Stephen Maxner: This is oral history interview one with Phil Price, conducted by Steve Maxner. It’s the 22\textsuperscript{nd} of July, 1999 at 9:20 A.M. Mr. Price, if you would, just give us your full name and your dates of service in the Army and your dates of service in Vietnam, please.

Philip Price: Okay. My name is Philip C. Price, C. for Clifton. I went into the Army just before Thanksgiving, November 1967. I was released about the 12\textsuperscript{th}, 13\textsuperscript{th} of May 1970. I was in Vietnam. My DEROS date was May 2\textsuperscript{nd} but we had two weeks in Panama prior to getting in country so I actually got in country about May 15\textsuperscript{th}, something like that. I was wounded on the 4\textsuperscript{th} of September. I spent one night in a MASH unit, one night on the runway in Cam Ranh Bay, was flown Tokyo for operation one night on a runway there, [then about nine days at Camp Zama Hospital, Japan]. They always kept you on the runway to make sure you were stable. And then I made it back home. I got back to Fort Sill, they sent me by way of California, Travis Air Force Base there and then one of the many hospital bases in San Antonio, and then back to Fort Sill. I got there about the 20\textsuperscript{th} of September. I made first lieutenant flying back from Tokyo. So that’s my service dates.

SM: Okay, would you give us a description of your basic training and whatever pertinent information that you think is relevant to preparing you for Vietnam and the kinds of training you received; weapons training, things like that, and whether or not you thought that training was appropriate to your experiences in Vietnam?
PP: I don’t think you really realize you’re going to be going until you actually see Vietnam. Even the training in jungle school was not as realistic. I flunked one of my leadership courses because I had my men charge when mortars were going off but actually I knew they were just dynamite or C-4 going off in heavily sandbagged pits, so it was not realistic even though the surroundings and the terrain were very much. Basically I think the training was good, but in basic you learn how to be a soldier, not a whole lot about your, much more advanced than that. AIT, we learned more, but again, most of the really good training as far as map reading and how to move artillery around and that sort of thing came during OCS. All of it’s just kind of to get you there, and get you ready. I can’t say that I was totally ready, mentally or physically. Physically, I was pretty much in shape. I went from 217 when I enlisted to 145 while I was in OCS. I received two changes of clothes on the Army. Immediately when I got out I had two weeks off, I spent them eating mother’s food and I had to buy my own uniforms this time because the old one’s didn’t fit because I was going to be a TAC officer, a TAC officer’s like a drill instructor over officer candidates and you run just like they run so I was going to be in shape but I was not as in shape as I was when I was a candidate. I was training in the cycle when I graduated from basic training, just no particular reason, I didn’t know there was competition. I was honor graduate out of OCS, again, I didn’t know there was a competition. [I got a trophy and would have made PFC but I was going to OCS and my CO gave the promotion to another guy after talking to me]. I had tried every honorable way to avoid the service, I was 20 well in ‘67 I would be 24 years old ’67 I would have been 23. And I really didn’t think we were trying to win the war, that opinion never did really change. I’m trying to think. I tried, like I said, every honorable way. When I first was drafted my car was in Seattle, I’d been visiting a crew that worked for me on the East coast and I was in Kalamazoo actually. My mother called and said, “Phil this looked important so I opened it, and you’re supposed to report for a physical in the morning.” She went down and flunked the physical and I got back as fast as I could. I again received a draft notice and my dad had a convulsion and was assumed dead, and I got another thirty day [extension]. I moved my draft board. I’m not sure exactly in which order these happened, I moved my draft board from Amarillo to Lubbock, got another thirty day extension, I was trying to get into the Air Force, I wanted to fly and found out I couldn’t because my eyes weren’t good enough, you had to have twenty-twenty. But they said my hearing’s fine so I could be on the ground. Received another draft notice and had no way of avoiding it. Went in and
they found I had a kidney infection which I didn’t know, and they gave me another thirty days, and I realized my luck was about to run out so being the brave, patriotic American I am, I volunteered. But I wanted to be an officer and the recruiter told me that I could put down five different branches of the service. Of course I put down signal corps, a lot of things like that and then he reminded me that one of the five OCS choices I had to make had to be a combat branch and he said, “Go ahead and put infantry down,” which I did. And there is no signal corps OCS, there you know, this was all a farce. I guess it was artillery and infantry were the only two OCSs that existed but he allowed me to put these other branches down. Let me say too having gone and served and been in the infantry I have a great deal of pride in it now, but at the time I was not too pleased about it. If you’re an honor graduate from OCS [as I was], I finished forth in my class, you get a branch transfer to the branch of your choice and I wanted Civil Affairs. And I was going to get it and then get an RA commission which would be the same as a Westpoint graduate has, and it would have been a very good career move if I’d wanted to stay. I had to extend for a year and I was asking the major how long it would be. The day I was commissioned I was signing my papers to extend for a year and he said “Well it will take about eighteen months for it to go through, you’ll be back from Vietnam, we didn’t train you to be a platoon leader for nothing.” So I turned down the RA commission and the extension. Later when I got to Vietnam I asked for Civil Affairs again and the clerkist typed in “Officer desires CA work.” Got to my unit and the clerk there said, “Sir, you’re the first son of a bitch who’s ever volunteered for CA. You’re assigned to Captain C.A. Strabl.” And I said, “Does Captain Strabl do a lot of Civil Affairs?” And the clerk said, “No sir, CA stands for combat assault.” So that’s how I got my job. You may ask how well prepared I was. The first M-16 I saw was in Vietnam. I qualified, I thought I qualified at expert because I was using a pencil, but it seemed like I got sharp shooter. I did qualify expert on an M-14 and I had ridden in an armored personnel carrier once, and they gave me a unit of them when I got to Vietnam and I got to learn how to manage those.

SM: Okay, why don’t you describe your initial experiences in country and actually, take a step back quickly if you would. You mentioned earlier that you had spent some time in Panama, en route to Vietnam. What was that for, was that for any type of particular training, or?

PP: Jungle school.

SM: It was jungle school?

PP: Yeah, you had...
SM: Describe that.

PP: It was far more realistic, I thought at that time normally you had a year before you went in country and I had expected to have a year but they were running out of second lieutenants, or lieutenants and I got my orders in about six months. When I got to Charleston or Charlotte, I guess it was Charleston, I was waiting on taking my plane to Panama, and I looked down and a pair of jump boots came up in class A uniform, and I looked up and it was one of my buddies from OCS, Bob Paulas, who was going too. We flew to Panama City and then they trucked us out to Fort Sherman and there we learned rappelling, we learned how to live in the jungle, how to eat everything except C rations. We ate snakes [sloth, caetomundies, etc.] but you know, if you just wrap it around a stick and cook it long enough it all tastes alike. But that counted as time in country so I wasn’t upset about that. One of the captains who was with us taking it told me when I get there I need to buy a Seiko or Seeko, I never knew how to pronounce that, watch which I did for $25 dollars when I got to Vietnam and it was a good one, it ran for years and years. But at Fort Sherman probably the hardest thing was escape and evasion. It was only about fifteen miles and they let us off, and of course they had ambushes set up along the roads. They did track with dogs and they used patrol boats on the rivers and the five of us decided to take the river route and it was the Chagras River. Only two of us made it. The other three, one was physically just had the runs and what have you and couldn’t keep up. The other two just didn’t push as hard. Paulus and I, this Bob Paulus, the same guy I had seen in Charleston, he was in front of me at one time. We were crawling over the roots of mangrove trees that grow on the river and, you know, they’re anywhere from two to three to fifteen feet I guess above the water and he disappeared. And then he turned on his light and he was under water, and I grabbed him and pulled him up. But he was stuck in the mud but we continued down and we had many times, patrol boats would come by with signals, and when that happened we would drop under the water and they would try to fake you out saying they saw you and come on out and all that. But I would imagine that was probably the most realistic. We had, like, three days to get there and get through escape and evasion and get to California. We got through about 5:30 in the morning, they’d let us off the night before, or the afternoon before and if you got caught you were sent to a prisoner of war camp and they did not want to do that. So we got there and we had a radio [flashlight] code that we worked with a patrol boat, or a small boat that took us across the river. We had swam it once during training, but I did not want to swim it,
especially at night. But we got in to Ft. Sherman and Bob and I grabbed a wooden bench, put it
into the showers and just sat there naked, slowly got naked in the hot water because we were
dead tired. I don’t think we slept. We went downstairs, had a small officer’s club there, and had
breakfast. I went on to fly out. I told Bob Paulus I was going to stop by and see Vicki because I
could spend two nights in Amarillo. He said that he couldn’t, that he said he’d said his good-
byes, and I didn’t realize a lot of the turmoil he was going through, but he went on to California.
I stopped in Amarillo. On the way to the airport [to got to California to Amarillo], I know, I was
in my class A’s, khakis, and a carload of teenagers passed and laughed at me which kind of hurt.
But when I got there [Travis] our flight was supposed to leave at ten and it was about 9:50 and
there was the longest line, it was probably two or three blocks long, as long as it would stretch. I
was thinking, “Well heck, I’m going to get to spend the night here.” And Bob Paulus was about
third in line and he leaned out and said, “Hey Price, I saved you a place.” And that was the only
time they didn’t mind you cutting in line in the Army. So he and I and a guy, one of our OCS
classmates who did get signal corps flew over together. I don’t know that we knew any of the
other folks there, but it was nice to know that we weren’t the only ones going early. But we flew
to Hawaii, landed in the middle of the night and they let us off the plane for a little while. The
airport was deserted. It was kind of surreal because they did have a little band that played
Hawaiian tunes and I wasn’t going to Hawaii. We landed again in Guam, and had breakfast
there and then loaded back up and flew to Vietnam. First time when I saw it signal corps guy
told me, you know, “Hey Price, I can see this.” And I looked out and I saw the mountains and
they were dark and forboding, it was eerie. It was almost an out of body experience. Signal
corps guy, don’t know his name, I spent six months with him though, but he asked Paulus and I
if we really thought we could kill a guy and I thought it was kind of strange that for ten months I
had been trained to kill people with everything from knives to grenades to artillery, and I told
him I thought I could but Bob said he’d have to think about it. He was the first one of our
company to get killed. But I did research recently and he was shot in the head in an ambush and
I actually got ahold of, through email, the man who pulled him out and went back and took
charge of his platoon. It was a sergeant, he’s now a high school principal, and he described what
they had found the day before, and the fight, and that Bob was alive when he put him on the
chopper but he had died earlier [en route to the hospital]. But he was the first of our company to
get killed. A couple of our TAC officers, we knew, were already dead because they were
naturally six months in front of us. So it was kind of my first expression, or impression. I know it was weird, we landed at Bien Hoa, and walked into and I didn’t realize, I didn’t know where Bien Hoa was, I didn’t know we were in Saigon or virtually there. I walked into, it wasn’t a tent, it was just a metal roof and had no sides and had benches for us to wait for our names to be called. And here we all were fresh scrubbed and fresh faced and I looked over in the corner and there was an old sergeant sitting there and he was dirty and he had his rifle, and he had his rifle, ammo, grenades, and everything, and it was surreal because of all the safety precautions in training we never would carry that. But he was just leaning up against the corner asleep, waiting for his flight he was just catching a hop somewhere.

SM: And that was in May 1969?

PP: May, yes, yeah.

SM: Now what unit were you assigned to initially?

PP: I was only assigned to one unit. 2nd platoon, A company, 2nd of the 8th infantry, 4th infantry division. We were a mechanized unit. Battalion headquarters was at Camp Anari, which was [just north of] Pleiku. That may have been division headquarters, too. I spent one night, or I spent two or three nights there processing in. We got our uniforms in Bien Hoa, and Bob and I went together to get them, and it was kind of eerie because here they were; jungle fatigues, jungle boots and everything. And I don’t know whether we bought or had shoestrings that we put our dogtags on. And I had made sure I had a watch that didn’t glow in the dark and didn’t tick, it was one of the first electric watches. And then I got an armored personnel carrier you could hear from Pleiku to Kontum [there to eternity] so it didn’t really matter much.

SM: That was an M-113 armored platoon?

PP: I guess, I don’t know. That’s what people have told me that they were but see, they just dropped me off and said, “This is your platoon.” And I remember watching the jeep head back toward Pleiku [and Camp Anari] and I felt like a calf watching his momma being lead back to the barn. But we got our weapons when I got to Camp Anari, and we got a briefing by I don’t know which Colonel, it wasn’t the Colonel that was mine, so he must have been over my Colonel. But it was a huge map, and they brought the young officers in. I don’t think they did it to the enlisted but they told us, you know, “You’re going to be fighting the 69th infantry division,” or battalion, whatever it was, it really didn’t matter, it didn’t soak in. But they told us
who we were fighting, where they were, and where we would be scattered or what our mission was, basically.

SM: What other aspects of an in-country briefing did they give you in terms of trying to prepare you for the culture of the Vietnamese, interacting with people, you know, staying away from brothels, things of that nature?

PP: They gave us a couple of books, I still haven’t read them. But I guess if you were going to stay in camp, I didn’t spend anytime in camp except during processing in and I went back, I guess twice as pay officer and ironically I saw, I was in camp three times and saw the same movie all three times. But at least it had white women in it. They did very little indoctrination that I can recall, I’ve got a couple of books I’ll show you and it gives the history of Southeast Asia, and I didn’t really care and most of the people I was with didn’t care. We wanted to know how many days we had left and I could everyday I could tell you how many days I’d been there and how many days I had left.

SM: How long a tour were you on?

PP: 365.

SM: It was 365.

PP: 364 and a wake up. And soon as you get there you start seeing signs that are short when you go into a stall in the john and on the door there’d be a pair of boots with a helmet on top of it and the guy underneath it says, “I’m so short I walked in without opening the door.” Because that was the term, being short meant, you know, that you had very few days to go.

SM: And that meant 365 days in combat?

PP: No, in-country.

SM: In country?

PP: In country.

SM: Now of course some officers, I know that battalion, brigade, and higher; some of them were on a six month combat rotation. Was that the case with lieutenants, with your unit?

PP: No.

SM: Was it the case with the battalion/brigade officers?

PP: Not that I know of.

SM: Okay.
PP: The only time, mine changed while I was there and I don’t know why they changed and we got a Colonel Zap, fortunately he liked me. I wasn’t a bad, I don’t want to paint it that I was a bad soldier, but at that time we had the general feeling that we weren’t really trying to win the war and so what our mission was was to try not to not die and keep our men alive.

SM: Now was that a sentiment held at all levels of command that you were aware of in terms of your level, company, battalion, brigade?

PP: They were more gung-ho the further removed from the fighting. I was chewed out one time, we were chasing them NVA and if you can see [line 5] the map you can see. Those are, what are they, twenty meters, I think, for each line something like that, so that’s pretty steep mountains. And I had a chopper telling me to take a five-degree turn to the right and I told him that I couldn’t make a fucking five-degree turn to the right. And another, I think my Colonel, wanted to know if I knew who the hell I was talking to and I said, “No I don’t but I know where in the hell he is, and I know where in the hell I am, and I know there’s a fucking cliff five degrees to my right.” And they let me go. I was not really insubordinate, I’m sure it’s grown over the years. But they would be more gung-ho. I was told one night I was going to be attacked by 160 [NVA], a reinforced company with a 160 men with mortars and I had 22 guys, but I had 12 machine guns and I knew where they would come from, or where I thought they would, and before I let my guys eat we got, we crawled out and put out new trip flares and we got grazing fire with our guns. We’d go in, there’s a lot of other things I did but we were ready. And we ate our C-rations as it got dark, and I had just finished my C-ration and as I set it down beside me the click. I can remember it, the click of it hitting the armored personnel carrier was the same as the click that a trip flare has because they click first then they shoot up in the air as they go off. And I heard it, and we were firing before it really was fully off because they were crawling in on us. We chased them away, pulled artillery in on them, we had artillery coming from a firebase [LZ Joyce] and one coming from Artillery Hill and we also had our mortar. It was later when Captain Kalen got down, was chewed out for not chasing them and I thought, “Well, if there’s 160 of them and 22 of me, what if I catch them?” And so at that particular time I had two Kit Carson scouts, which we did use to track and what have you. If they found anything that was really serious, the one that we used the most, his name was Choke, and they were ex-North Vietnamese that had gone over, and they knew if they were captured it was pretty bad for them. They might just shoot us, but it would be bad for them, and Choke always got
malaria every time we got close to a fight, so I knew it was serious if he was laying in his bed
shivering, not his bed, we didn’t have beds we had air mattresses we blew up.

SM: What were the soldiers like in your platoon, how well trained were they? Your
NCO’s, were they competent? Did you have any problems? Were they all squared away?

PP: When I took over my platoon I met two lieutenants who had had the platoon, I told
you yesterday. One of them had been blown off his track, the most recent one when they had hit
a mine because everyone rode on top, you didn’t ride on the inside for that very reason. He had a
bad back and the other had been relieved because the platoon told him he would be fragged if he
took them on a particular mission, so he had been removed and they had an old sergeant, he was
probably 35, but the sergeant had been in the Army 23 years I think was the time, his name’s
James Briley, but he may have been 27 years that he’d been in the Army, but he was a platoon
sergeant. He was a former cook, but I noticed when I got my Purple Heart orders, it was his
third purple heart, so he had spent his time in the boonies. When I got there I let run him the
platoon for the first two or three weeks until I noticed he was doing stuff that wasn’t safe as far
as making sure we had out listening posts and that sort of thing, making sure our perimeter was
protected. He would, he wouldn’t goof off, but he wouldn’t be the aggressive leader that you
needed to be and I gradually took over from him. Our men were generally pretty well trained.
The one’s who’d been there longer talked to the others and told them what to do and what not to
do. My first test in a fight came after a week. But my guys, we were basically a rescue group; if
a convoy was ambushed, that was our job was to break it loose and it was kind of the Aggie way
of breaking up a convoy, or breaking up an ambush. We would move in with machine guns and
drop artillery behind them so they couldn’t run, which I’d rather drop artillery on them. They
had a tendency to be a lot closer than you thought they were. Very much closer, I’ll tell war
stories later.

SM: Could you tell me about your first combat experience? Experience under fire?

PP: We had a rule that you, we could recon the fire, which we did, but it was always
single shot. If you ever fired automatic, that meant that you had contact. I was sitting, we would
get up in the morning, do a mine sweep, and then we would go on to what we call strong points
or strong points and we would stand there, or put up our fence up front. We had a chain link
fence to catch rockets if they came in, and I don’t know the wisdom of that because the thing that
did the damage was the heat rod and that still came on in, and it would just cause the shrapnel to
explode further out so that it’d have a better spread pattern I think, but still that was one of the
things we had to do. But I never got attacked while I was on strong point. But anyway, I was
there. We were waiting on the convoys to go through and I think both had gone through and I
heard automatic fire coming from my south position, probably a quarter of a mile from me and
everybody was either loaded or loaded very quickly and left. Briley had stayed where we had
slept at night, it was our little base. He swung up on the back and he had a PRC 25 with him, a
radio, and when we got there he rolled off in the bar ditch and started calling in artillery and a
Medevac because my guys started screaming on the radio. I forgot to tell you that. I heard the
automatic fire, but then I heard my squad leader start screaming, and he was using no radio
procedure, just “God-damnit!” and 5-7 was my name over there, or my call sign, and he said,
“They’re all over there, they shot Murphy, they shot so-and-so, and I’m hit, and God-damnit,”
you know, and just screaming, yelling, “Help us!” We got there and no one was firing, they
were all down in the track and fortunately we got there fast enough and I pulled along beside
them and they shot. The North Vietnamese were in the tree line, and they fired a rocket grenade
at me, it looked like a white dot coming toward me, and I started firing. I was scared as could be
and they fired a little bit. I think they left a lot sooner than I quit fighting. Strange, I didn’t
know how I would react but I fired instantly and I was calling in, trying to get Iron Mike. We
had a company commander, had a tank with him and Iron Mike was the nickname for the tank
and I was screaming, “God-damnit, get me Iron Mike! The guys have rockets!” and my throat
constricts, and I can’t even fake it now, but I had a real high voice and it was very tight and, you
know, you pucker but I had an inverted pucker so I was going, “I need help, you know, blah blah
blah” and he was going, and this is Cpt. Strabl who’s macho as can be, goes, “Calm down 5-7,
I’m on the way,” you know, and I go, “Hurry, hurry! Get it!” and it was funny because it took a
half an hour for my throat to un-constrict. By the time Strabl got there, it took him longer than it
should have I thought, my gun was so hot it was cooking off and he pulled up and immediately
called a cease-fire because my other tracks had joined me. When he called a cease-fire, my gun
was so hot, the breech was, that it exploded and this is a .50 caliber machine gun, and it fired. It
did that about three times, and I got tired of being cussed out so I opened it, even though if it had
fired while I was opening it, I was dead. But I fired 1500 rounds during that fight, and I had to
drive over all the cans.
SM: Now when you said you did recon by fire, with a single shot, was that with a 50 cal as well?

PP: Yeah. Whatever you had. The 50 cal just, you know, loads 100 rounds and loads easily, quickly. But we would, as we were moving, we would fire into suspicious clumps or, you know, places where they could be. You rarely saw the enemy, not up close.

SM: What about villages in the area. Were there many, or were there many civilian Vietnamese around?

PP: I drove past once or twice we went in to pick up a convoy, or we took a body in one time. And you would see some South Vietnamese. The thing that struck me, I remember, there’s one little village we drove through that was just on the road, the houses lined the road, and this would have been highway 19, and their houses were made of Coke cans, where they had cut them out, flattened them out and used them as shingles, and it was an interesting look to it, and those were the more prosperous. Most of the people we and the people I saw when we would pick up a convoy or I’d go in as pay officer, were the people who would peddle stuff to you, and I didn’t like them. They had one little boy that I was just sitting in a jeep waiting to go back out and take my money to the men, and he came by with sandpaper and scraped the face of my watch and he wanted a dollar to shine it. Well, the guys that we were with, there’s an armored unit that may have been MP’s because you have those big rubber tire tanks or whatever they’re called that led the convoys actually, but if they got into trouble we were the ones that helped them. But they had a little boy, probably 13, he was a Vietnamese, who was dressed in tiger stripes and he was kind of their mascot, well he got the little kid who’d done it and persuaded him to buff my watch free because it was a brand new watch. But when I’d first got there, my first day, the first convoy had gone by or one of the first days, and some of my guys came around and they said, “We want you to meet somebody,” and her name was Kim, and she had on black pajamas, and really built well, and she opened it up and said, “I souvenir. You boom-boom, you let me boom-boom GI’s.” And I said, you know, “Get out of here.” And I would not let my guys do that. Some of the officers when they went in would buy rubbers for their guys and what have you; I didn’t. I didn’t allow them to fraternize. We just didn’t do that. It wasn’t a moral issue, it was more of a safety. I figured they already knew where all my machine guns were at night and everything else so we just didn’t need anymore of that. There was a couple of times I would throw smoke grenades to get them out from around us.
SM: So that, and that policy of yours was in keeping with the Army policy, or did the Army instruct you, did higher commanders instruct you how?

PP: I’m sure they told us not to, but I don’t recall it. And all I know is that some of the lieutenants would allow it, some wouldn’t. My unit became pretty strict as far as, I came from being a TAC officer, so when I first got in country, the other officers didn’t particularly like me because they remembered their TACs. So my platoon straightened up and they became pretty good guys, really.

SM: Now you mentioned earlier that the platoon that you took over, the platoon leader prior to you had been threatened with fragging. How serious were those threats, do you think, and were any other members of your platoon ever threatened?

PP: That particular time I think the threats were just idle. There was a lot of talk about it but I never once heard of it actually happening because it certainly, to my knowledge, never. It never came close to happening to me. They knew after the first week that if they got into a fight I would be the first one there. In fact, the rule was that you could shoot anything in front of me, and they knew who I was because we carried a skull on a stick and so I never took point or anything until we got into combat and then I pulled to the front. There was another time a platoon, I think it’s first platoon, their lieutenant was relieved, (it’s cold in here), because he was going to be killed if he took the guys on a particular mission. It was not a fun mission because we had to walk and they relieved him, he went back to base camp and sent me to take his platoon on the mission the same day and I took Briley with me, and Briley was a great big guy and I came in just like as if I were a TAC officer, gave a five paragraph field order and told them in Army fucking terms what they would be carrying and when we’re moving out. And we moved and they were pretty undisciplined. We were going through circling around a unit, Jacket Kilo was the name of the guy who, or that was his radio name, it was a rough puff, just regional forces, and evidently they, my men, had decided, you know, it’s a mission they the rough puffs should have taken because we were sweeping around their area and we swept around this little mountain and it was real high elephant grass, and we hated elephant grass because you can shoot through it but you can’t see through it. And I had an artillery forward observer with me and his radioman, and then I had the other platoon leader’s radio man and I put us into a kind of a diamond shape instead of running individual people because you can lose somebody. I ran the four squads as a diamond, with the lead squad doing point and we kept pretty close together. But
I was going slower in the middle and we lost the point squad and my radioman who’s in the other platoon, he said, “Well you want me to fire up in the air?” And I go, “Shit! This isn’t Fort Dicks! You know, they’re going to know, they know where we are, and that’s all we need is to start a fire fight with our own people!” So I told everybody to just lay down, and we laid down and about twenty minutes later we heard them, or about ten minutes, we heard them whispering, you know, wanting to know where we were. From then on they stayed in tight, we made the little sweep. I went back to my own platoon. But as far as fragging, you know, it didn’t happen. I talked to my medic years well, 28 years after I missed him. He was the only other college graduate in the unit with me, and I talked to him about it and he said, “Well you may not have ever known about it, and in fact I think it was before you got there”. But my driver, he had a Polish name, played a harmonica, but he also had a gook’s belt on that he wore, and he had a 30 caliber North Vietnamese rifle that he’d taken off one of them, and it shot 30 caliber. And, I think he was in the mortar platoon, and my medic said that he went in and they were all talking one night at how they would fake a firefight and they’d leave a lane open so that somebody could get out. Actually the guy was going to sneak out, the guy with the 30 cal. or this is the plan that’s told to me 28 years later by my medic. He would sneak out and when Briley lit his cigar at night, he usually sat up on top of the bridge, and it would be easy to shoot, and they were going to fire and they were going to leave a lane open for the guy with the rifle to come back in and so he would have been shot with an enemy rifle and my medic told the guys, says, “Well, you’ll have to shoot me too because I’m not going to let you do it.” And it was just guys talking, I don’t think they ever would have really done it, and they didn’t.

SM: What really motivated that kind of activity or that kind of attitude towards other officers, NCOs?

PP: I think if they weren’t decisive, if they weren’t fair, if they did stuff that they told you not to. You just, well I’ve got letters back from my men that said that, “We thought you were hard on us but you were never harder on us than you were on yourself.” I actually walked flank one day just to see how hard it was to keep up and it was damn tough because, just like on a mine sweep or something, you can walk faster swinging the mine detector. I thought we were going real slow, but you get out there in the brush and it’s tough. Especially when it’s raining and things like that. After the first couple of fights they knew that they could count on me and they also knew that I didn’t make them do foolish things. Captain Strabl had taken them. I told
you this yesterday [that] when my guys were back at base camp waiting to have an officer the
zappers came through and blew up all the trucks that started. The ones that wouldn’t start they
didn’t touch and so their intelligence was pretty good. But they came in one side of the camp
and out the other, then, of course, zappers weren’t there to shoot at you, they were there just to
blow up stuff or throw satchel charges into sleeping quarters and that sort of thing. Well Strabl
took my men and took them and chased the gooks, and killed them, and brought their weapons
back. And I say gooks now, and that’s just because that’s what we called them, I mean no
disrespect or anything because they were doing their job. They were closer to home than I was.
But what would be frustrating I guess, I saw them one time coming through a clearing, I don’t
know, they were about 4500 meters from me. It was exact range by mortar, so 43, 42 [hundred]
meters but I could see it, and the way they carried their rifles and their uniforms were different. I
don’t know why they had the audacity to walk through a clearing, but you could see, like, three
of them at a time coming through but they were two or three miles away and they would not
allow me to fire on them. And I could have had three rounds in the air before the first one hit but
I called Jacket Kilo and he said, “All my men are in the wire,” and wouldn’t let me shoot. Later
we went out and found bunkers and things that they had built because they were coming from,
ironically, from the east. Most of them came from the west, from Cambodia. But we did meet
these guys later. They attacked a convoy a couple of days later.

SM: Did you ever find out the rationale for not being allowed to fire on them?
PP: We did not. Well, they could have walked in formation down the road and unless
they fired on me I was not allowed to fire on them.

SM: So those are the rules of engagement?
PP: Yes.

SM: If you were not engaged you could not engage?
PP: That’s right.

SM: Was that because you were in a defensive posture or was that just a standard?
PP: It’s probably a defensive posture and to make sure that we don’t hit an ARVN unit
by mistake, or hit one of our own units.

SM: Okay.

PP: The last day I killed one of them and I was watching his body bounce and I realized
he had a green uniform on and I thought I had killed one of my own men. Later, because they
had changed uniforms, they weren’t wearing khakis, they were green. Later they thought we were all dead and I was just unlocking my touret so I could spin, but I’d been shot a couple of times, but all my men were either wounded or unconscious or something and they [NVA] were all wearing green uniforms and I was very happy and I set off a hundred rounds of ammo. No that was what was frustrating is that you couldn’t fire until you were fired upon. Equally frustrating is that we would run up and down even closer to the town, we would pass the ARVN units and they would all be in clean uniforms, they’re APCs were clean, and…but we were doing the fighting, they weren’t and that was very frustrating.

SM: Did your men share their frustration?
PP: Yes.
SM: Did you talk about it a lot?
PP: Didn’t talk about it a lot, it was there. We did not like the ARVN’s. I had nothing to do with them. Jim Reckner here was with an ARVN unit for two years, or different units, and he grew really to like them and respect them. I just had no interaction except negative. I did work with the Montagnards and I loved them. They were very honest, very primitive people but I loved the Montagnards. One of them named Brae, he was probably 5, 4 or 5. We were moving. He would help me fill sand bags, and he was kind of privileged because he, his uniform, instead of just the sash they all wore, he had a very small Army hospital pajama top that he wore. The women wore just long wrap around skirts and that was kind of a shock for young guys who’d been in the Army for a long time. Brae worked with me, he was my laundry man. I had two sets of jungle fatigues. He would wash one, and every week I would change whether they were dirty or not. But God, they must have stunk. He would wash them in the run off of the rice paddy. But still, it was a fresh pair. I left my wallet in it one time and he brought it back to me. I would give him food and C-rations. The only thing they ever spit out was chocolate fudge that my mother had sent, and it was an old Vietnamese woman, or not Vietnamese, but a Montagnards, and she didn’t like chocolate at all. But they chewed the beetle nuts and that sort of thing, had bad teeth, but good people.

SM: You mentioned earlier that you had worked with some rural forces, rough puffs. Can you explain a little bit more about them and how your units interacted with them and how good a fighters they were, or bad?
PP: I never saw them fight during the whole time I was there. I went in to see Jacket Kilo because I was supposed to meet him since I was camped about, oh, a quarter of a mile if that far away from the rough puff camp and they ordered us to have ways that I would help it with defense in case he got hit. Basically the way we were going to do it, we’d have one of our tracks stay back and provide cover. The other three would dash in, spin around, use covering fire, he’d get in the back, and we’d leave. But that was never done. He had a nice hooch, he had a refrigerator, he had cold Cokes, and still I’ll never know his name. We got hit one night and he was [asserting]. He had a mortar and I was directing artillery fire from artillery hill and using all the coordinates and then from LZ Joyce we had 105’s coming in there, but the best fire was coming from Jacket Kilo and he kept. I was giving him two degrees left and right and all this, and he says, “5-7, I’m just kicking the fucking butt plate, I don’t have a [aiming device]”, what do you call it, it’s like a sextant, on the side of it. He said, “You know what, I’m just kicking the butt plate!” You know, I’d tell him left and he’d kick it, but he was the most accurate of all the people. But you know, we had one fight where we had something coming, we heard movement out on the wire, and we fired and it froze, and then later we heard movement. We were scared to death because it was coming in, and finally we saw it and it was a panther. Immediately I ordered white phosphorous and so it scared the cat away, but it was just a full size panther that was coming down the side of the road and it got though the wire, and it ran.

SM: You mentioned earlier also some experiences with the Kit Carsons, those that were assigned to you?

PP: Uh huh.

SM: Was there any problems, ever any problems with the Kit Carsons, any concerns over them engaging in spying or anything like that?

PP: No, because Choke was the one we had most of the time. The other one came but he didn’t stay long, he went back. Choke, I asked him how he left his other unit, his North Vietnamese unit, and he said that he killed his platoon leader. I told him, “Anytime you want to leave, just Didi.” And I would have let him, it didn’t bother me. He’s the one who would find blood trails after the flights. It’s strange; it had happened two or three times, and really where they went tracks couldn’t go and we weren’t really, we were out numbered. Two or three times, identified the blood trails as probably water buffalo and they said, “Okay. You don’t have to
go.” And I don’t know how they thought a lieutenant, second lieutenant at that, could identify, tell the difference. It was early DNA testing that we did.

SM: (laughs)

PP: But we basically didn’t go. They sent me on one mission, if you still have tape…

SM: Oh yeah.

PP: It was the first time I realized that they the NVA smell differently than we did because we had to leave our tracks and we went down and they had typical fox holes and the fox holes would be like a yard wide, maybe, and then six foot, and then they’d dig them down, and then about three feet down they would dig back into the wall of the fox hole and put grass, and that would be their sleeping quarters. Then they’d put poles that they stood on so that they didn’t stand in the water because it rained all the time. It’s ingenious, and it’d rather be kind of cool down there. Anyway, we were clambering down to get to them, we were trying to get them pretty fast, and they left, they ran, and we were probably making too much noise. But of course I’m sure they heard the armored personnel carriers. When we got there the fires were still going and they had dropped several sacks of rice. Their rice was carried in like a tube sock, a white sock, and they slung it around their shoulders. My radioman came up and said, “5-7, do you realize they’ve got more two man bunkers than we have men?” And I said, “I think it’s time for the artillery to take these guys.” And so I figured they had run to the blue line, or the stream down [below us] and I walked artillery there and we moved back to the road and I walked it back up through their camp and we left.

SM: So in those kinds of operations you wouldn’t go back in for a body count to see how many you might have killed?

PP: No, because usually by the time that happened it was getting dark and they owned the night.

SM: How would you report that kind of an action up the chain of command?

PP: I would report how many we found, and I never did give a false body count. I didn’t.

SM: Was that a problem in adjacent units to you?

PP: Not really.

SM: Issue of the body count and what did lieutenants and your commanding officers think of this fixation, because of course that was something that came down the chain from
people like Secretary of Defense MacNamara, these individuals who wanted to quantify progress
in the war, and therefore an emphasis on body counting? What did you and your fellow officers
think of that?

PP: Well the colonel would always come by and ask our radio, and ask how many
bodies, and it was rarely that we’d find their bodies because they would drag them off or one of
them they already had a trench dug and put him in it as they left, and we found him. I remember
the colonel asking me one time about, “Are you sure you killed anybody?” And I said, “Well, I
did,” and I described where I shot him, and, you know, where in his body, and he said, “Well
shit, we’ve already found him,” so they needed counts but we didn’t give them fake ones.

SM: Were there any rumors of, maybe not your unit, but other units that you were near
to, that they engaged in falsification or did you ever hear of any incidents of that happening?

PP: Well I read about it. There was one story, it’s said a convoy and gotten clobbered,
and we lost a guy named Parker on that deal, he wasn’t in my platoon, but there was a body
count given there and the bodies weren’t there. Probably we killed some of them, but you rarely
saw them directly. It was like reading a western novel, when you read it or a sports article,
because it was written about how great and brave and all we were and how we had really beat up
on this group and it wasn’t the case. We did win, but in fact that particular time we were a
blocking force. And I’ve heard it and I’ve played it over in my mind so many times I could see
it, so of course I know it’s raining and everything but I really couldn’t see it when it happened.
They shot a chopper down because we were working with Cobras, I love working with them.
And this, I don’t know if it was a Cobra or not, but the chopper was down and when Captain
Strabl got there a North Vietnamese was inside going through I don’t know whether he was
killing the people in there or what. But the was a chopper’s on it’s side and he jumped out and
ran and I will always remember Strabl hollering, going, “Get him, get him, get him, yee-haw!
Get him, get him, get him!” So they, and you could hear the tracks grunting as they worked him,
and someone shot him with an M-16 and hit him in the elbow and came out and it came out the
back of his hand. And I hated M-16’s. You shoot him with a 50 and that’s right. But…

SM: Where was this now?

PP: This was about 12 clicks north of Pleiku. It was right where I worked. We were
there, we were lined up just behind a little hill but if any of them came over the hill we had them.
I don’t know if they knew that or not.
SM: What size was the enemy force, did you know?
PP: Probably a company size. [Later told it was a battalion].
SM: And this was...these were PAVN regulars?
PP: Yes.
SM: Okay.
PP: That’s all we ever fought.
SM: So you never really had to engage in what are referred to as the Viet Cong?
PP: No.
SM: The indigenous South Vietnamese?
PP: No.
SM: Okay.
PP: Nope. This was ’69 and as I left, right after when I got a letter back from my medic,
he said they were turning it over to the ARVN's. I’ll give you a copy of his letter, he said they
were being attacked with sometimes strictly B-40 rockets because they were well supplied by
then if they can waste those B-40’s. And I think our company was down to about eight or nine
tracks. Could have been over run, in fact he says if we hadn’t had a Roane plow with us it would
have been the end.
SM: You mentioned earlier when you took over the platoon one of the operations you
were on you were dismounted for the majority of that. What were the, I guess the rules for
dismounting. Did you dismount often? Did your platoon dismount a lot?
PP: It strictly depended on the terrain. We would take the tracks in as far as we could
and we would you know, and there were certain places we just flat couldn’t get the tracks into.
And we would leave them, dismount and go out.
SM: Were there?
PP: But we didn’t like it.
SM: Didn’t like it?
PP: No. But then the straight leg grunts didn’t like riding with us. See we loved having
all the ammo, and all the water, everything we wanted right there. 12 machine guns, I had five
50s, and I guess 7 M-60s. I had a lot of weapons.
SM: You had lots of ammunition?
PP: Never ran low on ammo. No.
SM: Okay.

PP: I fired 1500 rounds and I don’t think, well you were resupplied every day with whatever you needed. I had one .45 at the time, I later had one or two others [personal weapons]. I carried a .45, but I carried it under my shirt because I didn’t want people knowing. Anyway, I ordered ammo and they sent me a case of it, which is a box that big. We wanted Cokes, but they said you have to buy flat which was like 116 cases, and I go, “That’s too many.” We did have a Coke truck hit a mine, though, and they left it on the road beside us and we evacuated several cases of cokes, about as many as we thought we could carry. Army was kind of funny in what they resupply.

SM: Were you ever concerned that your APC’s were so loud that they were going to give you away and give the advantage to the enemy?

PP: No. In fact I thought they would intimidate. We went in with our hair on fire. We were firing a lot. And generally they ran. They didn’t want to be there when we got there. For a straight leg grunt, you know, you’re one on one. There was one thing, Plei Boi, we were on two missions. First mission was a guy named Fritz who was a spook [CIA] and I had seen him once in base camp. He wore khakis…he wore a uniform but no insignia and no rank, no name, no US Army on it. And I think our entire company was involved in this. There was, I believe it was Plei Boi, and there’s a village, let me look at the map, this village right here, Plei Boi or whatever. We had Plei Boi, there was something going on right in here all the time and I slept right here most of the time, I believe.

SM: At the intersection near benchmark 716, is that right?

PP: Yes.

SM: Okay.

PP: Yeah, ‘cause the road was right up from us. Anyway we surrounded Play Boi because we were LZ Joyce was here, and we came down the road as fast as we could and they were riding with us and surrounded it except for this little blue line here, that’s where Fritz was and whoever ran, Fritz got. Because people think of, you know, like a sniper; well he was a sniper with claymores and stuff, he didn’t this was night and somebody ran. Later they sent me on a mission here, and I went up the road.

SM: To Plei Boi?
PP: To Plei Boi. I went up the road came in, I’m trying to think no, I came across because it was flatter and as we got about where that little blue line is my guys said, “5-7 you gotta come up here and see this, it’s weird.” And this was about five in the afternoon and I could see the village through the trees, and I swung out in front of them and fell into a tank trap. Turned us on our sides. They were ready for us. They had a trench dug around Plei Boi that you couldn’t get a track through, you couldn’t get a tank through; the walls were too steep. Since we had hit a tank trap there was no one in the village, no animals, nothing, and I was, you know, I was in constant contact with the company and the battalion. This time battalion and of course companies listening in, but it was perfect there. There were no weeds, the crops were perfectly tended, but no one was there, and there was one dirt road or bridge, culvert kind of thing, going in and I knew the sucker would be mine. Again, this is when my troops didn’t ask, knew I didn’t do foolish things, and so I told them what the deal was and they said, “You don’t have time to. We don’t have time to get people in there, come on back but check it out on the way back.” And on the way back we started finding spider holes and tunnels, and so that was marked for a later mission. About a week later is when I got shot, and I was turned in for a Silver Star, and I thought if I deserved a star for it, that my driver did. My driver was shot going in, he was shot through the cheek and so it wasn’t a major wound but it was just a crease and he turned around and said, “5-7, I been hit,” and I said, “Well can you still drive,” and he said, “Yeah.” And later bullets bouncing off my bat wings hit him in the back of the head and knocked him out, but he was brave.

SM: Why don’t you go ahead and describe the incidents surrounding you getting shot and the operation that you were conducting or the attack?

PP: Okay, let me just finish up on this Plei Boi first.

SM: Oh, okay. Certainly. I’m sorry.

PP: Because I was shot I was medivaced out and I would have been executive officer at the firebase. And in talking to my medic, they started taking trips out. Anyway, I sent [Captain Kalen a letter] I recommended my driver for a star also. I got a letter back from the Army that said my Captain was dead and so I wrote and it just said, “Captain Kalen’s reported deceased, 16th September 1969.” I found out later that from some guys in the artillery there that were stationed at Fort Sill, that my Colonel and my Captain had been flying over that same village [I had reconed] and they shot through the roof and shot a rocket grenade at them and blew them
out of the air. If I hadn’t been wounded I would have been XO, but I knew where it was, I knew where the tunnels were; I would have been in the damn chopper, so getting shot saved my life.

Okay, tell you about the incident?

SM: Yeah.

PP: That was the 4th of September. I was senior [platoon leader] been there since May 15th and I was Senior Lieutenant and so I was going to get to be executive officer and we had a place called LZ Joyce. Captain Kalen had that and he had renamed it and Joyce was his wife’s name. And they pulled me back in and my platoon, we had like two or three days where we were just security for this little firebase. They had four [artillery] guns. I was getting ready, I’d already bought me a radio, I’d bought me a lamp, a lantern, and it was going to be a nice duty compared, you know, of course most people hated it but that sure beats sleeping out under a tent, under a bridge. Anyway, Ho Chi Minh died and we had an international cease fire and there were two convoys. The northern one came down and then the one from the south to the north was the second convoy and it was about 11:00, and my world was great. We’d had a cease fire, I’m coming back to a fire base, my replacement’s on a convoy, and about a quarter of a mile from us they ambushed the convoy. And we heard the automatic fire, and I was out with another track burning weeds that would grow up in the Constantina wire. It probably wasn’t safe, but it wasn’t very safe there period; where you’d just light a match and then you’d spray diesel on it. And as long as you kept it burning you were okay, don’t let it come back in. But that’s how we burn. Anyway, I heard the automatic fire and I ran from the wire to my track and I loaded up. Earlier that day on that first convoy a stars and stripes reporter. My platoon had been engaged in a lot of things that had been written about but nothing major, but it was kind of well finding a mine, I’ll tell you about that. Anyway, he was there to do “A Day in the Life of an Infantry Platoon Leader” and so when I dashed back he was standing beside the track and I said, “Do you want to go?” and he said, “Hell no!” You know, because he knew where we were going. But we had a cook there that from Kontum that was bringing breakfast down for everybody and he had made his trip because he did it between convoys, and he’s in cook’s whites, and he went with us. My driver always cleaned my 50 for me, but he always left it on single shot and I never knew which was which. I sound like a dumb ass though, really I wasn’t. So to find out I mashed down on the butterflies and it fired one shot right in front of my company commander as he was coming out. I remember him looking over at me and he was kind of like, “What in the hell are
But he was on out, then my platoon was the second group out, and Captain Kalen went further down the road before he turned in and I turned in right at the convoy and right into them and we were shooting at flashes and you could hear the bullets going by. I even have the little CVC command vehicle, whatever combat vehicle commander’s hat on, but I never thought that strange until lately. It’s pretty well padded but we were getting so many rounds fired at us. Of course they were hitting the track, too, and that’s like somebody pounding on it with a machine gun and it wasn’t hurting the track. And Sergeant Warford, I had two sergeants, he was a buck sergeant, he came running up and he said, “They’ve shot Briley,” and I said, “Well where’s Briley?” and he said, “I’ll show you.” And when we got on the track and started towards them. We weren’t taking tremendous fire but I can remember them [bullets] whizzing past, and we were shooting M-16’s because we were up shooting, just shooting shoulder to shoulder, kneeling. And all of a sudden he just disappeared and they hit him in the widow’s peak underneath his helmet, and he flew off. Nobody died that day on our side. Briley was shot through the stomach, came out his back, and he had a bruised liver, and Warford had a concussion. My driver, by then, he said, “I been hit,” and he could still drive and he drove just a little bit, and we came over a little hill, and there was a guy twenty feet from me raised up to shoot me and I shot him right between. I was on top of him so I hit him in the base of his neck, right between his shoulders, and I’m sure the first bullet killed him but I shot him three more times in the back and his body flipped over and I broke his legs backwards, and I shot him six times, and I shot six times and hit him six. But he was so damn close! And that’s when I thought I had killed one of my own men. We were getting most of the fire from the right. Somewhere along in here is when bullets bounced off of my bat wings, and my driver went unconscious [ricocheted to knock him out], and most of the fire to the right. I couldn’t get it, I kept trying and I ran out of ammo. My radio operator stood up to give me ammo and I took it and I just about to cock it, and I saw him get shot through the neck and blood trickled down both sides. And as I loaded my machine gun I had a hold of the cocking lever and I got hit and I thought I’d been kicked, and I thought, “That’s strange,” cause there’s not anybody around here to kick you. I was the only one. The others had been shot too by now or were helping the medic, something. One guy had panicked. And most of the fire was coming from the right so they had seen me, you know, fall back and reach my left arm didn’t work so I stuck it in my pants and I knew I could turn my turret if I undid the toggle switch so I, I just laid forward and
it took me a second to find it, and when I raised back up they were walking toward me. And
they were carrying their rifles down, that’s the way they carry them. One of them, there were
four or five of them, they were well dressed, good, you know cleaner than I was. And the one on
the far right realized I only had one arm and was using the recoil on the 50 to back it around to
him and we were kind of at an angle aimed down and the 50’s barrel’s heavy, but I knew I was
going to be able to get to them. They started running, and he knew he had a little more time, and
he threw a grenade at me. And I could, you know how everything goes in slow motion, but I
was watching the barrel come around to get these guys and watching the grenade and I was
trying to figure, I said, “Now does ours arm in 12 meters or 12 feet or is it 4 seconds,” and I was
trying, “I wonder if theirs do too,” cause I think I could have caught it and thrown it back
because it was a can with a stick on it. It was a Chi-Comm grenade. And we had explosions
going off all around us and I don’t know if it went off or not but I decided I only had one arm,
you don’t have enough ammo to come back. So by the time I got around to where he was I was
out of ammo again and really had no chance of reloading and I looked down and said, “Let’s get
the hell out of Dodge.” Because they had Warford in the track, Briley was in the ditch and
another group was handling him and we were the Lone Ranger out there. A guy was shaking,
and he grabbed my driver when I said, “Let’s get the hell out of Dodge,” he grabbed my driver
and threw him in the middle of the track on top of the other wounded and I couldn’t get down
because there were wounded all over. And I jumped off the back of the track and the driver put
it in reverse, and so we’ve got machine guns shooting at us and kicking up dirt and stuff, it was
keystone cops. And finally I was trying to avoid getting run over and the door swung open and
my medic, who’s a conscientious objector, he wasn’t the good medic I spoke about earlier. He
pulled me in and I remember I was laying there and he was trying to bandage my shoulder
because it had swollen up like a grapefruit but it wasn’t bleeding much in the front. It had hit the
bones and gone out my back and it was kind of ragged on the back. But, you know, he was
having trouble getting this bandage to stay on and his glasses were hanging down, and he said,
“Sir, you’ll have to excuse me, I had a bad day.” Mine has been peachy! But the guy who
panicked got us back and they said, “How many stretchers do you need?” And I don’t
remember, three or four, and they said, “No you need one more because you need one, too.”
They put us on stretchers and Medevac wouldn’t land because they were taking rockets in the
firebase and they moved us into a little bunker for a while. The lieutenant, I guess he was the
captain of the artillery, our sidewalks were made out of artillery boxes and the rest was, you
know, knee deep in mud. He had to get off because they were carrying us. I saw the *Stars and
Stripes* reporter and he was terrified. But they wouldn’t land the Medevac, and I had sat down in
the mud and leaned up against a bamboo pole that was our antenna, that we had our antenna
[pole] on, and I remember watching the rockets coming in, they looked kind of pretty, but I was
on two shots of morphine by then. But they still wouldn’t land the Medivacs, the artillerymen
and one of your questions was “What’s the bravest thing you saw?” These artillery men were
unarmed and they carried us out the other side of the firebase into a little valley and the chopper
landed and they loaded us on and two of them were unconscious and they had to strap them in
pretty good. My radio man we had time [waiting on tie downs for the unconscious men], he and
I sitting with our legs hanging out of the chopper and he asked for water, and I had a canteen,
and I said, “It’s going to run out both sides of your neck!” But nothing it did not hit anything
major, it went through his neck, and I swear to God you could see the blood come out. They had
a bandage on it by then. But I gave him water and we took off. I can remember watching the
artillerymen running, carrying the stretchers, but they didn’t have weapons.

SM: Wow. Now the medevacs, was that something that your unit had called in a lot on
before, or was this?

PP: Every week or two.

SM: Every week or two?

PP: Somebody. You know we took about 30-40% casualties in that four months but I
did not have a single guy maimed or killed.

SM: The entire time you were there?

PP: Yes.

SM: Wow. And no one was killed in that operation that you were?

PP: Not.

SM: Where you were wounded?

PP: No. I was probably the most seriously wounded although I was still lucid and my
right arm worked. And basically that’s what the action was for was continuing to fight even
thought you’re wounded. One of the citations said although see, citations are written by people
who weren’t there, so they have no clue. And we were just trying to help Briley and to break the
convoy loose, which we did. Medevacs I saw several of them, but they would not land if they
were going to be shot down and you don’t blame them. We did very little since we were mainly a daytime unit, we put out listening posts, but that was for our own protection. We didn’t have enough men to really put out ambushes, but Jacket Kilo would do that and the straight-legged grunts would handle the ambushes. Ours, our job was in early mornings mine sweep, then stand guard for the convoys. Then we would go out on Medcaps where we would go to the Montgnard villages and take care of their wounded. We always stopped, they always had the lepers in a little hut downstream and we would go down and tend to them. After that we normally had a mission of some kind, which would be, “You need to check out hill so-and-so,” or whatever, and usually we would find foxholes or bunkers, not always. Resupply, we had one mission that came down at five in the afternoon that there was a resupply mission to a Special Forces camp on the border, well, it was twelve or fifteen clicks west of the highways, barely a two lane road. But it had gotten into an ambush and they had all been blown up and they desperately wanted to get the stuff to the Special Forces camp. That was the only night mission really that was major. And I tried every way to, you know, we have helicopters or somebody else that can do this and they said, “No, we’re sending the convoy from Kontum,” and these were armored personnel carriers except they were trucks and they were track vehicles. They told me where I’d meet them, and I met them on this next road I may have somewhere. I don’t know what this road is.

SM: It’s a road that intersects with Highway 14?

PP: Yes.

SM: In the northern quadrant of?

PP: Yeah, and of course we weren’t going to take it.

SM: Yes.

PP: And the Special Forces camp was somewhere, over here. We met them and I did not want to take the road cause I figured it would be ambushed, and I picked and I went through these lakes around. Went through one ambush that, well we had to change the radio frequency several times because we were going into different units. One ambush that we had set up, somewhere along here I’m not sure, but I met the convoy here with my tracks and you see it’s difficult to read a compass inside it or with all the metal around but I did and did use dead reckoning to get through. We got to about here, maybe a click and a half, something like that and they said, “5-7 come forward,” and so I pulled up in front of my lead track and there were the carcasses of the armored personnel carriers. They were upside down and they had burned
out. And I had just by, you know, luck or accident or misluck, had taken the same road in that
they had been going in in the daytime cause they had pulled all the men and all the weapons they
could out but they had not yet picked them up. But we hid them [the convoy] there, went all the
way through. The command sergeant major of Special Forces, or sergeant major anyway, met us
at the gate and walked us in; he was real happy to see us. And that was without incident but it
was scary as can be, especially when you run across where the other guys have been killed, and
they were killed in the daytime and we were taking them at night.

SM: What kind of night vision devices did you have?

PP: We had infrared that didn’t work. Well, we didn’t have the goggles or whatever it
takes to look in the no, all that kind of stuff. We had night scopes that we used in training and I
love those. It seems like one track in our company was fitted with infrared night scope but we
didn’t have them. Those starlight scopes were wonderful but we didn’t have one.

SM: Okay.

PP: The best thing we had, we always at night we would pull a flare mortar and anytime
we had action that was the first you know, they just automatically dropped that and then we start
looking. But that’s scary too cause, especially when you have more than one flare coming down
everything seems to be moving out there cause they’re swaying and those shadows move and it’s
eerie.

SM: So most evenings did you lay out just in the defensive perimeter?

PP: Very much, very tight. We had four main points with machine guns that were
manned all night, and you took one hour shifts. I’d put an LZ down the stream, they weren’t far,
30-40 yards but they were, you know, outside our wire. We had wire that we drug across the
road. And, like I said, I had a lot of Claymores. And all the way around us were pre-plotted
artillery positions that, you know, I could call a Red One or whatever I wanted.

SM: Did you get engaged very often in the evenings or at night?

PP: No.

SM: No?

PP: Not after that first time when they tried and we were so ready. But I was skeptical
that night because that afternoon there was an old Montgnard that walked up to Jacket Kilo. I
think that’s where we got the intelligence, and he was drunk. And when I turned in my resupply
I ordered it was something like a whiskey barrel and that meant tank, and Kalen then or Strabl, I
can’t remember who he was, said, “We’ve only got one and I’m keeping it,” but he said, “I’ll be there, don’t worry.” Didn’t make it.

SM: Okay.

PP: He made it much later. But we did sometimes we’d do thunder runs at night or where he’d just run up and down the road and Iron Mike did that more than anybody else just to scare them, really.

SM: Make your presence be known?

PP: Yeah. Cause on more than one occasion I woke up and went down the road a stretch I would see a trail where, you know, a hundred of them had crossed and it’d be muddy going across the road, and they left I don’t know if I’ve got one or not, they left propaganda for us, telling about how bad the war was and our mothers wanted us to come home.

SM: Did you often have soldiers fall asleep while on duty at night, or was that ever a problem?

PP: Not when you shoot over their head with a ’45, it tends to wake them up.

SM: Okay.

PP: That’s.

SM: So that solved most of the problems?

PP: Because I woke up every hour. These were some of our propaganda, and that’s one that they had. But I was up almost every hour and I would go in and break squelch and if they didn’t answer me with two clicks I would fire over their heads. Not at them, just to wake them up. Fired and you’d hear this “click click,” and everything’s fine.

SM: And that would be the end of it?

PP: Yes.

SM: The disciplinary action.

PP: Oh no.

SM: Or anything like that?

PP: No, no.

SM: Did you ever have to take disciplinary action against some of your soldiers?

PP: Yeah. I only had one that was a goof off when I got there. He had been before I got there, he had been going around a clump of bushes or whatever and ran smack into a North Vietnamese. North Vietnamese had a grenade, threw it and hit my guy in the chest. The North
Vietnamese was so scared he forgot to jam it to arm it, like, pull the pin, cause I think they just stuck the can the stick down in the can, that’s how they activated theirs. So the grenade just bounced off this guy’s chest and they both ran. But he was too terrified to go on patrols or anything after that and we had gone on a sweep where we had found the more foxholes than we had men and I came back and he was sunbathing up on top of the bunker, so from then on he had to go with us. You asked the funniest thing this guy was a real goof off, he’d already had an Article 15, but all I did was just put him back to work. And when we were at LZ Joyce we got probed one night and he was outside, and a month or so earlier a General Pepke had designed a W shaped foxhole, where you had three places that the trenches had three fighting places, and the trenches that came back where you had your ammo stored. And it was ingenious for West Texas, but in the monsoons it wasn’t too good, so it was full of water. Well that wasn’t all. We had a two holer where you have for a latrine, and the guys would carry the stuff out and they were supposed to burn it with diesel. They’d burn it for about 15 minutes and then dump it in General Pepke’s bunker. This had been going on a month. Well the goof off guy, I was in a bunker and it was raining and we got probed and we were fine. It wasn’t a battle really, they were just trying to get through the line and we were trying to shoot them. He was outside, and he started running, fell all the way under, came in, and we immediately…everyone in the room stopped firing. They, you know, told him to get out, and he said, “Shit no, there’s a fight going on,” and they said, “Get out or there’s a fight going on in here,” and they actually turned a gun on him and he got outside, stripped naked except for his boots, and then we let him come back in. God he stunk. But it couldn’t have happened to a better guy.

SM: That pamphlet that you just showed me which was propaganda that the Vietnamese would leave for Americans to find. What kind of effect did that ever have?

PP: We laughed at it because, well, whenever we need them…just some of their English is so bad. It shows pictures of the anti-war. This is why we don’t like the protestors. “Son, come back home. Don’t make me suffer, thinking you can die without glory in this dirty war.”

SM: So it was not it didn’t have the desired effect the Vietnamese wanted?

PP: No, no.

SM: Was morale in your platoon and in your company high for most of the time you were there?
PP: Most of the time. There’s nothing higher than after a little firefight because you can smell the ozone, you can smell the gunfire or the gunpowder. You really are high, you know, if you didn’t take bad casualties. And we didn’t usually take any because most of the fights were very short. And we were pretty, we had good security, my guys were well trained, it’s like when I fell into the tank trap, we had done other things well, where we were coming up to a village and we would throw a track. Well the first time something like that happened it takes an hour to get a track back on. I immediately put out security on all four points. We had machine guns out there, we had back up folks, we had claymores out, and so we without even having even an order from my track they automatically went into the perimeter, and we didn’t get hit.

SM: So there’s no training like combat?

PP: That’s true. There’s one time we were going into a village, we were just making a run to it, but we were on line running into it and I did look out and everybody had mosquito spray out and spraying, and I thought, “God damn, put that down and get your gun!”

SM: You’ve also shown me a couple of other items, in particular code of conduct card, and I was wondering how important was that to you and to your soldiers? Was there ever really any fear of being captured, and what role would that code of conduct have played if you had been?

PP: I think we would have tried very hard. There was very little that any we lieutenants had as far as knowledge that would have been very valuable to the North Vietnamese that they couldn’t get from a hooch girl or something else. I only heard of one incident in our battalion where a lieutenant had been knocked unconscious and zappers were dragging him back into the tree line and he woke up and they put a satchel charge on his chest and blew him up, so…they didn’t take prisoners. We didn’t either. We had one guy surrounded, I wasn’t in on the unit when it was, and everybody was shouting, “Chieu Hoi! Chieu Hoi!” And he raised his rifle, and he had four armored personnel carriers around him, so they didn’t.

SM: Did you have anybody ever surrender?

PP: No. Nope. We were never in any big fights and there was always a place for them to run generally and a place for us to go, too. This is one that I like, we’ll talk about how we handle it. The time when the guy was running and got hit in the elbow and came out his arm, the colonel wanted him for questioning and they told the choppers to land and take him back to Pleiku. The chopper landed and, of course, he was wounded, and went out about 40 feet tilted
and he fell out. The pilot cussed out and they [HQ] said, “Mark him,” and they laid a red smoke
grenade in his face to mark where he was. They landed and the chopper left, and they were back
on line real quick cause one of their buddies had just been killed and the guy was inside either
killing him or whatever and the colonel asked, “Did you get him back to Pleiku, how did you…”
and he said, “We got to about 400 feet and he jumped out again.” So we thought it was
hilarious. But you’re totally desensitized.

SM: And you don’t think he jumped, or do you?
PP: He was unconscious [I think]. I didn’t see it, but I heard it, when I was a blocking
force.

SM: Were there many incidents like that or was that kind of an isolated incident?
PP: It was very isolated.

SM: Because of course once word got out about the atrocities at My Lai.
PP: Oh, we thought that was horrible.

SM: Right. And I guess the general tenor of the forces, American forces, was that this is
horrible, this is not the kind of stuff that should happen or does happen. But of course the
popular perception is that My Lai is indicative of American forces in Vietnam.

PP: This was in the heat of a battle where he had shot the thing down and then was inside
either killing the pilot or whatever, the pilot was dead. And we’re still in a fight. He was not a
civilian. I couldn’t remember why I went in to a battalion headquarters one time but I was sitting
on strong point and this is I told you the guys [NVA] were coming down and they had a little
wing over piper cub or whatever it was called. It was a forward air controller, and he was
looking in the woods and all of a sudden he exploded, and they shot him. I remember watching
it fall and, I called it in, and, you know, “Can I go after him?” And, “Do you think he’s alive?”
and I said, “No, he’s not.” And they said, “No, we’ll send a team in.” And they sent a team in
that deployed and then well they rappelled out, and I don’t know why they didn’t take the body,
they brought me the body and it was wrapped in ponchos, and for me to take it to Kontum the
next day. And I had forgotten. I remember going, being at graves registration, I remember
going into Kontum and it’s the first time into the camp there because they made us unload our
weapons, which made me very nervous. But we had to flip it [.50 breech] up, and they’d given
me a loading order on how to load an armored personnel carrier and it had the ammo, the .50
caliber ammo stacked on the right and…a lot of things wrong. And I went in to battalion
headquarters and I said, “I don’t know who the dumb son of a bitch was that drew up this order but machine gun loads to the left, you got ammo stacked on the right, your bandoleers you don’t need back in the back, you drape them over your bat wings so that you can throw them to whoever needs ammo.” I said, “You’re flares, if you’re left or right handed that’s where your flare box goes because you don’t have time to move,” you know. I’m sitting on a two by four and that’s what I was. You just grab it and fire the flares. And the guy took the paper from me and I said, “Here’s how it should be loaded,” and he took the paper and he said, “Lieutenant, I’m the dumb son of a bitch that drew that up,” he’s a major. I remember that and I always thought that was funny. I remember being at graves registration and my platoon sergeant showing me how to roll a Coke on a block of ice. You roll it for about 30 seconds and it’s cold, and it doesn’t fizz. But I’d forgotten about the body. But I remembered later untying it from the rope, something called the chopper hubbard, and nobody went around it. It was one of those deals where I was the one that had to did it. I did get a couple of guys to help me load it into the mortar track and we took it in. But it was shriveled up, it was burnt bad, that was a strange deal. Some of those things I’ve just blocked out. Some of the things are funny things. We had to go in to do something, either to pick up something or whatever but my guys had one track that went in. I think they took somebody in. And I got a call that I needed to discipline them, that they had been disrespectful and a lot of stuff. I asked what happened and they said they wouldn’t let them into the PX because they were dirty and so we ran over their white rocks. And they did, they did wheelies on the rocks, where you flip your track and you turn it a circle because they had their white rocks painted and they wouldn’t let my guys in because they were dirty. And we were dirty.

SM: Now you mentioned before with the helicopter incident that in the heat of battle, in the heat of combat these kinds of things might happen. In those kinds of environments in the heat of battle with your unit, did you have a hard time controlling your men sometimes or were they pretty responsive?

PP: Very responsive. They really did work together well. They worked with each other. I had the one guy panic. He had about 45 days left, and it was extremely loud that day. And most of the fight had lasted a lot longer than they normally did. But the guys, they were basically good guys.

SM: Why don’t you go ahead and tell us about the mine story?
PP: Yeah, that was a real slow day in the war and I was pay officer, and you get to go in, you spend one night, pick up your pay, and the next morning you catch a convoy out and you drop off and you pay your guys, go back in and turn in anyone who wasn’t there anymore or anything like that, spend another night so those are two good nights you got to spend in a nice base camp. But I was paying and I was walking, because we’re about a quarter mile apart, and just carrying an M-60, an M-16 trying to look like a little snuffy. One of my men had to go to the bathroom, and had an entrenching tool and took one [cut into the dirt] it wasn’t next to the road, it was across the bar ditch, and cause that was where we would pull to do our strong point. They radioed me and I took one scoop and I saw metal underneath it, so I cleaned the top off and then I cleaned around it, and I called it in and asked if I could blow it in place and they had to get, you know, clearance and they kept telling me no and I kept digging and they finally called in and wanted to know, “Are you sure is this a mine?” and I said, “Well it’s the size of a cake top…cake box…or cake pan, and it’s got a plate on the top, a plunger in the middle, and it’s only got one handle. I think it’s a mine.” And they sent a tank and a jeep down, and the tank we tied onto the handle with a long, long rope and everybody got down and they pulled it out. It didn’t explode. They put it in the back of the jeep; I would have put it on the tank, and took it back to Kontum. It’s in somebody’s den now, I guess, I don’t know. My platoon sergeant was, a scrounger. He’d been in the Army, he knew how to do everything, and since every night we had to bury our trash and our C-ration cans and stuff, he had the idea that we would get a five pound shape charge and just blow us a hole and that could be our latrine and everything else. So we ordered the shape charge and the Army sent you whatever they had and they had a 25 pound shape charge. We all we put it where we wanted our latrine to be and blew it and one of the legs actually stuck in the side of the armored personnel carrier. But I was behind the door, which is steel or iron, anyway. It was a hole, it would have swallowed the jeep. Everybody was afraid to go around the hole. But we never had to worry about digging another hole! But it was a health hazard. If you’d fallen into it, it was huge.

SM: How did the various, I guess, for lack of a better expression, races, get along? You mentioned that you had some blacks, whites, Hispanics? Were there many Hispanics?

PP: Quite a few. When I first got to Fort Dix I got my first exposure to, you know, the boys in the, you know, the hoods and the blacks in basic were off the streets of New York. They hung together and they were a virtual not a gang, but they were, you know, it wasn’t us with
them they were just wanted to be by themselves and be the tough guys that they wanted to be. A
lot of that was broken up though because like our first sergeant was black and was an
outstanding individual and the Army treated everyone the same, or I believe they did. I had a
great deal of respect for him. He had a voice like a rusty bugle. And my platoon sergeant, or
what did we call him, drill sergeant was black and he and I got along fine. I was a squad leader
and he was good. In Vietnam most of the instructors in jungle school and a lot of them in AIT
were Puerto Ricans and it’s a different kind of Hispanic. You know, they had their accents,
which we made fun of, you know, “The jungle is your friend, and your friend will kill you.” But
they were good at what they did. I don’t remember a single racial incident ever in Vietnam. We
had black classmates in OCS. Leroy Moltry is one of my favorite classmates or friends.

SM: What about drug problems? Of course there have been allegations that the Army
had problems with drugs in Vietnam, soldiers doing drugs. Were there any incidents or
problems in your unit or the units that were in your company or battalion?

PP: I think most of the drugs were the REMFs that had those and you know that term.
We had no drugs out in the field. I did get a medic in one time. We were at LZ Joyce and I went
by checking the hooches- not hooches, they’re bunkers, and they were smoking marijuana that
he’d brought and so I did not accept him, I sent him back. I think he probably got an Article 15
if he got anything. But that was the only incident of smoking. You had to have a clear head, you
didn’t, I’d drink when I’d go back in to be pay officer but I’d never drink or anything out in the
field because you had to be sharp.

SM: And that was something that the soldiers automatically accepted as part of their
survival? Was it something that you had to really ride herd on?

PP: No, not at all. They didn’t want it. They wouldn’t have done it. And if anyone did
do it, he’d get sent back which is kind of bad because the punishment is no punishment at all to
be sent back. So, and it did go on, I think, in base camps, but I saw it that one time I saw it one
time in the barracks in Fort Dix, but as a matter of fact, it’s the first time I’d ever seen marijuana
in my life. And a guy was sitting on the john with a joint. But it wasn’t the problem that
everybody says it is.

SM: Okay. Let’s go ahead and turn to a couple of questions about the effects of Vietnam
on your life. What I was wondering, if you could tell us how was Vietnam important in terms of
one of your life long experiences, one of your formative experiences? How was it most
important?

PP: I don’t know, you realize things about yourself and the ones who went and served
and especially there’s a comradery or just a feeling that you survived combat and you no longer
have to question, “Am I macho enough,” or whatever, because that’s the ultimate test. There’s
nothing macho about it, it’s just that you did it, you didn’t panic, you did your job. There’s a
comradery, there’s a spirit that’s born in combat and, you know, I don’t have any macho hobbies
right now and don’t feel I have to.

SM: Did Vietnam affect your religious beliefs at all?

PP: No, I’ve always been fairly religious, I mean, very personally. But as far as, I had
two incidents with medics. We pulled back for stand down because we were so beat up, we had
four days to get our equipment back together and I got a copy of the *Army Times* and it
listed…there were 167 killed that week and Lieutenant Bob Paulus was one I saw and I just
thought he died in August but he was killed in June I found later, but it affected me. Actually, all
my men were safe and I laid in a bar ditch and cried for about an hour. I asked the chaplain to
give us a service, something about and to mention Paulus and, you know, the sacrifices we made,
and the chaplain preached a Christmas service. This was August.

SM: Wow.

PP: And I didn’t respect him, you know, I wouldn’t have gone to him for anything.
Later when we got in, when I’d been shot, and I woke up because they cleaned the wound and
wrapped me in Ace Bandages to ship me to Tokyo for operation, we had a chaplain come by so
this is the second chaplain. He asked how long did it take. And I said, “Well, it took about a half
hour to get Medevac,” because we couldn’t land until we got gun ships in. And he said, “They
got ships all the way up in the mountains?” And I go, “Nope, padre.” Cause he’d been asking
what he could do and I said, “I’ll take a Pepsi,” just to get rid of him.

SM: So the chaplains weren’t all that effective or useful?

PP: The two that I met were not at all. They were totally worthless, but that was an
individual, it has nothing to do with religion.

SM: Right. How do you feel, or what do you think about your Vietnam service now?

PP: I think that we gave Southeast Asia ten years to get ready to [govern themselves]
otherwise I still believe in the Domino Theory. We may have fought it the right way, only
because we already had Chinese Communists in Vietnam, we know now. But that was our big fear was going to war with China. And you can’t judge it using today’s criteria, you’ve got to be back there with the Cold War going on, with Kennedy and Kruschev and the missile crisis and all that stuff going on. So you can’t do it like it is today. We probably didn’t do it right because we didn’t go in to win, we went in almost status quo.

SM: You’ve mentioned earlier that when you first entered the military that part of your reluctance or part of your concern was you didn’t think we were in it to win?

PP: Yes.

SM: Could you elaborate a little bit more on that? What do you think we could have done differently?

PP: Well, you know, I was older than most, and I listened to the news and you hear the coups and the various generals and it didn’t seem like it was a democracy we were protecting and I don’t believe it was. I believe there are a lot of good people and I’ve met a lot of them since then, Bui Diem and some of the others, and General Khanh. From the news reports I got I just didn’t feel good about it. In fact, I did like Ho Chi Minh. I mean, I respected him and what he had done, and we had in fact you know, I knew that he’d been part of helping the down fliers in World War II, get them out, and didn’t seem you know, we were more worried that he was a communist. And I believed then, and it’s grown, that he was more of a nationalist first and a communist second.

SM: Did you talk about these kinds of issues with your fellow officers, your fellow lieutenants?

PP: Very little.

SM: You didn’t?

PP: I don’t want to be called.

SM: The political aspects?

PP: We talked about the ARVN’s and them not fighting and there was a lot of disgruntled folks because we felt like we were doing their fighting for them. But I didn’t realize if they left, the Viet Cong or whoever could come in and kill their families, and would have, and that you know, that’s why they stayed because they took their families with them.

SM: Okay. What did you think about the folks back home protesting, the student activists, the anti-war activists? Did you and your fellow officers talk about that at all?
PP: Some. Did not like them. Later saw films of Jane Fonda and she’s probably the only person that I would not accept. Jane Fonda, no. Cause she was to me she was a traitor. It’s one thing to have a belief and I have nothing against somebody who believed the war was wrong and spoke out about it, that’s fine. But you need to separate the warriors from the war, and because those of us who were doing what we considered our duty didn’t deserve the treatment some of us got.

SM: How were you treated upon your return?

PP: Well I was medevaced back so I had a different return my brother in law told me that somebody had thrown piss on me but I don’t remember that. There were protestors, Jane Fonda for one, at Travis, but I was in a cast from my waist to my neck [and arrived at night]. There was more just the isolation, you know, you’d be in an airport and people wouldn’t come up to you or talk to you. Really there’s more of an isolation and that was probably the cruelest thing.

SM: What was it like being in Vietnam one moment and then all of a sudden being back in, as they put it, the world? Being back in the US?

PP: It was weird, but I only had one reaction. I stepped out of my wife’s house, her grandmother’s house, and I had a white shirt on and it was night and I jumped back in real quick. But I didn’t have any trouble adjusting or anything, not really.

SM: What do you think are the major lessons that we should learn from Vietnam? From that experience?

PP: That if we’re going to go, go to win. I sure don’t want people to think that Kosovo is the rule right now, because we haven’t won that yet, it’s not over and they’re basically back to stalemate where they were. I think we need, if we’re going to go we need to be totally committed and not just hope that we can do it with air strikes and not lose anybody. I’m not anti-war but I am there need to be a damn good reason before we do it and we need to all be committed if we’re going to go.

SM: Well Kosovo is an interesting example to bring up because of course there are a number of individuals who made parallels to how we were conducting the operations in Kosovo to how we conducted operations in Vietnam, with the incremental increase in air power, and the threats of potential ground combat and things of that nature. Do you see, for the United States, a role in the world, in international relations, international events, that would put men into
situations like Vietnam again? Do you think it’s appropriate for us to do those kinds of
operations?

PP: I think that there’ll be certain times like with Iraq where our economic interests were
threatened, more so than our sovereignty or anything like that, and that one was done the right
way. Kosovo, Somalia, we’re doing the wrong way. You don’t start a war small and try to
escalate because that’s what we did in Vietnam and that didn’t work. You can’t bomb somebody
into surrender. You can kill them, you can stop their ability to wage war, but you’re not going to
bomb them into submission. If you don’t kill them, they’re just pissed off because you killed
their kids or something. And I think anytime you go to war you go to war with all you have,
everything you’ve got and then you can back off, but you don’t start with start it small. That’s
not right.

SM: Is there anything else you’d like to add, discuss?

PP: I think that’s about it.

SM: Okay. Well thank you very much. This ends the oral history interview with Phil
Price.