. He said let me take your medicine, I said yes, my medicine is that way, but it cleared the infection up and it really did. It tasted like gas forming, and I did gelatin in those little capsules.

KS: What about any problems with wildlife, anything, snakes?

BM: We didn’t have any problem with snakes, we had trouble with water buffalos, because they, it was mostly was the way that we smelled is we didn’t smell like the Vietnamese. Well, every now and then one of them would take the nose and he would row me, well they’re short and stocky and heavy. We didn’t have any choice but to shoot him because he’d just, we couldn’t let him go and we had that happen.

KS: Would they just charge people and then he’s going to run right over?

BM: Yes, just run right up, here they come. Of course the thing about Vietnam and being nineteen, when they give you all the ammunition you want and these great big firecrackers, you know you’re like a kid on the 4th of July. Like when we would go through days or something where there wasn’t anything happening and the boredom. We’d just get some well, like if you went on patrol, you just fragged caves or if you were close to a river, just throw your frags on the water, just to see them blow up. Yes, it’s like having big toys, but as far as. I can’t ever remember.

KS: Did you have any mascots or pets?

BM: We got a puppy. We were at a search and destroy and of course, in search and destroys, you were supposed to take whatever was there. Well, I don’t know what happened to the momma doggy, or if this is any more puppies, but just this little puppy like that. We called him Bear and we would take turns in the squad, like when we move, whenever we’d take him on patrol or out on an ambush with us, each guy would take a turn, take your helmet off and turn it upside down and pull a towel in it and pour your
water out of your canteen over it and then set it down and then carry it like this. You
were talking about snakes, I don’t know what happened to him but when we were on an
ambush one night he started whimpering and he normally didn’t do that. Well, we got a
poncho throw it over where you can turn your flashlight on and something that had bit
him. The corpsman worked with him, gave him some stuff but he died. Then, I don’t
guess, I don’t remember having the opportunity of getting another pet or anything.
Maybe that soured anybody, we was all pretty crazy about him, because he really made
us, you would carry your helmet and he would sit there on the ground just satisfied as he
could be. He was solid black, but I don’t mind having been involved them. And it might
have been a snake. But he lived for about two or three hours.

KS: What about, were there any instances of racial tension?

BM: Yes, first of all I’m going to, I want you to understand that I’m not a racist.
Lopez was my best friend, he was Puerto Rican but we had a lot of trouble with the black
guys because they didn’t want to be in the field because of the danger but then if they
were in the rear, they’d put them on working parties all day, like filling sandbags or
stringing barbed wire and then they’d make them stand perimeter watch at night and they
were hard to deal with. It didn’t matter, I told you, walking point was voluntary unless
you didn’t have somebody that would volunteer, then you had to say, well these three
guys have all walked it theirs, it’s your turn to walk point. Well, you want me to walk
point because I’m black. No, I don’t, I want you to walk point because it’s your turn.
That caused problems and then the ones in the rear, they were in the rear because they
had back problems or stuff that you can’t, just because it doesn’t show up on an x-ray
doesn’t mean it’s not there, it doesn’t mean that it is there either. I had a lot of problems
because they were always talking about, this is a white man’s war. Well, most of the
guys in my squad were black, so the basis for what they were saying didn’t work well.
And we had more trouble in the States with them than we did overseas. It got terrible
out, it got militant and they were always ganging up. I know that sounds bad but that’s
the way it was and the trouble that they had, they brought on themselves. I was fortunate
enough that like my rank, a gunnery Sergeant, I looked to him more than I did my
platoon commander, because your platoon commander is a second lieutenant and there is
a good chance he don’t even know what is going on. They say the most dangerous thing
in Vietnam was a second lieutenant that was map and I believe it. But my company
gunnery sergeant was a, he was your textbook Marine, so if you had trouble with
somebody you went to him, you didn’t have trouble no more. He went and counseled
with the guy and got him straight. I think the only thing that I brought that I brought
home from Nam, that really means something to me, is Gunny Chad, had me a plaque
made, it’s, plain Jane black and it said, in appreciation of Sergeant Morris. Well, that
might be the only thing that I have, so I got that plaque and it’s because I had so much
respect for him and he gave it me, that’s why I still have it. Like I say, he was a Marine’s
Marine. If you did what you were supposed to, took care of your business, he was behind
you 100%, done trying to mess him or watch what happened in the meantime. These
guys, and I got picked for it, I was in the field and they call me out of the field to the rear,
I had a helicopter back in. Well, when I got their I had to report to the company office
and when I got in there Gunny Chad told me that the, I don’t know whose it was, some of
these guys, they needed their service record books. And I said, of course my clothes, you
know what my clothes look like. I asked him if I could go down to the battalion supply
and get me some new utilities. He said, you go down to supply and get anything you
want okay. So, I went down there and I told the sergeant working in there that I needed
new issue utilities. We had the camouflage ones and he said where is the second suit you
had issued to you when you come in country. I said I didn’t have no second suit issued to
me, what you see is all I got. He said, no, you ain’t getting nothing because you had a
second suit issued to you when you came in country. Well, I went back to the company
office and I went other there and told Gunny Chad, I said that sergeant down there won’t
give me anything. He said, is that right. I said, that's right. Well, then he reached up and
got his cover and put it on. We went down to battalion supply and the Gunny walked in
there with me right beside him and he said who’s the blank, blank, blank that’s in charge
here? And this sergeant said I’m the blankity, blank, blank that’s in charge here. There
was a counter and Gunny Chad just reached over and got him by the collar, brought him
over the counter, then he told him he said, I want you to give his man anything he wants,
do you understand? So, yes, Gunny I’ll give him anything he wants. Gunny Chad he
looked at me, he said he gives me any more trouble commander get me. Okay, Gunny.
That guy, I got socks, a T-shirt, utilities, I probably didn’t get any boots but I explained, I
got a towel and towels were really hard to come by.

Kim Sawyer: This is disk two continuing the interview with Butch Morris. You
mentioned that around 1970 October, you were moved to the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines.

Butch Morris: I already was 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, anyway they made me
assistant manager of an Enlisted Men’s Club, with the 1st Marines fire support base and I
don’t even remember the name of the fire support base was. We were just south of Da
Nang though, like, you know Freedom Hill was just a rock’s throw away so it was only
like five miles south to something and we were set up right on the South China Sea was
were the fire support base was. I was there until I got my flight day home on November
the 25th.

KS: What did you do as the assistant manager?

BM: I’d keep the inventory up and then I’d balance the books, we sold beer and
soda, that’s all we sold and both of them were a dime each. We had three Vietnamese
women and one Vietnamese man that worked for us and I sort of watched everything,
they kept the club clean during the day and had the trash carried out and stuff like that.
Then I’d go to Da Nang and go to the division warehouse and pallets up some beer,
cokes, whatever and that’s about all I did there. And at night, or even during the day I’d
stay out in the club area to make sure there wasn’t any trouble out there or anything like
that. Something I thought was really stupid is, nobody can come in there with just a T-
shirt and their utility trousers on, they had to have their regular camp white shirt and they
couldn’t wear their cap in the club and they couldn’t put their feet in the chairs. And I
thought we’re in a war zone, who cares. Then if we had a USO show, I’d get a truck, go
into Da Nang and pick the USO show up. That was about it. We only got mortared one
time there, it was in the afternoon. I think they were trying to go after the combat
operations center, and the only thing they blew up was the chapel. Here they were
probably shooting at what’s called Geronimo style, instead of aiming it, you hold it
between your legs with pal wrapped around it and then what they would do, they’d see
where that one hit, so they’d lower the muzzle a little bit to get the range for that. That
was, if I had like four years to do a full and I wouldn’t get an early out when I got home, I
would have reupped for another year if I could have stayed at that EM Club, it was good
duty.

KS: Who made the decision, you went from infantry to working at the club, how
did that come about, do you know?

BM: I don’t know. They just said this is where you’re going. I’ll never forget
because in a lot of ways I’ve never taken myself very seriously. Well, I had made
sergeant and I had to go to this club to be interview. Well, I walk in there was this staff
sergeant there that was the manager of the club and I didn’t know he was like he was but
I walked in and I said I’m Sergeant Morris, I’m here to interview for the assistant
manager’s job. And he said, well are you a sergeant and I went yes. And he didn’t have a
sense of humor and I kind to find out, he had been on the drill field and he was ornery, no
he was mean. He had been in the field and they finally moved him to the EM Club
because the Marines had fragged him three times, but they were trying to kill him. He
slept on one end of the club in a little room and then all the way on the other end of the
club I slept in a little room. Of course the Vietnamese who worked there, they had to
leave the base; they couldn’t stay over night there. He called me Jim and one time he
said, after we got to know each other, one time he said Jim, he said I’ll tell you what we
are going to do. We’re going to build a new room over this club and you can bunk in here
with me, and I said no. And I did it because some other Marine try to kill you, sir he
might kill me instead, I ain’t doing it. He talked me into doing it and before we left there
I was fairly good friends with that guy. But we’d go up there and shower, we took a five
gallon drum, filled it up with water and you’d let it set in the sun all day, well the water
would get hot, then I came home, from around the first of October to the 25th of
November. I’ll tell you one thing they did to us and I don’t know what they were doing
when they first started because it hadn't happened, but we had that military payment
certificate. Well, it looked like Monopoly money. Well, one day they locked the gate,
obody could go out and nobody could come in. Well, they did it first thing in the
morning, well the civilian personnel, the Vietnamese couldn’t come on base. Well, they
took up all of our money. There’s Sergeant Morris he turned in $25 and then the next
day they reissued it to in the new military payment certificate, like a $5 bill was blue,
well now its pink and they did that because so much money would get into the
Vietnamese hands. Well, when they changed the color on it, changed it, well all the
money they had was no good then, they couldn’t spend it on anything. Well, I guess it
was the day after that, I had to go to Da Nang to get something, they had the engineers
out. They had set up one five-five round booby trap out close to the front gate. I guess it
made them mad and that MPA was just thrown everywhere because it was totally
worthless. When they went to bed that night, they might have had twenty thousand
dollars and when they got up the next morning they didn’t have a dime and they did it
because of the black market. I guess between getting mortared that time and that one
deal that was the only thing that ever happened up there.

KS: Now you mention USO shows, you picked up the entertainers and brought
them back, do you recall any specific names?

BM: No, not any names. Well, one that I went after, they were all Koreans.

KS: Musical groups?

BM: Yes, and it's funny, a lot of the songs they sang were country and western
songs. Of course that upset some folks, but it was just right with me. This isn’t very
nice. Of course I was nineteen and silly and ignorant. But we went and picked up this
USO show and see downtown Da Nang to the Marines was off limits. You could go
through it if you were going from point A to point B up there, but you couldn’t stop.

KS: Why was that, do you know?

BM: Just a rule, brains I would imagine. But when it singled out and even in
private personnel in California you couldn’t wear blue jeans, not allowed, I don’t know,
that’s just what the Corps said. It had like two or three girls or whatever. I told that truck
driver I said, after we picked them up because they were really cute, I told him I said, I’m
going to ride in the back of the truck and I got going in and got back of the truck and sit
down by this Korean girl and I happened to look over and she had more hair on her legs
than I had on mine, so leaned over to the cab of the truck and stop the truck and he said
why and I said I’m getting back up there. But they were fun.

KS: How often would the USO put on these types of shows?

BM: I think we only got two of them, both might have been Korean. It was in
downtown Da Nang, which was a real trip for me. I said we couldn’t go through there.

Of course down there I don’t know, I carried a .45 whenever we go but when I was in the
1st Marines, I felt as safe there as I do right here because it was just, the area was too
secure because the 5th Marines were still there and the 1st Marines were still there, they’re
still out there running patrols and all this stuff. So its, like I say, I didn’t feel, as far as a
threat to me or anything, I didn’t feel any of that.

KS: Did you ever get the opportunity for any R&R?

BM: Yes, I went to Bangkok, Thailand. I was there five days. Of course that was
another one of those deals you had to be, it was funny when you got off the plane that
picked you up on Lake Crayon and took you to the R&R center and the first thing that
they told you, you can do just about anything you want to, but don’t raise much Cain, that
will get you in trouble. Well, as we first walked in the door there, they handed us a glass
of beer and a wet washcloth and they told us first off, don’t find some girl, fall in love
and get married.

KS: They actually told you that?

BM: Yes. But it was just party time. I know, I guess its, I hadn’t had a drink
since I was eighteen, but I even thought that was, push that drink, it didn’t taste near as
good as it did before I turned twenty-one. I rented this taxi driver for all the week for
twenty dollars, the hotel was five dollars a night. It was a nice place. We went to this
club one night and I wouldn’t call it a disco club now. But I had seven or eight risk
drinks they watered it down for all the Americans there. Well, this taxi driver bought a
bottle of Thai whiskey and it was 180 proof and he said you want some of this and I said
sure and I had a glass of ice, I started pouring. Well there was, this young lady sitting
there and I started pouring that in a glass, and she grabbed my arm and she said no, no,
no, make you Bo Co dinky dell. I said, I can handle it. No, I couldn’t either. Last thing I
remember saying is that mule should sure do bald going around in the sun. And I woke
up the next morning in the hotel, wondering how I got there. That taxi driver, he took me
down to the South China Sea, we rode horses and we swam and went bowling. I had a
grilling asp, and both of them. I went to indoor movie theater in Bangkok, same place
and have you ever seen that show *A Man Called Horse* with Richard Harris?

KS: I don’t think so.

BM: Well, that’s what was showing.

KS: An American movie, yes.
BM: And what was funny, like our movie theatres sell popcorn and cokes and candy stuff like that. They sell fruit there and it was delicious. And then I went to one place, I think they call it Timland, but what it was, it was sort of like all of Thailand put in this little amusement park and they had sword fighting demonstrations, stuff like that and they were really good at it because they were just play acting. They had rooster fights and stuff like, elephants. It was funny, before I left, going to ‘Nam, I bought these switch-blade knives. When I was going through customs and I asked the guys, why are you taking those and he said, they’re classified as deadly weapons and I thought, I carry an M-16 and a wall, three or four cans of saline, five frags, a thousand rounds of ammunition and you’re concerned about these things. One thing that I remember, seemed like the plane that we took from Da Nang to Bangkok was something like Northwest, those stewardesses on that plane, I believe they are the three ugliest ones I’ve ever seen in my life and I thought, I know why you all are doing this because we haven’t seen a woman that looked like a woman, because I’d been over there eight month before I went on R&R and I guess they were afraid to put young nice looking women on the flight.

KS: They had it all planned out.

BM: They did, they knew was they were doing. But a lot of ways I regret going and in a lot of ways I don’t because I don’t know if I would ever had as good a friends in Lubbock, Texas. Of course, the way it was handled, when we finally wound up, even though it wound up the way it did I can’t let myself believe that the guys’ names that are on that wall died in vain, I can’t believe that. I won’t believe that. Because there was some really good guys.

KS: So, you came back to the States, November 1970?

BM: No, I actually got back to the States on December the 1st, and I got released December the 3rd and I was home December the 3rd.

KS: And where did you fly back into, was it California again?

BM: Yes, when we first, so we went from Da Nang to Okinawa and stayed five days. After we left Okinawa we went to Japan and refueled and we flew from Japan to Tacoma, Washington and I’ll always think that Tacoma, Washington is the prettiest place in the world because it was all these lights and you could see all these cars moving. And
they were floating on the same runner there on California and they put us on buses. The
bus had to take us to San Diego and found out that was where they were supposed to be
and turned us back to Camp Pendleton.

KS: Did you come across, run into any anti-war demonstrations at the airport or
anything like that?

BM: No, I’ll tell you the only thing that, well Christmas just after I got there, a lot
of people donated, I think what they did is they would donate money and then the Red
Cross would take that money and buy little packages, they’d have like toothpaste and
gum, stuff like that. Then they would say this is for so and so that lives in Pennsylvania
and this is their address, will you write a paycheck. But one guy got a package and he
unwrapped it and it was a can of dog food and said, I guess it says something to the
effect, here this is what you deserve because of the animal that you are. Then when I got
home. A lot of people that I thought were my friends, when I got out, well where you
been? They hadn’t seen me in along time, well, I’ve been in Vietnam. Well, that was
stupid. I guess he isn't my friend after all. There was, let me say that had been the truth
more times, that you sort of, I guess you sort of toughen yourself to it, you block it out.

KS: How do you feel about your service in Vietnam?

BM: For the majority of it, I feel like I did the honorable thing. There was some
things happened that I would change if I could go back, but I still feel like that we were
there for a good cause. If the politicians had left us alone, we would have kicked them
out of Vietnam because we had everything we needed. We’d have done it, if we had, like
when Johnson says you can bomb this target, this target and this target, and let’s say that
this Navy pilot bombs something else and they court martial him and then on the next day
that’s on the approved bombing list, it didn't make any sense. They would even come
down and say, this is the route that you are going to take to go in on your bombing run,
well, you do that so much that they know where to set the missiles and the anti-aircraft
batteries and stuff. And it’s because the politicians were scared to death that they were
going to get red Chine involved in it, but China didn’t want nothing else.

KS: How close did you follow politics or policymaking while you were there,
soon after you came back, were you aware of the bigger picture so to speak?
BM: No, because, what you have to do say, we worked in platoon size groups most of the time and well you pretty well focused on what you were doing and one of the things that you had to learn, this was a terrible hard lesson, but you didn’t have a choice but to learn it, you can be sitting around talking and a sniper kill one of the guys in the platoon, maybe twenty feet from you and then call you up and tell you to take out a patrol. Well, that guy that just got killed, can’t think about him anymore because I can’t think about him because I got these eight with me that I’ve got to think about, don’t forget and If I’m thinking about him I might get one of them killed. So, that’s pretty much as far as we could think.

KS: What about lessons learned from Vietnam, do you think the military today has taken anything from Vietnam as far as how things are done today?

BM: I don’t. The problem with the military, we’ll fight the war pretty much the same way. I think that the politicians may have learned to stay out of it because you can’t run a war from ten thousand miles away, you’ve got to be there. It’s just like in Desert Storm, Schwarzkopf, they told him there it is, you take it, you do what has to be done. Well, he was there. He knew what to do and he knew what he had to do and he did it. And the only thing that Washington told him was stop, this is as far as you’re going, which was a mistake. They should have went on and gotten Saddam Hussein out of there. But that was the politicians. The military knows how to run a war and I don’t think they would change much of it except – you know the B-52 bomber is an extremely good weapon if it’s used right. If they had turned them loose, if they had done anything but, the harbor at Haiphong had only done a rail system, the road system, the electrical system, the power system and I would have bombed that Mekong Delta until they had road water running out of their ear. When you break the civilians’ will, or the civilian population’s will to fight, the war is over and we’re a good example of that because that’s what they did. I read one time when they were over there bringing some of the POWs home, that an American general, I assume he was probably Air Force told one of the North Vietnamese generals, you never defeated us on the battlefield. He told him that’s irrelevant and it was, they won anyway. I don’t know if I’d trade, if it was something, it was vital to the interest of this country and I knew that they were going to let the military do what was necessary, I probably wouldn’t stand in his way too long because to me if
you don’t have your honor you don’t have anything. I couldn’t stand that until when my
time was up as bad as I think so, but it was a big old lie, like Johnson running, I’m telling
you I’d take him. He may not ever give to be a doctor but you’re leaving, you’re not
doing this. Hopefully that won’t ever happen again.

KS: Is there anything else you’d like about your time in Vietnam or anything else
you’d like?

BM: No, I guess the one thing I would like to say is I appreciate what you all are
doing because for a long, long time, nobody wanted to listen to us because it was, why
don’t you just go away, I don’t want to hear about it. Well, it’s good to know that
somebody cares and somebody that will get our side of it. I’m not different than all the
other guys that were in combat units in the back but it’s certainly an indication that
finally somebody will know what happened. I appreciate you all doing that.

KS: This concludes the interview with Butch Morris. Thank you very much.