Stephen Maxner: This is Steve Maxner conducting an interview with Mr. Emil Heugatter on the 2nd of August 2001, at approximately 9:50 Lubbock time. We’re in the Special Collections Library in Lubbock, Texas at Texas Tech University and this interview is for the Vietnam Archive Oral History Project. Sir, why don’t we start with a brief introduction into your life? If you would just tell us when and where you were born and where you grew up?

Emil Heugatter: I was born on June the 18th, 1936 in Fruitland, Texas. A small farming community south of Bowie, Texas. We lived there until 1947. We moved to Dalhart, Texas. I graduated from high school in Dalhart in the end of May of 1954. On Monday morning after graduation I was in Amarillo being sworn into the United States Army. That initial enlistment lasted until the end of August of 1979.

SM: Now, what did your folks do?

EH: My dad was a bricklayer by trade and also he was an X-ray technician. He worked in X-ray at a hospital in Wichita Falls, Texas prior to WWII. He went into the Navy in 1942, joined the Navy. Because he had three [means four] children they probably never would have drafted him. He joined the Navy and he was an X-ray technician in the Seabees and served in the South Pacific during WWII. My mother was just always a house wife and mother. After the war my father came back and went back
into the construction business, did that for the rest of his life until he retired and
ultimately passed away.

SM: Did he talk much about his service during WWII as you were growing up?

EH: He never talked a lot about it. He had his Seabee book and he brought some
things back from the war that interested me. If I would ask him, he would tell me. I have
now a little bracelet that he wore or had made. It was made out of some part of a
Japanese aircraft. The aluminum was made into a little bracelet. I have that and his dog
tags and a few things like that.

SM: How about other relatives that served in WWI?

EH: I have an uncle that served in the Army in WWII. He was in the 7th infantry
division in the Aleutian Islands. Then I have another uncle who was a Marine in WWII.
He was in the invasion of Guam, Kwajalein, and Okinawa. He was wounded pretty
seriously in Okinawa. Of course, they have all passed on by now.

SM: Did they talk much about their experiences as you were growing up?

EH: My Marine uncle did. He liked to talk about things. It really made a big
impression on him. I guess, like people that serve in pretty heavy combat, it probably
impresses them more. Or stays with them more than the others. My Marine uncle did
talk to me a lot about it. We talked a lot.

SM: Did any of those conversations have an effect on your decision to go into the
service yourself?

EH: Yes. I wanted to quit school in 1953 and go in the Marine Corps. My father
was against it. He let me join the National Guard. He signed for that. I was 16, then and
my last year in high school I was in National Guard. I was still going to go in a Marine
and then an Army sergeant first class came through Dalhart one time. We were in a pool
hall, my friends and I and he was escorting prisoners and he put them in a jail while he
was waiting to change trains. We met him in a pool hall and we were so impressed by
him, that four of us joined the Army upon graduation from high school. That’s how I
became a soldier.

SM: Your interest in the military and your interest in military history has some
pretty deep roots?
EH: Yes. I feel that all I ever wanted to be probably since 1950 when the Korean War started my dad and granddad and I were working on an addition to our house in Dalhart and we were listening to the radio. Listening to all of that, oh, I think from right about that time on, I knew I wanted to be in the military. I don’t know if at that time, I as going to make a career out of it. I wasn’t in the Army very long until I decided that was what I wanted to do.

SM: What was it like growing up in Dalhart?

EH: It was a good place to grow up. Dalhart, I had good friends. We played in the canyon. I think it was Rita Blanca Canyon in there in Dalhart. We had a lake. We fished out there, we camped out, I was in the Boy Scouts. We would go camping. We had a really great Scout Master, Mr. Jeff States. We would go camping at Punta de Agua. He had a big impression on me too. Then we had a Methodist Church down the street that I attended. The Methodist church had a lot of activities for youngsters. the MYF. It was just a good place to grow up. We never were in any kind of serious trouble, me or my friends, really I don’t know of anyone. It was just a good small town America. Everybody obeyed the law.

SM: As you grew up how much did your parents talk to you about some of the experiences that they had in the Great Depression and deprivation and stuff like that they suffered?

EH: We never talked about it. We were poor people. We never had electricity or running water until we moved to Dalhart. But everyone that we knew and grew up around was in the same situation. We lived in rural Texas. I can’t see it was a lot of difference than some of the 3rd world countries I was in later on. It was just no electricity, no running water. The farmers used horses and plows and wagons. There were very few tractors around Montague County that I ever saw. It was just unspoken. Everybody was poor and just didn’t talk about it. We never were hungry. We raised most of our food, nothing fancy, but good wholesome food.

SM: What did you enjoy about school if anything?

EH: Recess (laughs). No, I enjoyed reading. I remember before I could read that my parents got the Ft. Worth Star Telegram and I wanted to read so bad so I could read the comics. I learned to read as soon as I could. I’ve just been enraptured with reading
all of my life and my three children. I think my wife and I instilled that in them. They
all are avid readers also.

SM: In terms of subjects in school?
EH: History. History was always my favorite. I really enjoyed history. I had a
history teacher in Dalhart, Mr. Banner that was a good teacher and I guess he’s the one
that influenced me a lot toward history also.

SM: Was there Junior ROTC in your high school?
EH: No, there wasn’t. The only thing military I got into or had access to prior to
the Army was the National Guard, Texas National Guard.

SM: How about sports?
EH: No. I played high school football my freshman year and I was so lousy at it
I didn’t do it again. Be honest with you that was the days before the facemasks and I
didn’t really like to get hit in the face. I just didn’t care for it. In my last two years in
high school, I worked after school and Saturdays. I wasn’t much really into sports I was
outdoors a lot. Other than playing football and catch in the streets and baseball and
things like that.

SM: Was there anything else about growing up that was important for you as you
went into the military?
EH: Well, I guess I was taught discipline by my parents. I never had any
problems in the military taking orders. Our family was pretty well organized. Meals at a
certain time, everybody had to be there. There was curfews that you had to be home at
night. You had to get permission if you were going to go anywhere at night or anything
like that. That didn’t happen until you were a junior or senior in high school. It was kind
of a regimented youth, I guess. My dad, being of German extraction, I never had any
problems in the Army taking orders or obeying regulation.

SM: What was it like, your introduction into the Army? Where did you go? You
went to Amarillo?
EH: I went to Amarillo. I was inducted in Amarillo. They put us on a bus and
we went to Ft. Bliss, Texas this was early June of 1954. It was horribly hot. I took my
first eight weeks of basic training at Ft. Bliss in the summer of 1954. The Army at that
time was like the football coaches at that time. They didn’t let you have water. They
would tell us down there that one canteen of water is all you’re going to get and we’d be out in that hot desert all day training and at night. Then we got one canteen of water. We would get back to the company area and turn our rifles in, and go into the showers fully clothed and just drink until we almost would explode. We were so thirsty. It was just deprivation. The football coaches at that time were the same way. Water was a reward and I didn’t like that in high school football either. It’s amazing that some of us weren’t killed or didn’t die. We had people in Ft. Bliss that would pass out and we’d have some heat exhaustion, things like that. In fact, I passed out in a formation one day just from the heat and water, no water, luckily survived it. Then after completing basic training I had volunteered for the infantry, so I went to Ft. Ord, California for advanced infantry training. That was also eight weeks. I was trained to be a heavy weapons infantryman. I was trained on the .81 mm mortar. The four point, 2-inch mortar. The old A6 machine gun, thirty-caliber machine gun. The water-cooled .30 machine gun and the 75 recoilless rifle. It was eight weeks of training there. Upon completion of training in November of 1954 I received orders to go to the 33rd regimental combat team in Panama. They moved us over to Camp Kilmer New Jersey and we waited for a troop ship. A troop ship came and we went to Panama.

SM: During your training both in basic and in advanced infantry training, were many of your instructors Korean War Veterans?

EH: Almost all of them were, Korean War and some were WWII. I don’t remember any of my NCOs that were not combat veterans.

SM: Did they talk much about their combat experiences?

EH: No, they didn’t talk much to us trainees other that yell at us or anything. It wasn’t too much of a buddy-buddy relationship then. We would see them with their shirts or their uniforms or their ribbons and decorations, very impressive to young 18, 17, 18 year old men.

SM: Well, not necessarily in a buddy-buddy atmosphere, but instilling lessons from combat.

EH: Yeah, O.K. Yes. Especially at Ft. Bliss. They had made a movie *Take the High Ground* there. They made it at Ft. Bliss and we trained. We went through company any attack, platoon in an attack at that same hill. They had trenches up there and
everything. Our instructors would tell us things like that, how hard combat was and if
you don’t pay attention you’re going to die. All these type things. In that reference they
did talk about their combat experiences.

SM: What was the basic weapon, rifle that you trained with in basic training?
EH: In basic training it was the M-1 rifle. Also we got familiarization with the
M-1 carbine. We threw the hand grenades. That was our small arms training.

SM: How about in advanced infantry?
EH: In the advanced infantry it was the heavy and light .30 caliber machine guns.
The 4.2 inch mortar, the .81mm mortar, and the .75 mm recoilless rifle.

SM: In terms of a personal weapon?
EH: It was still the M-1.

SM: Still the M-1.

EH: When I went to Panama I went to a heavy weapons company. I went to M
Company, which in an infantry regiment, Delta Company, H-company and M-company
were all heavy weapons companies. That’s where the recoilless rifles, machine guns and
mortars were. Then you had a heavy mortar company, which in regiment it had the 4.2
mortars. I went to M-company 33rd and was assigned to the 81-motor platoon, where I
remained for three years. I was an 81 mm mortar man in the M-company, 33rd infantry
regiment.

SM: What did you carry?
EH: I started out as just a private. I was an ammo bearer. I carried an M-1 rifle.

Also, the squad members carried the mortar. If my memory is correct, I’m not sure the
gunner either carried the tube or the bipod and about the first ammo bearer carried the
base plate. I remember when I first went to Panama I had a backpack with a 54 pound
base plate that I carried along with my other equipment. To me that was an incentive to
get promoted and further up the chain of command where you would carry something
lighter.

SM: Fifty-four pound base plate on top of your pack?
EH: That’s in a jungle that’s a horrible jungle to get around in. In Panama they
didn’t have mountains, but we had hills, muddy hills, very steep. We had jungle boots
and you would climb up a hill, but you would take three steps forward and slide back
two. Very, very hard physical work in that jungle. With the oppressive humidity and heat, it was really tough.

SM: Was that your first time outside the United States?
EH: Yes, it was.
SM: What was it like for you?
EH: Well, I was an 18 year-old kid then. I had the mentality, I guess, the United States had won WWII and we were the conquerors of everywhere. We were the biggest, baddest kids on the block. Panama was a poverty stricken nation. We were mostly uneducated, unsophisticated, young Americans. We were probably the ugly Americans and everything. We thought we were better than all those and everything. Then after, being in Panama for a while and meeting Panamanians and friends and making friends with them, your attitude changes. They really were wonderful people. This was before Castro destabilized Central and South American and [the] people, in relationship with the Army and the Panamanians was just wonderful. In fact, my best friend married a Panamanian girl and they had a long, wonderful life together. I found out the Panamanians are really good people.

SM: As you were growing up, before you went into the Army, how much of the Cold War was present in your daily life? In terms of talking about Anti-Communism and fear of Communism?
EH: None. I was not aware of anything or paying attention to the Cold War until after I came back from Panama. I was in Panama in 1955. The President of Panama was assassinated and our regiment went on alert. We guarded the Panama Canal. My sphere of interests was probably in the Canal Zone and that area. I wasn’t sophisticated enough to really care what went on anywhere else. I just did my job and what I was told and tried to better myself. I really wasn’t aware of it. To the best of my recollection it did not influence me until later on when I went to Korea and Germany.

SM: When you were going through your initial training, your basic and your advanced infantry, did they talk about the Soviet enemy? This is more than likely the person you would eventually find yourself…?
EH: Not to my knowledge. They didn’t. They weren’t training people to be politicians or tacticians. They were just training a bunch of young, wallow recruits to be
soldiers. They didn’t indoctrinate us with that. Later on when I was training recruits, we
did very little of it too. We were just training to be soldiers.

SM: So, there wasn’t a specific enemy that you were supposed to be fighting?

EH: If we were fighting anything probably it was WWII and Korea. I remember
a chemical warfare film they showed us. They told us how different how bad the
Japanese gas mask was compared to the American gas mask, that kind of stuff. This was
10 years after the war, nine years after. It was pretty antiquated; I guess the training and
the weapons. Well, we were using the very same weapons they used in WWII.

SM: What was your impression of the military?

EH: I was impressed. My leaders were the guys that won WWII and I felt they
won in Korea. I was very impressed by them and the military. Anything you need if you
were sick, injured or whatever, you were taken care of. Every month there was a payday.
They fed you. It wasn’t gourmet food, and there wasn’t a lot of it. There were no fat
boys in the Army in those days. It was enough and for a young kid that liked the
outdoors, it was great. I really liked it. I really enjoyed it.

SM: I meant to ask you, you mention that there was a heavy emphasis on
privation when you were at Ft. Bliss going through your basic training especially for
water, did that continue to your advanced infantry training?

EH: No, not really, but again it wasn’t that hot at Ft. Ord. In fact, it was cool in
the morning and everything. One canteen would last you a day out there. It was more
physical out at Ft. Ord. We would have physical training every morning. We ran
everywhere. Then we would have in mid-morning what they call a P.T. break, a physical
training break. They would make us crawl in the sand doing low crawl. Push ups, sit-ups
things like that, pull-ups are tough, but you do the low crawl very far, very long and it
will kill you. We did that in that sand. It toughened us up though. We were treated
better in infantry training than we were in basic training, much better.

SM: Now when you got to Panama and you were in an actual infantry unit, did
you feel that the training you had received had prepared you for what you had
experienced in Panama?

EH: Yes, I did. They give you enough of the basics with your weapons, your
crew served weapons to were you were familiar with them. When I got to Panama we
trained everyday. If we were not in the jungle we were doing crew drill on the .81 mortar. We would do that until every man could do every other job. We would do it. They would have a mortar squad lined up with the mortar, a man behind each piece of equipment, each of the three. Then you would go through the gunners drill, which was about six or seven steps if I remember correctly. We’d have a gunners test every year. At the completion of this six or seven steps, you would fall back in, you would dismantle the mortar. You would fall back in behind the pieces and they would say fall out one and you would just rotate. You would do the same process over again as a different crewmember. We would do this repetitiously day in, day out. I could have done any job on an .81 mortar blind folded at any time. That was with the old mortar sight where we had the aiming stakes 150 mills apart in a complete circle around the firing position. You had a base stake and then all of the aiming stakes were near the gun, around the emplacement. Later on, they changed the sight something like the M-34 sight, the 4.2 mortar had where you had two aiming stakes out to the front, one behind the other at a much better [longer] distance. In the jungle the old and M-4 sight was better because we were in jungle down there you couldn’t get 50 meters of 100 meters to put those aiming stakes out unless you cut jungle for two days. Triple canopy jungle you couldn’t do it. It was hard just getting mass clearance. The old sight was better down there. Anyway, we were well trained. We could have taken our company, our regiment because all of the companies in the regiment were doing the same thing. We’d have one week a month the company would be on guard at Gatun Locks. The other three weeks we were back training unless we had battalion training in the jungle. We all went through the jungle-training center in 1955. We got the jungle expert patch, which we wore down there. I never wore it after I left Panama.

SM: Any incidents with all the wildlife while you were going through the jungle-training course or just in the field?

EH: Any what now?

SM: Incidents with wildlife?

EH: Yeah, they teach in jungle warfare and jungle survival, don’t worry about the wildlife and the snakes because they’re more afraid of you, then you are of them. At night the monkeys and the parrots make all kind of noises and everything, the birds and
all that. Until you get accustomed to it, a young kid from Texas is scared of it. After a
while you find out it’s not. We’d run across snakes pretty frequently. Again they were
always running away. They were either alligators, crocodiles whatever they were in
some of our swampy areas. I don’t know. We were walking along there through the mud
there one time. There was a little one there and nobody seemed concerned. I felt that it
had a parent around somewhere, a big one. Never saw any bigger ones. They had the
fer-de-lance snake, which was very poisonous. The bushmaster was very poisonous. The
hog nose viper, the eyelash viper, these were all pretty bad snakes. They never bothered
us. I saw boa constrictors a few times. In fact, in Colon which is the city on the Atlantic
tide of Panama, like on paydays the Panamanians would be selling pets. They’d be
selling monkeys and snakes and things like that. Some of the guys would buy baby boas
and things like that, monkeys, bring them back to the company. Of course, when the first
sergeant found out they’d have to get rid of them. They were plentiful down there. I
never had any scary experiences I can recall.

SM: No one got bit by a snake?

EH: I never heard of a GI, but the Panamanian workers on the canal on the locks
would cut the grass, the heavy big grass by hand with a machete and a stick. With their
left hand they would hold that stick to hold the grass by and with their right hand they
would cut that grass. It must have been monthly that you would read in the newspaper
about a Panamanian being bitten on his left hand or arm by a fer-de-lance or some
poisonous snake. He always died. They would be dead before they could get any
medication to them.

SM: Wow. That poisonous?

EH: Anti-toxin or whatever. It was always death. I guess what they would do
because they told us leave the snakes alone. Don’t bother them they want bother you.
I’m sure what happened to those grass cutters they invaded the turf of the snake. The
snake felt it was cornered or was protecting turf and it bit him. We were shooting dice in
our jungle base camp one time on a blanket and we got through we picked the blanket up
and there was a little coral snake under the blanket. They told us don’t worry about the
coral snakes because they were too small to bite you. They had to open their mouth. It
was really colorful, pretty little snake, but very, very small.
SM: How about insects?
EH: They were brutal. The mosquitoes were just horrible down there. They had these big soldier ants. Everything in the jungle seemed like it would bite you. They had these things and they would bite you. The mosquitoes would just carry you off. Now at Ft. Davis where I was stationed and all the military posts, the Army posts they sprayed them two or three times a day with DDT. I was never bit by a mosquito on an Army post. In Dalhart when I was a kid they used to smoke the alleys with DDT. I’ve never heard of anyone being injured by DDT. I just don’t believe the effects of DDT are as bad as malaria and all these diseases the mosquitoes carry. Malaria kills more people in the world than any other known disease. If they just get the DDT back I think we could save millions of lives. I just don’t believe that the DDT, having breathed it pretty well everyday of my life for three years, I don’t seem to have any effects of it. I don’t know maybe I do. Anyway, on the Army post they were really mosquito free.
SM: The relationship between the military personnel and the Panamanian civilians, what was that like?
EH: Great. They were really good. We got along really well with the Panamanians. Of course, you’d have Panamanian girlfriends. The La Guardia National was the Army of Panama and their police. It was mostly just police. I’ve known guys that would get drunk in Colon and not capable of getting back to the company and the Panamanian police would not arrest them, but would put them in a taxi cab and send them back to where they would be taken care of, had a very good relation with them. This was back in the mid-50s. I had no animosity or no bad feelings at all about the Panamanians. Then about 1959-1960 whenever the problems started it really, really shocked me. I couldn’t believe those gentle, nice people had changed so much in such a few short years.
SM: Did you ever go back?
EH: Yes. I went back in 1970 after I came back from Vietnam. The Army conducts; they call it the match of the Americas down there. They have all of the countries from the tip of South America up to Mexico and they would bring them into Ft. Kobe and we had really good ranges there. They would bring these guys in, each country and give them marksmanship training and rifle and then at the end of it there’d be a rifle
In the Fall of 1970, they didn’t have enough rifle instructors from our unit at Ft. Benning. Since, I had been on a sniper instructor group in Vietnam, they took me and I went down with them and I coached the Argentina rifle team. I had a really good time. It really changed a lot. Well, I had been gone 13 years. It was really a different place.

SM: Was the atmosphere different in terms of the relationship between Americans and Panamanians?
EH: Yes. The Panamanians were not seemed to be as friendly. There had been some problems down there so the American people weren’t as friendly toward the Panamanians either. Really unfortunate.

SM: Where did you go after Panama?
EH: While I was in Panama I started shooting on the pistol team. My platoon leader a Lieutenant from Texas, I’ll never forget him Idefonso Labrania. He was a Hispanic Lieutenant from El Paso and I really, really respected him. He was really a great guy. He was given the mission of organizing the battalion pistol team. He took me; I was a corporal on the mortar platoon. He was mortar platoon leader. He took me along to help him. He and I shot in the regimental matches with the battalion team. Well, I shot good enough to make the regimental team. Didn’t know what I was doing. Then, they had the Panama area matches and I made the Panama area team. Then they had the USA- Carib matches and I made that team. We came back to Ft. Benning in the summer of 1956 and shot the all under matches sat Ft. Benning, Georgia. I made the tryouts for the all Army team, but didn’t make the team. I went back to Panama and they sent a team to the National Matches in Camp Perry [Ohio] in 1956 a rifle and pistol team and I went with them. So, anyway the next year I went back and shot my way back to the states again and I made the All Army team. I was kept at Ft. Benning for the summer and competed at Camp Perry with the All- Army team at the national matches. In 1956 President Eisenhower tasked the Army to organize a marksmanship unit because the shooting and marksmanship ability of the United States Army had got horrible since World War II. He wanted to upgrade the shooting ability of the American soldier plus the International Competitors and International Competitions was not doing well. He wanted that upgraded. He tasked the Army to form a marksmanship unit, which they did.
They staffed it in 1956 and ’57. Well, I shot good enough in 1957 they wanted me to be assigned to that unit, but I had already put in for a request to go to Ft. Riley, Kansas, which I got orders for Ft. Riley, Kansas and was assigned to the first infantry division there, first battalion 18th infantry. We were training recruits. This was in the fall of ’57. Then in January of ’58, I got TDY orders, temporary duty orders, to go to Ft. Benning to join the Army shooting team, to shoot the National Mid-winter Pistol matches in Tampa, Florida. So, I went down there and shot on that team and was shooting pretty good. Then they kept me on TDY after the competitions were over. I wasn’t eligible for a permanent change of station until the 1st of July. At the 1st of July I was reassigned to the marksmanship unit at Ft. Benning in July of 1958. I shot with them of course, all summer. We shot the National Matches at Camp Perry, Ohio in September I believe. I won the Center fire, the national center fire championships. Came out 2nd in the overall championships. So, I was shooting good. I stayed at Ft. Benning for a couple of years there. Then I saw that wasn’t going to be promoted and I was an E-5 sergeant. I wasn’t married and I requested transfer to an infantry unit so I could be promoted. I was transferred to a basic training unit in the 2nd infantry division at Ft. Benning, not long after that I got married and then I got orders to go to Korea. I got on a troop ship in about February of 1960 and went for 21 days on a troop ship to Korea. I was assigned to Delta Company, first battle group, 31st infantry, at Camp Casey, Korea. Tong Du Shon was the Korean name of the little town. Korea was still pretty well shot up. It hadn’t really recovered from the war, people were hungry and, Seoul was just a mess. The 7th Infantry was blocking the traditional invasion route from the north, we were behind the DMZ. I became a section leader of the 106 recoilless rifle section. It was an anti tank weapon that each infantry company had two of them. It was a recoilless rifle mounted on a jeep. I spent a year there with Delta Company, 31st infantry and did not get promoted. I requested Ft. Ord, California and when my time came to rotate got back on the troop ship and went to Ft. Ord, California. I got there, the 6th Army rifle and pistol team was there. They assigned me to the 6th Army pistol team. I shot with them in 1961 and I came out 3rd at Camp Perry that year. All of a sudden, this is when I really became aware of the Cold War because I had been back from Korea about 10 months, my wife was pregnant and I got assignment to go to Germany, which was very abnormal. You’re normally
going to get two or three years in the States and normally if your wife was pregnant you could get a deferment until after the baby was born. Well, they just had this Berlin Wall and all this stuff was going on and the Army sent so many troops over there. They really thought there was going to be a war. The Army then had built something they called Davy Crockett. Davy Crockett was actually I guess you could call it a nuclear mortar. They got about 30 of us, most of them from the 101st Airborne Division and four or five other of us non airborne and sent us to Ft. Knox, Kentucky for a month, Davy Crockett school. So, I went to Ft. Knox, went through the Davy Crockett School and then was given unassigned orders to go to Germany. So, I went to Ft. Dix, New Jersey, got on a troop ship to Germany. I got there I was assigned to echo troop 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment. It was in Kaiserslautern. I got there and they had no Davy Crockett so I was a 4.2-inch mortar squad leader on an armored personnel carrier. I stayed there about three months. The marksmanship unit in Europe, during this period in time, marksmanship was really a big thing in the Army, Navy, Marine Corps and Air Force. I was one of the pretty good shooters so the USAREUR marksmanship unit transferred me from the 3rd Calvary regiment to Grafenwohr, Germany to shoot with them. We would come back each year and shoot the All-Army matches and the National matches. In 1962 we came back and shot the All-Army match at Ft. Benning, Georgia and my team, my four man shooting team won the .45 service pistol championships. The record we set there still stands today. We shot that good. Then I spent my three years in Germany. While in Germany I started shooting some international competitions with the Germans over there, the French. I came back from Germany again on the troop ship in January of 1965 and was assigned to the 2nd Infantry division at Ft. Benning. The marksmanship unit got me and I never checked into the 2nd division. I went back to the All-Army pistol team at the marksmanship unit. I shot with them, both International shooting and American shooting. I made the United States World Championship team in 1966. They shot the World Championships in Wiesbaden, Germany. I was on the center five team that won the World Championships. We beat the Russians by about two or three points. So, I shot both International and American shooting for the next three years. We shot Mexico a number of times. Tampico, Mexico City and then I shot all over Europe. We would fly over there and shoot and all over the Scandinavian countries, came back in 1968, General
Jullian Ewell took over as commanding general of the 9th Inf. division in Vietnam. He decided he wanted snipers. He tasked our marksmanship unit at Ft. Benning for sniper instructors and weapons. In 1968, in May the first group of sniper instructors that the Army sent to Vietnam went over to the 9th infantry division. I believe they were at Bearcat. That was the division headquarters then. General Ewell was the commanding General. They were very successful. They moved out of Dong Tam. They set up a really good school down there. Snipers down there were very, very successful. All of a sudden then the Army started looking around and decided it was a good idea why when the original group were do to rotate to come home, they needed another group of instructors from the marksmanship unit to go over. The unit commander asked me, I was a pistol shooter and I was due to go over for my next reassignment. He asked me if I would go with these sniper instructors and I said I’d love to. I was the first pistol shooter that went with a rifle instruction team, though I had shot a little bit of rifle. Not anything like those guys I was with. I knew basic marksmanship with a rifle. I went over as a sniper instructor to the 9th infantry division. We were there about two or three months and President Nixon decided to start pulling troops out of Vietnam and the first division that he removed was the 9th infantry division. I feel because we were having so many casualties down in the Mekong Delta where we were at. Anyway, two brigades came home and one brigade stayed. This brigade was under then operational control of the 25th infantry division. Our division commander of the 25th, then I forget his name. I’ll remember it later probably. Anyway, when he took over the 25th infantry division, he took selective commanders and personnel from the 9th division with him. He wanted the sniper school to go with him. He took each of us, I mean the whole school and a couple of the better snipers from the 9th division we took with us, that still had four or five months in country to go. We went to Cu Chi 25th Infantry division and built a school and built ranges and then it became a very successful program in the 25th infantry division.

SM: Before we get too deep into the work that you did there in Vietnam I did want to ask you a couple of follow up questions with regard to your experiences prior to and then early during the military experience. Did you have any kind of pistol or rifle experience, prior to the Army?
EH: Well, I was like most kids in Texas. I grew up shooting a .22 rifle. I never had shot a pistol until I went in the Army. In Dalhart, where we lived I remember this fondly, probably 12, 13 years old I had a BB gun and on our back porch about 5, 6, 7 yards off the back porch was a big, red ant bed. Seemed like I would sit for hours with my BB gun and shoot red ants. It just seemed to be a lot of fun. I’d shoot those red ants. Then we had a lot of jackrabbits around Dalhart in those big wheat fields. When they’d cut them and everything well those wheat farmers didn’t mind that I had friends whose father’s were farmers, they didn’t mind you go in there at night and riding on the front fenders of cars and shooting rabbits. We would do that because these big, old rabbits would eat a lot of wheat. They didn’t want them. We’d just ride around shooting those rabbits at night with spotlights. It was a lot of fun. It wasn’t too much fun probably for the rabbit. That was the sum total of my shooting experience brought to the Army.

SM: How did you qualify in basic?
EH: I think I made expert. Which was really a feat because those rifles that they have in these basic training things were just worn out pretty awful. I’m not sure but I think I did. I know it wasn’t worse than sharp shooter.

SM: After Panama you said you requested to go to Ft. Riley?
EH: Yes.
SM: Why did you request Ft. Riley?
EH: It was close to Dalhart and I had friends there I grew up with. So I could take a pass from Dalhart or from Ft. Riley, it was the closest military post to Dalhart and I’d go home see my friends, girlfriends and stuff.

SM: What did you do at Ft. Riley?
EH: We were training basic trainees.
SM: So you were basically a drill instructor?
EH: Yeah. They called them cadre in those days because we not only taught them their marching and all that stuff, but we taught them their classes too, all of their military instruction. I did that again at Ft. Benning. Somewhere around the Vietnam War they started with the drill sergeant program.
SM: You mentioned that after Korea where you were a section leader for 106 mm recoilless rifle team or section. You came back to the United States but only for a very short time?

EH: About ten months.

SM: While you were in Korea what were the relationships like between the Americans and the Koreans? What was morale like there in Korea for the Americans serving?

EH: Well, morale was great. We were good soldiers. We were well trained. We hadn’t had a war. This was 1960. So, we hadn’t had a war in six years. All the senior NCOs were WWII, Korean Veterans. We were well-trained, good shape, we still had the old BARs and we still had the M-1 rifles, carbines and all that stuff. They had a unique situation in Korea. They didn’t have enough soldiers or if something [this program] started during the Korean War. They couldn’t get enough replacements, so they put Korean Army guys, soldiers into our units. So, all of our infantry companies we had something we called KATUSA. KATUSA is the acronym for Korean Augmentation to the U.S. Army. They were good soldiers. They lived right in the barracks with us. We lived in these old Quonset huts and we had the KATUSA’s with us. At the first of the month, they didn’t pay them anything they got Korean little Army packets with cigarettes, with candy and stuff like that. The cigarettes were horrible. They made them in Japan I think. It was pretty frugal living for a KATUSA and you got the good American food. At the first of the month, I was a smoker at the time, the first of the month soldiers we’d all go buy our cigarettes and we would share them with the KATUSA. By the end of the month when the soldiers were all broke and out of cigarettes then we’d smoke the KATUSA’s cigarettes. A KATUSA was a hard worker. I never had any discipline problems with them. I’d pull the sergeant or corporal of the guard of the guard and you’d have GI American soldier post. Then you’d have posts that the KATUSA would guard. You’d have a guard mount with American and KATUSA. They would shine their boots and do as well as they could just like us. They were all draftees. Most of them couldn’t speak English, or very little and that was some problem. Each company had a KATUSA first sergeant that could speak English and if you needed to tell them anything really serious, like myself, in the 106 section I had no KATUSA.
This was a little too technical for them. It was all GIs. Now, in the mortars they had some KATUSA ammo. Bearers. But like gunners and assistant gunners they wouldn’t use them for that. Those mountains in Korea were brutal. We all had to climb them. We’d have to go on these conditioning marches. They probably made us go on a, I think we’d have to go on a 25 or 30 mile march each month and then we’d have to go on an all day cross country march that was just a killer. We’d carry our weapons. I was a squad leader and I either carried a carbine or an M-1 I don’t remember which. In our rifle platoons we still had the Bars. The Bars weighed 20 pounds. Then they had to carry the A6 machine guns. Then you’re talking 30 pounds. Seemed always the Katusus would be armed with BARs and machine guns. Their guys could scoot up them hills like rabbits, where us bigger GIs had more problems. I think we kind of took advantage when we issued weapons. If the war had heated up or there had been a war, I’m sure the BARs and machine guns would have found themselves in American hands then. Not to say the Koreans weren’t good soldiers. They were good and they proved that in Vietnam.

SM: You mentioned that when you were in Germany you were sent to Davy Crockett training. That’s when the Cold War really hit you?

EH: That’s when it really hit me, because of that big build up in Germany I couldn’t get deleted from those orders. When we got to Germany I went to second squadron, 3rd Armored Cavalry in Kaiserslautern. We had triple bunks, double bunks were all over the Army. These were triple bunks. A guy would get a nosebleed up on the top of one of them things. We were crowded in. We had a squadron, which is the same as a battalion in an area that should have been about two-company size. They just had so many people over there they didn’t have billets, adequate billets. They had a dependant travel ban. They had curfew. Anybody from Major below had to be in their barracks for bed check at midnight and down. Couldn’t be out past midnight unless you had overnight pass. This was a Major. He was an O-4. It ruined a lot of careers you had a guy that was a Major who fought WWII in Korea and you tell him he can’t be out after midnight. It was terrible. I can’t remember, it was one of the old World War II generals. He was a four star general who was a USAEUR commander. His idea and intention so that if a balloon goes up, I want an Army of sober, rested soldiers. We would get one overnight pass on the weekend. This was in my platoon and this was a platoon with
probably six or seven sergeants. A couple of them 10 year veteran, 12 year veterans
something like that. You couldn’t have you family over there then. That came about a
year later when they let the dependants start coming back over. It was pretty tough. You
could go to the beer garden and things like that. You could get about three passes; four
passes a platoon at night. These were Cinderella passes. They ended at midnight. You
had to be back. It was just an Army that was ready for war. That was my introduction to
the Cold War. Other than Korea, it was a little hotter than the Cold War because we still
had incidents along the DMZ. That’s when I knew the rest of them weren’t our friends,
big time.

SM: In Korea you had incidents?
EH: Well, they would be little border incidents, like on the DMZ. We had our
first calvary division was on the DMZ. Seventh infantry division was behind the DMZ.
The first calv division went on a maneuver somewhere some time and my battle group
went up and we got into their positions on the DMZ for a while. Week or two while they
were gone. Then I was on temporary duty to a ROK [Republic of Korea] Army teaching
marksmanship one time. They were up on the DMZ and all that. The seventh division,
my division was more in a blocking position. If North Koreans attacked we were in the
invasion route toward Seoul. We were about I don’t know how many miles above Uji
Jon Boo. Uji Jon Boo was between us and Seoul. Of course, Seoul being the capital
would probably be the objective of an attack into the South as it was in 1950.

SM: Were you personally involved in any incidents in the DMZ?
EH: No.
SM: When you were in Germany going through that Davy Crockett training.
EH: I went to Davy Crockett training in Ft. Knox. Then I went to Germany I
never saw it [in Germany].
SM: When you went through the Davy Crockett training in Ft. Knox what did
they tell you about that? How much information?
EH: Everything was secret. Everything was secret until you read the *New York
Times*. We would go to these classified classes. The only time I ever did it in the Army
you had to have a secret clearance to go to school. You’d have to show your ID card.
There was a guy standing at the door of the classroom with a bayonet. You’d show him
your ID card; he’d look at you. You’d go in. We would go to classified classes and this
is not classified anymore, if it is come get me. Anyway, they had these things, they had
two Davy Crocketts. The small one and the large one. One of their maximum range was
2,000 meters the other one was 4,000 meters. It shot a 280 mm round. I think it was
equivalent to 20 KT’s that’s about what it was or something by memory. Anyway, we had
to go to classes and see these classified charts on blow down. Like when you drop a
nuke, if you put an airburst in the way it’s going to blow down trees, so far, so long. If
you’re going to go into the attack you’re going to take into consideration this blow down
trees and all that. All that stuff was classified. The ranges and all that. I read all that
stuff in *New York [The New York Times]*. They brought it to class and showed us the
New York Times. Anyway, all this class. Actually firing the thing, we shot it, we fired it
280 mm HE round. I believe it weighed 75 pounds or so, I’m not sure. They way you
shot it, this thing set on a tripod. It was recoilless, like in a recoilless rifle. The thing
didn’t recoil backwards or anything. You put a launching piton down the tube and then
you screwed that 280 mm projectile on the end. On the very tip of it you had a safety pin
of something. You’d pull it so it would detonate. I think that it was taped on. Pull the
tape off, pull the little pin so it was armed. The way you fired it, it had low energy
detonating cord that went through the base of the launching piston. You got in a bunker
50 feet away or something and pull the pin like a grenade. To tell you the kind of
soldiers we had then, they told us the way you fired it; you squatted down, put your hands
behind you and pulled the pin. The reason we did this was if it blows up in your hand, it
won’t blind you. You’ll just lose your fingers. We never questioned it. We just sit down
and did it. Later on I think they came up with a better firing device. This thing was
really put into operation quickly. They wanted a short-range nuclear weapon for the
infantry in the Army. Later on the figured it out. 2,000 meters and then you’ve got the
Davy Crocketts behind them. You’re probably going to blow your front lines up too,
when you shoot that thing. Anyway, I read somewhere later on probably the worst
weapon the Army ever came up with was the Davy Crockett. I never saw another one
after school.

SM: My goodness. Did they talk about the fact that the blast radius of a 20-
kiloton yield bomb would probably kill you.
EH: They never told us that. We were not the brightest pebbles on the beach.

We did kind of suspicion it wasn’t going to be too good. We thought, well they’re going
to get those guys in front of us. They’re gone. Like the infantry men and the Army were
up in front of us. We’re going to be behind the lines shooting that thing. I don’t know
how far, maybe we were just right behind. We would be back a little ways.

SM: Let me make sure I understand this, the range.

EH: From the missile from the launching tube to the maximum range of the small
Davy Crockett was 2,000 meter.

SM: It was a 20-kiloton yield weapon?

EH: Yes. The big one was 4,000 meters. It had 2,000 meters more range. 2,000
meters or 2 kilometers. Let’s see a kilometer is about 6/10 of a mile. You’re a little over
a mile. Another thing that is bad too. In those days the nukes were so dirty that the half-
life of the contamination that you have there would probably be a century or so whatever
who knows. They probably told us, now I’ve forgotten. You would have to be buttoned
up and be decontaminated to go through this. Fortunately we never had to use any of that
stuff.

SM: It’s almost 11:00. Why don’t we go ahead and take a break and we could
continue on the phone.

EH: Well, we got everything.

SM: We go to Vietnam and we started talking about that already so we can build
on that. Sign on real quick.

EH: My old marine brother-in-law love him dearly but he is retired. He was an
engineer for 40 years with General Dynamics down in Ft. Worth building airplanes. He
sat on his butt all these years. He’s just totally inactive. He’s got bad diabetes so he’s
got to eat pretty regular and all that. If I don’t get over there pretty close. Of course, if
worse comes to worse, they can eat.

SM: This will end the interview with Mr. Emil Heugatter on the 2nd of August.
SM: This is Steve Maxner continuing the interview with Mr. Emil Heugatter on the 27th of November 2001 at approximately 9:15. I am in Lubbock, Texas. Mr. Heugatter, would you please tell us where you are?

EH: I’m in Waco, Texas.

SM: In Waco, that’s right. Sir, why don’t we go ahead and pick up with a discussion of your trip to Vietnam? If you would begin by telling us where you were when you left the United States for Vietnam and then describe the actual trip over.

EH: I was stationed at Ft. Benning, Georgia. I was assigned to the United States Army marksmanship unit. I was on the Army pistol team. I had the opportunity to go to Vietnam with a sniper instructor group. I believe there was five rifle team members and myself. I was the first pistol shooter that joined one of these sniper instructor groups. We got orders, we were going over to replace the first group of Army sniper instructors that were in the 9th infantry division. Dong Tam, South Vietnam. They had come from our unit there at Ft. Benning and went over and spent their year was about up. So, they needed replacement. They selected us, a group of six to go over and replace them. We all went on a thirty-day pre-embarkation leave in April of 1969. We joined together at Ft. Lewis, Washington in early May of 1969 for our trip to South Vietnam. It’s been so many years I remember mainly that it was raining most of the time we were at Ft. Lewis.

They issued us our jungle fatigues and our jungle type clothing. Camouflage t-shirts,
socks, jungle boots and all this kind of stuff. We had with us forty noise suppressors that we took over. I remember these. We had them in about three or four duffle bags. They were a big pain because all of our own personal gear. We had to drag those duffle bags around full of those noise suppressors. They were gosh; it seems like about 18 inches long. They weren’t really that heavy. I can’t remember how many duffle bags, but anyway they just seemed to be a problem at the time. Keeping up with them and our other stuff. We were flown over on one of the contract aircraft that the military leased in those days. I don’t remember, we flew from Ft. Lewis and I guess we gassed and refueled in Hawaii or somewhere. I don’t know. We did not go the Alaskan route. I remember we did stop again at Tachakawa Air Force Base, Japan because we had offloaded and were standing around on the tarmac while they refueled the aircraft. We saw a good friend of ours who was rotating from Vietnam back to the states. He was one of the old rifle shooters that had just finished his tour with one of the infantry units over there and was going home. We saw him and had a nice little visit. Then we flew on over to Cam Ranh Bay. We landed at Cam Ranh Bay, which was up in kind of the Northern part of Vietnam from where we were going. We were going to the Mekong Delta about 25, 30 miles south, 40 miles whatever it was south of Saigon. We landed at Cam Ranh Bay and stayed there for a few days. got some in country orientation before we moved down south.

SM: Hello?

EH: Yeah, I’m still here.

SM: I was curious about the noise suppressors.

EH: They were noise suppressors for our, I call them XM-21s. They were accurized glass bedded M-14 rifles that we used for sniper rifles. I don’t know if they requested them in the 9th division guys. I don’t know if they requested them. I don’t know if it was something the Army wanted to try out or whatever. I do know they were bought from this company sionics outside of Atlanta, Georgia. It was run by a guy, I can’t remember his name. He was a pretty colorful old gentleman. He had been an OSS agent and operative during World War II. Gosh, I can’t remember his name. [Later remembers his name was Warbell.] Anyway, he did a lot of things like special equipment like for the CIA, Army and things like that special operations type stuff. He

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had developed these noise suppressors. That’s where the Army bought them from him.

We carried them over.

SM: How effective were they?

EH: Well, I didn’t particularly care for them. Most of the people that would care
carried one. I carried one for a while on my rifle. They were long and extended the
length of your rifle, which it would catch on vines and things like that. You had to take
your front sight off to put it on. So, if you took your front sight off and something
happened with your scope and you needed your iron sights, you didn’t have them. When
you shot these things, they were pretty good at suppressing. Of course, it was not a
silencer at all. It kind of disguised where the shot came from. It was kind of like
clapping your hands rather than that real loud noise. The thing blew back a lot of gun
powder and debris into your face, kept your rifle just filthy around the chamber area and
everything. It required a lot more cleaning. They weren’t a very popular item and
eventually just weren’t used.

SM: Did you have an opportunity to use them quite a bit before you left for
Vietnam?

EH: Never saw them before we left for Vietnam. It was just something. Before
we left I guess one of the guys may have taken them. I don’t even remember. I didn’t
have a duffle bag when I went on leave. Some of the guys lived in the Columbus,
Georgia area outside of Ft. Benning. They may have picked them and checked them
when they came to Ft. Lewis where we all got together and went. It was just something I
had no idea what they were or anything until all of a sudden they were there. Of course, I
wasn’t in charge of anything at the time, I was just another instructor.

SM: Did they have any special ammunition that went along with the suppressors?

EH: No. We used the regular M-14 match ammunition. The 308 match
ammunition that the Army rifle team used. That was what we used in Vietnam for our
sniping program. Now, before we went over the first group I understand did some
experimenting and tried some subsonic ammunition. They weren’t pleased with it. Of
course, that probably would have been the first generation of that type of ammunition.
They weren’t pleased with it. I don’t really know why. I would think maybe being low
velocity it would be very easily moved by the wind, not very accurate. Again, I just don’t
know. I never saw any when I got there. I just heard them talking about it.

SM: You never used any subsonic yourself while you were in Vietnam?
EH: No. Never did. Only thing I ever used was regular ball and tracer.

SM: The suppressor, how much did it degrade the performance of that match
grade round?
EH: I couldn’t tell that it did any. In all reality, by the time I got over there most
of our shooting was at night and closer ranges.

SM: Would you use night scopes?
EH: Uh-huh. The starlights. We had the first generation of starlights. The
ANSPV1, PVS2, PVS2A. These were the AMPVS1 was the very first one. It was a
little longer, I believe and a little heavier maybe. It had a T that you use as a sighting
device in the starlight in the obstacle part. It was a large T. Sometimes it would kind of
obscure the target a little bit it was so big. The night vision part was good. Now, the
elevation and deflection for your windage and moving your sights was not very exact.
You would maybe move a click and it wouldn’t move you. Maybe move a click and it
moves you three clinks. It was not very good. The AMPVS2 and 2A were much better.
They had a smaller T in the RADICAL. The windage and deflection or elevation
movements were much more precise. They were pretty well like a rifle sight. If it was
supposed to be one minute of angle it would be one minute of angle.

SM: When you said T, these first generation night scopes did not have cross hairs
is that correct?
EH: No. They didn’t. They had a T in them. After I came back to the States, 10
or 15 years later you’d watch a documentary with police operations and they’d be looking
and it was green on the screen. When you looked through the starlight everything was
green, it was a green thing. You’d see these police operations, they’d be doing night
observation and you would see a T in there. It would be sideways, upside down. What it
was you could tell then, they were taking the old pictures from the old AMPCS1, 2 or 2A,
which I thought was kind of interesting. Of course they’ve got really good stuff nowa
days. These things they came in a box, these night vision glasses. It was like a big, brief
case type thing. It had a mounting in it for the M-16 rifle, the M-14 rifle and the M-60
machine gun. I never saw them used on anything but us. We did with our sniper rifles.
Most of the infantry units would take the starlight out of the box, tie a bootlace around it
as a sling and use it as strictly a night observation device.

SM: What was the magnification on those generation of night scopes used?
EH: I just don’t remember, but it wasn’t very much. It wasn’t really magnified
very much. I’m not even sure if had been four power. It just really wasn’t magnified
very much.

SM: What was the max range you could shoot at night with those?
EH: We shot our snipers at night on our ranges at 300 meters. They did pretty
good with them. They do good at night. The wind usually not too bad at night. You
were out there shooting at night they’re usually sitting in a position at rest where they
could rest the rifle. Make the rifle a little heavier and a little steadier. They did pretty
good with them.

SM: What about actual field usage? Do you recall what some of the ranges were
when targets were actually acquired and killed using the Starlight?
EH: No. Not really, it’s really imprecise at night. You just can’t tell. Of course
if you shoot something at 50 yards by the time you get through telling it three times it’d
be a150 yards. It wasn’t very good. One little interesting story that one of our snipers
got into, two of them there was a road down on the 9th infantry division. The enemy
would walk across this thing at night. Now, the starlight scope would pick up, they had
the great big search lights, the searchlights had the regular white light and they had, I
guess it was infrared. There was a different spectrum or whatever you would call it.
They could turn that searchlight on and you could not detect light with the naked eye.
Like infrared. It may have been infrared I don’t know. Anyway, the starlight would pick
that up. You could see with it. They had these guys walking. I guess that they knew that
they were going to come across this road or they did it frequently. So, what they did was
they towed a search light out there and had an infantry platoon for security and had a
couple of snipers. They would turn that white light on and run it down that road and
search around knowing of course the enemy would be down. Then they’d turn that white
light off an out the other light on to what you couldn’t see. These guys would go across
the road and these snipers knocked off about five, six, seven of them there one night
doing that. I though it was pretty interesting. Of course they would have these lights on
the helicopters. Later we went to the 25th infantry division. I was on an ambush outside
a village. We were waiting on these people, we knew these people, they told us they
were coming in this village. You could see there was a road, just rice paddies around the
outside of the village and there was a road down there. Looking through the starlight you
could hear helicopters; you always heard helicopters seemed like everywhere. Looked
into the starlight I saw that search light coming out of that helicopter and just following
that road and it was the dark light. You had to have the starlight to see it. Of course, the
enemy couldn’t see that that road was being watched. They would have a UH-1B the
Huey flying along with the light and then up behind it would be a Cobra gunship. If there
was anything detected down there you know a Cobra would just come down and attack. I
think they had names for these things, Hunter, Killer, Night Hawk something. It’s been
so long I forget a lot. Anyway, the night capabilities that we were getting when I was
there. We were getting good at night. We were taking the night away from them.

SM: Any idea the strength of the infrared searchlights that they had.

EH: No. I don’t. You see the old pictures like in documentaries. Or if they’re
opening some big, new theatre up and you’ll see a big searchlight. That’s the size
generally about the searchlights. About the same width and intensity of the light but I
have no idea what kind of power or anything like that.

SM: It was obviously lit up to probably thousands of yards.

EH: It was very bright and very, very long. It was very good. Around base camp
defense at the 9th infantry division they had a searchlight so they could move around.
Then we had the, I think they called them the dusters. We had the quad fifties that they
could move around, then the Gatlin guns. The dusters that were on a personnel carrier.
They move around the base camp defense if they had seen anything. They could just
wipe it out. We didn’t have a lot of ground attacks there with that stuff there.

SM: Now did you know before you left for Vietnam where you were going to be
assigned?

EH: Yeah. We knew we were going to replace the sniper instructors of the 9th
infantry division. The commanding general of the 9th infantry division, gosh I can’t
remember his name.[Later remembers his name is Julian Ewell]. He later made three
stars. He was a paratrooper in World War II in the 101st Airborne Division. I saw him on TV recently. Gosh, he must be close to 90 years old. He had a very distinguished war record in World War II as a young paratroop officer. Then he had become the 9th infantry division commander. He saw a need for snipers so he tasked our unit at Ft. Benning for some. You’re not going to teach people to shoot if you don’t know how. You need the best rifle shooters in the Army were there and the best coaches, so he got a group together. Major Willis Powell was the officer in charge of the first group. He took about eight or nine guys over there. It was tremendously successful. They built ranges, took the match grade rifles over and taught these guys, had a 21-day program. It was really, really successful. Anyway, so when their time was up there was a new division commander and he wanted this continuity. They sent back and they wanted another group. About January they alerted us. We started getting ready. We did some night training things like that to get us familiar with the starlight. We went over and these guys left. They were all of our friends we’d been shooting with them for years. They all left a couple of weeks or a week or two after we got there. Actually about two months after we got there the 9th Infantry divisions started coming home. Our division commander was transferred to the 25th infantry division as a division commander. He took us with him. We established a new school there at Cu Chi, built the ranges and all this. When we left the 9th division and went to the 25th division, the division commander told the division engineer battalion to give us anything we wanted, do anything we wanted. We really got a lot of support. We built a range there. It was the range the targets were outside the defensive wire. The firing line was on the defensive perimeter. This one sergeant we had, our gunsmith, Sergeant Loris J. Smith came up with the idea of using armor plate for targets. That way they’re easy to maintain. What he did was he got blown up armored personnel carriers and took that ¾ inch plate off of it and cut out silhouettes, like the old, I forget the nomenclature, but anyway it was a silhouette. Like a cardboard silhouette you’d go on these train fire courses. He did this full size. Well, from waist up silhouettes to just the smaller shoulder up silhouettes used in the closer ranges. Put the silhouettes all the way out to 900 meters. Painted them white so the snipers would shoot during the day at those things, then repaint them. That was all the maintenance. You’d go out, but you’d have to take security out and repaint the targets. At night these white targets really
showed up well with the starlight’s if there was any light. You know the starlight has to have a little bit of light. On a totally dark, rainy night you’re not going to see anything. Anyway, old Smith came up with that idea and it worked really, really well.

SM: When you first arrived you said you arrived at Cam Ranh Bay and then went to the 9th division. Where exactly was the sniper school?

EH: At Dong Tam. That was down south of Saigon. Dong Tam was the division headquarters of the 9th infantry division. That’s where the school was. It was right on the I don’t believe the Mekong River, but it was one of the big rivers that was down in that area. Dong Tam was just a little bit north of My Tho, which is a pretty large city in the Delta down there. It was a funny place. The Army built this thing. It was right along the edge of this river. We couldn’t have dug in bunkers because the water would fill up, the water table was so high. So, all the bunkers were above ground. We had pretty intense combat down there. We had a lot, a lot of casualties. Mainly everything was so booby-trapped. There were just booby traps everywhere. Every kind you can imagine. The people were pretty hostile down there. I guess they had been under the control or influence of the Communists for quite some time. I never saw the hostility of the Vietnamese people up around Cu Chi, Dong Ten, Tay Ninh and these places. There wasn’t the hostility with these people down in the Delta. The GIs down in the Delta were really hard on them. They hated the Vietnamese pretty well. Because there was so many of the guys that their friends has been blown up. The Vietnamese weren’t getting blown up. They knew where the booby traps and stuff were and they wouldn’t tell you and everything. It was a pretty harsh relationship, I guess between both people down there. We worked the 9th infantry division, we had one brigade that lived on these navy barrack ships. This was I guess you’ve heard of the brown water navy and the riverine forces?

SM: Yes, sir.

EH: That was us. That was the 9th infantry division. Anyway, this one brigade lived on these ships and they worked with these tango boats and PBRs, patrol boat rivers, like a little PT boat. They had something called a monitor. It was a landing craft type thing. They had 105s on them. They had 4.2 mortars on some of them. They were pretty heavily armed. They could put almost a platoon in these landing craft type things.
They did a lot of assault off the rivers, and they could do some helicopter stuff too, but
the other two brigades were more into the helicopters and moving around that way.

There seemed to be enough enemy to go around down there. When I got there they had
the Navy base right there with us at Dong Tam. They had a squadron or whatever they
call them of these patrol boats. We would go out with them at night on like sniper
missions with two of those boats. What you could do is put the snipers on the back boat
and the front boat would go along with the motors making a lot of noise. The rear boat
about 100 meters behind or so, idling along and was not making lots of noise. So, the VC
would sometimes they would duck down and hide when the front boat was going by.

When it got by there ears were ringing, and they couldn’t hear that back boat that was
there. Sometimes you could get a shot when they would pop up after the first boat went
by. We used them that way, snipers along the rivers that way. Then too the rules of
engagement, if I remember correctly, if the fishing boat was tied up and had a light on it,
he was ok. If that boat didn’t have a light on it, and this was at night, if that boat didn’t
have a light and wasn’t tied to a stake or something like that he was fair game. There was
a lot of the sailors on these boats would go along and stop these sampans and stuff and
search them. Sometimes they’d find guns and ammunition. They moved everything
pretty well by water down there. We had a good relationship with the Navy. The Navy
and the Army worked real well together down there.

SM: In terms of the training and the school did that involve all the branches? Did
you have students from the Marine Corps for instance or was it just Army?

EH: No. We didn’t have the Marines. The Marines had their own. They were
way up north. They had their own instructors, and damn good ones. Marines always had
good riflemen. They did their own school and it was a little different than ours. I think
Major Powell, when he first took the first group over he was really one of the best Army
rifle shooters. I think it was Captain Land, the Marine first guy up there that really got
their stuff going. They were old rifle shooting friends and stuff. We all shot together at
the National matches and everything. If I’m not mistaken Major Powell probably did
some liaison work and got some help from the Marines about the school and the teaching
and all this. All the program of instruction and all that. Major Powell devised a 21-day
program of instruction that we followed. Then the subsequent people that went to the
other divisions and replaced us, we all were on the same sheet of music. We had this 21-day training cycle that worked pretty good for us.

SM: How many students would you cycle through in 21 days?

EH: It was usually, best that I remember is 20 or 25 something like that. The smaller the classes the more individual help you could give them. We didn’t graduate all of them. They had to pass. They had to qualify. We’re not going to teach that you’ve got to be a National Champion in 21 days or anything, but you can sure teach them to shoot a rifle if you’re not a good instructor. You can teach them good enough to really do well over there. To be quite frank with you, the Army had got out of the eye field the business of training riflemen by that time, relying more on massive artillery, helicopter and machine gun, things like that, mortars and all that. The individual riflemen we used to laugh that the M-16 was capable of shooting 600 misses a minute and generally they did. The guys would put the things on automatic. They call it rock and roll and just unload it. If anybody ever got hit it was either a friendly guy or by an accident that you shot the enemy. We trained these guys and taught them how to shoot like we were trained, back the way they did the Army 50 years ago. A lot of dry firing. Practice your sight alignment; trigger control and stuff like that before you even fired a live round. I remember when I went in the Army we spent two weeks dry firing just laying [practicing] all the positions. By the time we got to shooting live ammunition we knew what we were doing pretty well. Anyway, the Army got away from all that. Anyway, that’s what we did with our snipers. We took them right down to basics and brought them along, biggest part of them, I’d say about 2/3 of them 75% of them would qualify.

SM: What about pre-qualification? Did you have an exam that they had to take to go through school?

EH: No, not really. I think the Marines have a thing that they say had to be an expert riflemen or something. You know the Army qualification at that time was so screwy shooting solo at targets and things like that, how would you know an expert from a sharp shooter? We were really hesitant to believe what came out of those training centers, what we required was you had to be a sniper. You had to volunteer. You had to be an infantryman with 90 days of service in the field as an infantryman and volunteer. We got them in and cleaned them up issued them equipment and trained them. Like I
say, probably 65 to 80% of them would qualify and then we would put them back out in
the field with equipment.

SM: How were they selected to attend sniper school?

EH: They would volunteer.

SM: So, they would just go to their headquarters and say, hey, I’d like to go to
sniper school.

EH: Yeah. The word was out. Once we got snipers in the field our first class,
they must have sent out a word through the division when we first got there. About
probably in July of ’69, they probably asked for volunteers to go to sniper school. I’m
sure that’s what they did. Then probably the local commander, the company
commanders probably had something to say about it. Occasionally we would get some
really bad yard birds, some bums. I know what happened then. The company was just
wanting to get rid of them. Of course, generally these guys didn’t pass. The company
got them back anyway. We had plenty of volunteers. After we got snipers in the field
they had a generous award program for them. They were a little cut above the regular
slogging infantrymen. So, the guys saw that the old boys in the infantry company saw
that. They decided well you know that might be a good deal. We never had a problem
getting people. We turned down more than we got. We occasionally have people come
from, I remember one day I was there after I was the NCO in charge in the 25th division
school. I was there one day and a young soldier from one of the engineer units came in
and he was just begging to be a sniper. I’m sorry he may have been a good one, could
have been, but our rules were you had to be an infantryman.

SM: What about the role of the spotter in the training that you did? Did you have
that component?

EH: We trained them one to shoot and one to spot in the daytime. Anyway more
than anything he would be trying to tell the guy where he was hitting if he was hitting
close or whatever. Of course, you know really and truly by the time we go to the 25th
division they just didn’t run across that many in the daytime. Most of the action was at
night. Actually you usually had two snipers and probably both of them would shoot if
there were enough targets. We were like the Marine Corps up in the Northern area they
had, apparently they could get long shots daytime shots and everything and the 25th
division there it just didn’t happen that much. By the time we got there really and truly
we had them pretty well on the run. At night they were hurting us. We pretty well took
that away from them.

SM: What about training in camouflage?
EH: We had camouflage fatigues for the snipers. A lot of them would use the
paint and stuff.

SM: How about gillie suits?
EH: No, this was before the gillie suits and stuff like that. We had different ways
of using them. Different things worked at different places. One of there good ones,
where a gillie suit would have been great was the stay behind. Like companies going
along what we call RIFing, reconaissance in force. Actually what they’re out doing us
trying to find them. So, you’re going along near the company so like at noon they stop,
put out security and have lunch, or maybe a platoon, have lunch set around and all that
and rest for a bit and then take off. Well, leave a couple snipers camouflaged and hide
there because a lot of times when the troops gone, you know those troops will throw
away food. They don’t like this C-ration, don’t like that, throw it away, they drop
ammunition. They’re tired and they’re lazy and they throw stuff away. The enemy knew
this. A lot of time when the troops would move on they would go to where they had
stopped to see what they could find. Well, we had stay behinds that would hide nearby
and sometimes get a shot. Like I said a gillie suit or some really good camouflage would
have been good for that.

SM: It just wasn’t part of the equipment yet?
EH: No. This was probably really the beginning of sniping. It got pretty
sophisticated after the Vietnam War, like it is now. They’ve got the good stuff now,
good weapons, good snipers and the gillie suits, know a lot more about it than what we
did. We were the ones that just got it off the ground I guess. They saw that it was pretty
effective and pretty cheap. We used to have a little form that you filled out. Every time
you shot you filled out these little things, where, what time, how many shots, results.

This went back to the division G3 who put it into the computer for, I guess to find out
what maybe the optimum times are, how effective it was. They come up with something
like every 1.67 shots or something like that there was an enemy shot. I think for the
regular infantry and stuff like that, I think it was 50,000 rounds per body or something like that. It was just really cost effective. We got in it too little too late.

SM: You said that of course they had to pass a final exam in order to graduate, what was the graduation exam like?

EH: It was shooting. They had to qualify in daytime out to 800 meters, maybe 900. Nine hundred meters you’re talking a thousand yards. They didn’t have to hit every shot out there and everything. They would compile a score. I’ll just be frank with you I don’t remember. Night was the same way. There would be so many shots fired at night at the silhouettes. It was just hits, however many hits. I just have no idea. Maybe for instance if they shot 60 rounds, it might be they had to have 50 hits or something like that. This was at various ranges. It was neat at night; you would spot behind the sniper. If you looked behind him and told him which target to engage and he shot. You’re looking through a starlight and he’s looking through a starlight and the bullet hits that piece of metal it makes a flash. You can tell, of course hear, too. Heck, he maybe have been shooting on something else. If you hear it clunk, it’s really neat to look at where he’s shooting with your starlight and when that bullet hits there you see that explosive piece of light on the target. Something else about the starlights and people if they ever read this or hear it or anything will remember. You look through a starlight scope, the old ones I don’t know about the new ones. The ones we had in Vietnam, you looked through for a while, you’d get a terrible headache if you’d look a long time. It really feels like it pulls your eye out of your socket. It was very eye fatiguing to look through these things very long.

SM: Was there anything you could do to prevent that from happening?

EH: I never found anything or heard of anything. Another thing about the starlight, it’s bringing back some memories. You could zero your rifle in the daytime with a starlight. The starlight had a cover over it. I just don’t understand this. It had a cover and a pinhole in the very middle of that cover. You could put it over the front of your starlight and the back of your starlight had this rubber thing that you put your eye up against. You could put that cover over the front of the starlight with that pin hole then and see like it was dark. Now, if you kept that cover off of it in the daylight and turned the starlight on it, it would hurt it. It would make it ineffective. You kept the cover on it.
with that little pinhole it would work. Also what the guys found out, leave the cover off
and put your hand over the front of it. Cover the front of the starlight with your hand and
shoot. You could zero it that way. It would work. I have no idea the reason being or
what. We did it.

SM: It would see through your hand?

EH: Yeah, I don’t understand it. Like I say, I just don’t know. I’ve always
wondered about that. Maybe if you ever have an opportunity to see a physicist, someone
who knows about these things he can tell you. It’s always been a curiosity with me. I
just don’t understand it. Actually seeing through your hand. Amazing.

SM: One of the potential problems with the starlight scope or with any night
vision device as a sniper is the eyepiece of course reflects light off of your face doesn’t
it?

EH: I guess it could. I don’t know. Never seemed to have been a problem.

Gosh, there was so much other, if you were out with other people there’s other problems
to worry about more so than that. Making them be still, making them be quiet. I had
some interesting things happen on night ambushes before. This really in combat like we
had over there we were working against kids off the farms in North Vietnam and stuff
like that. They weren’t the most sophisticated, well-trained soldiers there were. By the
time I got there they were just scooping everything sending them down. They did what
they had to do. What there bosses, their NCOs their officers would make them do and
everything. They did so many stupid careless things. Walking down roads at night,
smoking cigarettes, talking and things like that. I just can’t see them being observant
enough to catch a reflection off a face or anything like that. They weren’t the best
soldiers in the world. Anytime there was a shot fired we’d always holler sniper, then
about some bozo shooting a rifle. He probably couldn’t hit that wall over there. Most of
our casualties were not gunshots.

SM: Did you guys train for counter sniper operations?

EH: Not really. We told them the best defense against a sniper is another sniper.

Each division I was in the snipers were on call 24 hours, their sniper instructors, rather
were on call 24 hours a day for base camp defense. Anytime that there was anything to
shoot anywhere around that anybody saw, especially around if it was a village. The only
person who could shoot, would be a sniper because they didn’t want to blow the village away or hit something that they didn’t want to hit. They knew that we could hit what we were shooting at. If there was suspected anything around maybe at 3:00 in the morning we’d get a call go to bunker 75 or something like that or tower 24. There’s something observed there. You go and take your rifle, your starlight and see if you could see anything. You were authorized to shoot, unless it was like a ground attack a lot of times, these guys weren’t.

SM: Earlier before we started talking about the sniper school you mentioned that when you first arrived in country you went to Cam Ranh Bay you received some briefings. Do you remember what they were like?

EH: I can tell you two things kind of humorous, I thought. First thing they got the whole plane-load of us out and they had these out door sinks with water and sinks and a dental officer. I’ve talked to lots of Vietnam Veterans I’ve not run across this again rather. They gave us a little tube, like of toothpaste enough for one good thorough brushing and they gave us a throw away toothbrush. They told us to brush your teeth thoroughly with this stuff. It’s some kind of stuff; I guess it had a lot of fluoride or something in it. Brush your teeth really good with this stuff and you won’t have a cavity while you’re here. In six months we’ll have you do it again. Well, we didn’t do it again. I don’t know if our group had ever seen it again. What was funny, I thought was the dental officer said don’t get that stuff on your clothing, might hurt your clothing. Our NCO in charge Sergeant Horton, good old Texas boy, he says you’re telling us to not get it on our clothes because it can hurt them and then you want us to put it in our mouth (laughs)? Anyway, we brushed our teeth with it and spit it out and all that. I didn’t have a cavity during that time. Of course, I may not have anyway but that was the thing. You hear, I’m sure you’ll hear from veterans and from all wars, they all got the same story. That they had venereal diseases over here so bad that if you get them they put you on an island somewhere and you spend the rest of your life there. They can’t cure it. I’ve heard that about the Korean War. I’ve heard it from the WWII guys and I’ve heard it from the Vietnam guys. It’s just a myth it’s not true. Anyway this medical officer he was telling us to take your Malaria pills and do this and do that. He says contrary to the stories you hear, we can cure any kind of venereal disease that you can catch. I’m not
telling you to go out and do these things. Those are two of the things. Then they briefed us a little bit about customs of the country. Little basic things like that as much as anything to keep us occupied until we got shipped out to our units.

SM: How about when you arrived at the 9th infantry division, did you receive any specific briefings there?

EH: Well, it’s kind of funny. We flew down to Tan Son Nhut or Bien Hoa. I can’t remember one of the two big air bases around Saigon. It must have been Tan Son Nhut there in Saigon. They had a reception thing there. We then got on a C-130 and flew down to Dong Tam which was a little ways down the road, 40 or 50 miles. Well, we’re new in country and we don’t know we think as soon as you get off the plane they’re going to be shooting at you and all that. Then, we landed in a rice paddy outside of Dong Tam because the runway inside the base camp there at Dong Tam was blown all away. We got rocketed quite often. It was so pitted with rocket holes that we couldn’t land inside with a fixed wing aircraft. We had to land outside. Of course, that scared us. We didn’t have any weapons or anything. We were pretty apprehensive. They had some buses to take us into the place. Then we walked down the ramp and what greeted us was a bunch of little Vietnamese kids about waist high begging for cigarettes, kind of took the John Wayne attitude away from you. What in the world are we getting into? It went from combat to something we thought was kind of funny, to little kids begging cigarettes. When I was in Korea they were wanting candy or food, these guys wanted cigarettes.

SM: Back to the sniper school, real quick, you said it was principally only Army. What about other country forces?

EH: I forgot about that while ago. We trained some Navy guys.

SM: Oh, you did?

EH: In fact, I don’t know if I gave you a picture or not after we had finished the class, the 21 days we would have a big steak cook out if we could get steaks for the snipers before we sent them out. I’ve got a picture of me and some Navy guys drinking beer at one of these things. These guys were I guess from the Brown Water Navy, the PBRs. I don’t believe we trained any SEALs. There was a seal group down in My Tho. I went down there one time and they had some use for match 308 ammunition. I took a case of match 308 ammunition down there and traded it for a case of steaks. I had a few
drinks at their bar. They had a nice little bar, and a really beautiful Eurasian bar tender. I’ve always wondered if she got out of there without having to stay or somebody married her. She was really a beautiful young lady. You have some memories that just don’t go away. She was so striking I don’t guess I’ll ever forget her. We traded the ammunition for the steaks. When we went to the 25th division we trained some Navy guys. These guys wore the same thing; I guess right off the boat, the PBRs and things like that. We were building the blast walls around our barracks. You either put sand bags or with this case we have 55-gallon empty oil drums. I was having the troops I was the NCO in charge by this time. I was having the guys put the barrels up next to the barracks and then fill them up with dirt. This one Navy guy, he was really a good, young troop and everything. He just overdid it. He tried to move one of those big barrels and he had, in his forearm a big knot jump up, looked about like a golf ball right in the middle of his forearm. I sent him on sick call to the medics because he said it was hurting. What it was, they said it was a hernia. The muscle had strained and popped up somehow or another there. They had to send him back to the States for an operation. We got a letter back to the school from his commander, saying what in the world; you’re working our people so hard? We sent them up there to be trained as snipers, not as laborers or something like that. Our major had to write a letter back saying everybody did that. Everybody worked like that. When they weren’t training and something had to be done, it had to be done. This was the only people we’d had. We got in a little hassle there. We still got sailors after that. They still sent them to us. We trained a group of Cambodians one time.

SM: Cambodians?
EH: Yeah. The A company 5th Special Forces and headquarters was in Saigon. The commander, Lieutenant Colonel Sidney Hines was a distinguished rifle and pistol shooter and West Pointer class of 1950. He was just one of our old shooting buddies and friends. His last tour in the Army was a commanding officer of the Army marksmanship unit at Ft. Benning. He was a full colonel. He got me back there as the NCO in charge of the pistol team and I was a sergeant major. We went all the way back to me being a young sergeant and him being a young captain. I knew him that long. Anyway, he had these Cambodians in his Special Forces Company and they didn’t shoot well. He wanted
us to train them to shoot the M-16. We said sure and our division went along with it.

Hey, we’re all in the same side. Anyway he sent these guys up. They were there about
two days; we had to get a hold of him to bring them some food. The food that we ate, the
Army American food was a little bit too rich for them or they didn’t like it or something.
We had to get a hold of Colonel Hines and he came up with a helicopter load of these
Cambodian indigenous rations. It was like the Vietnamese dehydrated stuff. Dehydrated
rice and one of their meals was fish. It was like little dried minnows about an inch or so
long. One of them was like beef jerky, which was pretty good. They all had hot peppers,
little packets of hot pepper stuff that they liked and what they ate. We got them their
rations up and everything was o.k. after that. We had interpreters and we got them where
they could shoot pretty good. We didn’t give them the full 21-day course. We just gave
them a basic marksmanship about a week. They did better.

SM: What about other countries?

EH: No. They had two Korean divisions there. They found out about us having
sniper rifles and they had a rifle competition down around Long Binh somewhere. The
Americans, weren’t involved, I don’t understand why we didn’t get in it. It was like a big
rifle match. I think the Australians, the New Zealand and the Koreans whoever else we
had Philippines they all had teams there. This Korean division commander, one of them
heard that we had these match rifles and he came up to Cu Chi and wanted to buy
[borrow] some. Well our Major in the best interest of Allied Friendship he said sure. We
loaned them five or six or seven match rifles. They won the matches down there. The
Major and I got in the jeep and went down. They wanted us to come observe the end of
it, the matches and I guess bring the rifles back. We went down and they treated us like
royalty, had a big tent there you know. All these Korean officers they had some Korean
food and drinks and things there. They treated me and the old Major Chester like we
were the commander-in-chief or something. They won the matches with our rifles. Our
rifles shot so much better. The only foreigners that we trained were the, well, we did
train some Vietnamese too. It was again basic marksmanship. That was when we were
in the 9th division. We trained a few Vietnamese soldiers, again with an M-16. I was
working with this one young Vietnamese, you know they’re so tiny, to shoot any kind of
a rifle you need to if you can, you want to use your sling. You have what you call a hasty
slung. It’s just you unsnap the bottom of the part of your sling, like the M-16 or M-1 or
whatever kind of rifle. You could make a loop in there, give it a half twist to the left,
stick your arm through it and you get it tight. You tighten the sling up to support your
rifle. I was working with this young Vietnamese, he couldn’t speak English and I didn’t
know anything about Vietnamese. I was tightening that thing up and he started going
Tong Lai, Tong Lai. I asked Major Chetester who spoke pretty good Vietnamese; he had
pulled an earlier tour as an advisor. I said what’s this guy saying? He was staying stop.
What it was I was getting it so tight it was hurting his arm. I didn’t know what he was
saying. I was about to squeeze him in two I guess. Well, we trained them. We trained
some Special Forces guys. The MACSOG people the ones that would cross the border
into Laos and Cambodia on these reconnaissance trips and things. We trained some of
those guys. These were American Special Forces guys. Good young troops.

SM: How about Laotians? You didn’t train any Laotians?
EH: No. No one asked us to I guess. What we did was just whatever we were
told. None showed up.

SM: How about American civilians?
EH: No, I don’t know. They had the Phoenix Program. I’m sure you’re familiar
with that.

SM: Yes, sir.
EH: We would go on sniper missions. They would take the NCOs and we would
go on special missions for our division, G2 intelligence. I went on one, one time me and
the guy I usually I went with Sergeant Lebish. We got on this field and the Major went
with them. Major Chester. The Major from, I can’t remember his name from division
intelligence. He was briefing us on what we were doing and he was going to go with us
too. Pretty soon we had so many people it was just a mess. Anyway, he said we’re going
to go outside this little village. I don’t know, it was somewhere in the division. It was a
pretty good size village. He said we’re going to go there and about 8:00 or right after
dark so, these people are going to be coming with these NVA or VC whatever they were
are going to be coming in on this trail right after dark. They’re coming into the village.
They’d go to villages for food and intelligence, to steal money and whatever they wanted.
They had to have the villages or the enemy did nearly to survive. These people will be
coming in right after dark and what we want you to do is shoot them in the leg and we’re
going to capture them. I said how do we know these people are going to be coming in
this village at this time. He said we have a CIA agent in the village, of course it’s not a
round-eyed American. It was somebody that the CIA had working for them that was in
there told them this. It all happened just like he said. Right after dark, they’d come
prancing down this trail, coming in toward the village. They had some good intelligence.
That was the only time that I think that I had any contact with or anything related to
civilians.

SM: Was that when you were with 9th ID or with 25th?

EH: Twenty-fifth.

SM: When you went on this mission, were you one of the snipers that shot the
enemy in the leg?

EH: Yeah. There was one sniper from the battalion and that area of operations
and me and Sergeant Lebish and then the Major. It was really a mess. We landed in a
helicopter at this little ARVN place. It was either ARVN or these Rough Puffs, these
regional forces, popular forces or something. Anyway, they were a little ways from the
village. They had a little fortress like place with bunkers and wire around. We landed
there and we had not told them anything about anything or coordinated with them at all.

If you do you’re just telling the enemy. So, we landed there. We had Major Chetester,
this Major from MI, myself; Lebish and I can’t remember the name of the snipers. It was
in the 1st of the 5th infantry area of operations and this guy was one of the first snipers we
trained from that battalion. He was with us and so it was three snipers. The Major from
intelligence was going to go and so was Major Chetester. We landed there and that dad
gum Vietnamese guy in charge just raise all kinds of hell because we hadn’t coordinated
with him and everything. Major Chetester and this major from intelligence didn’t just
fall off the turnip truck, they knew that if we left out of there, those guys were going to
let the enemy know that we’re there. So, Major Chetester said I’m going to stay here, in
this place and I’m going to make sure there’s no phone calls, no radio calls, no nothing.

When they found out that was going to happen they said well, you’re going to have to
take one of our people with you. We had to take this Vietnamese guy with us. We were
late. We should have been in our ambush position because of this hassle back at the little
base. Anyway, we’re gong through the village, we just get to the edge of the village and
the guy at point was our sniper from that battalion. He stopped us and pointed and right
there about 150 yards, here they came, about 4 of them, 5 of them. The three of us each
shot. It was like ok on three. One, two, three then we all shot. Of course wasn’t
anybody shooting at any legs. These Vietnamese we have back here are big people
compared to those people over there. Those people just barely weighed 100 pounds, little
old scrawny legs. To shoot a leg in the dark, walking, you could see through your scope
it was either a couple of RPGs or that Chinese machine gun they had, RPD I think it is.
You’re not going to shoot anybody in the leg with it like that, more than likely miss
anyway. Anyway, we shot them. Shot at them. We don’t know because it was like 150
yards away. Shoot three times you’ve got about four or five people. As soon as you
shoot one time, you don’t see them anymore, they’re just gone. Either down, run off or
whatever. Then we went on to our ambush place. Normally when you’re going to have
an ambush, you go into a place before daylight in what we call a holding area. Then after
dark you move. 150 or 200 meters away because somebody may have watched you
move into that place. You’ve go to move anyway. We didn’t have to then because it was
dark anyway. We just went to our ambush place. At 2:00 another group was supposed to
come by and sure enough they did. They turned away. They didn’t come close so we
didn’t shoot. For some reason, I don’t know what it was, they didn’t come in like they
were supposed to. We just saw them way out there. It was a pretty open area. Maybe
they had been warned. Maybe those guys that we shot at first, if we hit any they drug
them off. I’m sure we hit some. They’d carry the bodies off anyway or their wounded. I
just feel that they went over there and were waiting on them and alerted them. They
didn’t come to the village.
SM: This was a different operation?
EH: No. It was the same one.
SM: Did you ever get anybody that intell could interrogate to get information
from them?
EH: NO. I never captured anyone. When we shot, we shot to kill. Didn’t want a
mad wounded guy there on your hands or anything. We really weren’t in the intelligence
business except on this special deal. I think the major realized too, after he saw what it
was out there. I didn’t think he was too interested in shooting anybody in the foot either.

SM: When you arrived at the 9th ID, you started working as an instructor in the
sniper school did you also go out on occasional missions, ambushes, things like that with
9th ID?

EH: Not down in the 9th division. We were pretty new at everything there. We
were kind of closing out that school and getting ready to build another. After we went to
the 25th division yeah. When we finished our first class in Ch Chi, we went out with the
snipers from the first or the fifth infantry. A mechanized battalion that was actually there
at Cu Chi but it had a fire support base Patton. We went out as soon as they graduated
and the General gave them their diplomas and all that. We went out with them and spent
about four or five days, four nights, five days. We went out on night ambushes with
them. Two of us would go out with one of them and a radio operator throughout their
area of operations. I think we kind of sold the program pretty well then. They had a road
that went down by fire support base Patton. About a mile down to a village. You could
go along that road and see blown up vehicles. About every division in Vietnam had been
there over the years. 101st airborne, 1st calv, 25th division, 1st infantry division. At one
time or another all of them had been in that area. The VC would mine that road. They
just couldn’t seem to get them to stop. I don’t know what they were doing; other than
they had about 200 yards down from the fires base they had a little fortress type place.
They had a .50 caliber machine gun there that they would shoot up and down that road at
staggered intervals all night. Anyway, we went out the first night. We went, myself and
a guy and one of their snipers and a radio operator. We went out, went down the road
and went about 150 yards from the village after dark and set up. Then we put two more
of our snipers, our instructors and a sniper in a little area on the other side of the road and
on the other side of the village. During the night this guy that was with me, he shot one
guy. The guys on the other side, our two instructors and sniper on the other side, they
killed about four or five. Right out in the road putting mines in. The next night we were
somewhere else, the next night was somewhere else throughout the battalion. Anyway
after about a month, we had already gone back to Cu Chi, but the local snipers killed a
few more on that road. There were no more vehicles blown up on that road. They
cleaned that mess up just with the snipers. Of course they would still sent the
minesweeping team down the road in the mornings, but there wasn’t much activity. In
fact, one of the ones that was killed that first night we were there in the road laying the
mine was a woman. She was out there doing it. It was an ARVN captain’s wife that was
there. He was all hostile and everything like that. I’m sure he knew what she was doing.
Probably, he’s just as bad as her. He just threw a fit. There she was lying out there in the
road. They were laying mines. Anyway, you never knew what was going on in that
place.

SM: That brings up a very interesting question and issue. What did you think
before you went to Vietnam what did you think was going on over there?

EH: Well, I’d had many friends who’d gone over there being a career
infantryman. And talked to so many friends when they came back. I knew it was a heck
of a mess and it was a very deadly place. Scary. If we should be there, if we should not
be there was never a concern. That just never entered my mind. I was a career soldier,
an American, whatever my country told me to do, I was going to go do. I didn’t
particularly want to go over there and do any of that. All of the stuff that was going on at
that time, the protests because we shouldn’t be there and it was a civil war and a bunch of
stuff like that. To me it was never a civil war. I got over there; there were very few Viet
Cong left. Everything that we were finding was Vietnamese soldiers in uniform. They
didn’t grow them down south; these guys came from the north. They were trying to take
over, which they ultimately did.

SM: What about that example you just cited? The fact that you have here an
ARNV officer’s wife, who obviously must be south Vietnamese laying in mines in this
road. Obviously now you question her husband.

EH: Yeah. Sure I did. I never trusted really any of them. We had these Chieu
Hois. The Chieu Hoi program was you surrender and give us your gun, we give you
money. We had a lot of these guys that would be with our platoons and companies as
guides as and point men and change sides to our side. Gosh, I didn’t trust those guys one
way what so ever. I just didn’t trust any of the Vietnamese. None of them in uniform.
We would go to villages and things or you’d be in Saigon and you’d be anywhere where
there were Vietnamese soldiers and people. You could see a lot of hostility. Not all of
them, of course. With the Vietnamese military, you could see a lot of hostility with them a lot of times. What used to irritate us, the war went on seven days a week with the American Army. Friday evenings, Friday afternoons, the roads, we were at Cu Chi was only about 30 miles from Saigon the roads would be choked with ARVN going to Saigon for the weekend. Long weekend, take off Friday afternoon and evening and go down there and go back Sunday evening or Sunday afternoon rather or Monday morning. We were over there fighting their damn war and these guys are going to Saigon. The American military over there, the infantrymen, we were not all that happy with the South Vietnamese. It was just almost like, get them the hell out of here and let us finish this thing off. Get them out of the way. I never saw them. I know they did a lot of good fighting over there and times and places, they did a lot of damn running too. A lot of search and evading and a lot of not doing anything. That irritated me. That was pretty well the general thinking of the guys.

SM: As you became more experienced, did your attitude about what was going on there change at all?

EH: Not at all. No. We were over there for one thing, to train our guys and to shoot people. It’s funny, you can teach a guy to shoot but you can’t really teach him to kill. I’m sure that we had guys that had opportunity to shoot people and didn’t. That’s their own thing and I didn’t get into any of that or whatever. The division had a generous awards program for an incentive for them to shoot people. I got pictures and put them in the sniper barracks over there, big, blown up pictures of dead NVA and stuff. I put a little caption under it, second place sniper match. We would do things to our better snipers, we kept a score board back at our place. These guys would come in and we’d really take care of them and build them up, pat them up [on the back] and all that. Just to get them to go out and do it. That was what we were over there for. Of course, by 1970, you could see that it was winding down. When they took the 9th infantry division out, that was the first American Army division that came out. When they brought the 9th back we saw them. Of course no one wants to be the last guy killed in a war that they’re pulling out of.

SM: Yes, sir.

EH: That’s an attitude that’s very understandable.
SM: I wanted to ask about that. In particular, you arrived in Vietnam and it was May 1969?

EH: May of ’69. That was of course, the same month that operation Apache Snow and Hamburger Hill occurred.

SM: Hamburger Hill, yeah. I remember Hamburger Hill occurred. I remember in the Stars and Stripes there would be a casualty list out and everything. It was pretty heavy at that time.

SM: What kind of an effect did that have? The battle of Hamburger Hill and I guess more importantly the apparent shift that occurred in both the Nixon administration and also in MACV pretty much to what you were just saying. Shortly after Hamburger Hill, Nixon made the announcement we would start withdrawing American forces, Vietnamization of the war was going to go at full swing. Did that trickle down to you?

EH: Yeah, it did. Of course, it hit us real hard in the 9th division because all of the people that had 7 or 8 or 9 months in country went home. The rest of us got sent to other units. It looked like some light at the end of the tunnel for us. That there was a different attitude in this thing. As far as the Battle of Hamburger Hill or the Marines or some other division or unit got in heavy engagement, it really didn’t affect you wherever you were at. You were really more concerned with what was going on right around you. Your world is a very, very small narrow place in combat. They had the moon walk and stuff when I was over there, meant absolutely nothing to me. Things that I missed like that. I read about them now and they mean something now. Then it was ho hum, watch those mortar rounds or something like that. It was really strange.

SM: Was the school ever mortared or rocketed?

EH: Oh, we got fire. When I was in Dang Tien, down in the 9th division we were rocketed and mortared daily and nightly nearly. We were having a sniper graduation and we got about six or seven rockets come in. Of course everybody was on the deck. It’s really a strange thing. I could hear in those days, you could hear those rockets whistling when they’re coming down, sounding like they’re coming right to hit you in the back. They may land a hundred or 200 yards away, but it sounds like when they whistle they come in and boy, it’s really scary.

SM: Was there ever any significant damage or any casualties?
EH: Oh yeah. Our barracks got blew up one day. My birthday June the 18th 1969. I went out on these PBRs and I was on a back PBR. We just got away from there. There was an explosion between the two boats. Somebody had shot an RPG at us, didn’t hit either one of us. I don’t know if they were shooting at the from one or the back one. Anyway, it splashed water on us, but it didn’t hurt anybody. The same night they got a big mortar attack by our barracks area. killed one of the guys running for the bunker. Not one of our guys. A lot of people shared bunkers. When we got back in next morning, the blood was there and there was a couple fingers there. I don’t know how the finger’s got missed. I guess they just picked the body up kind of surreal like. We quit living in our barracks. We had a two-story barracks type thing. After it got hit we moved into our big bunker and just stayed there.

SM: Wow. What about for the students?

EH: They did too. We had bunker for them. We wouldn’t do them that way (laughs).

SM: I didn’t think so.

EH: I tell you those big boys they wouldn’t stand for it either. They weren’t dumb. American soldiers are pretty crafty, smart individuals.

SM: Yes, sir.

EH: The young boys, I tell you serve in something like that with young Americans it really makes you proud of them.

SM: Did that change at all when you went to the 25th?

EH: We didn’t get rocketed and mortared up there. We got it occasionally. One day I was going up to the division or something. I had my driver there after I was in charge of the thing. We were going up there to do something, and just as we were leaving our area there was a tremendous explosion down in the wolfhound area, their rear area. They had some barracks there. One of the barracks we went by there and it was just a smoking wreck. There was a Lieutenant out there and it just made too much damage to have been a rocket or a mortar. I asked this guy, I said that incoming there, was that one of ours? He said yeah it was a 155 round from one of the firebases. They’d made a big mistake he said. Another 30 minutes we’ll know which gun it was that they
screwed up on. They didn’t hit anybody, didn’t kill anybody it was an empty barrack, luckily. Other places it could have really hurt a lot of people.

SM: Now when you were with 9th ID did you go out on patrols?

EH: No, I didn’t. The only thing I did down there was I rode the boats. I’d get called out on bunker calls if they would see something. I didn’t go out on any. I did that in the 25th.

SM: How about also with the 9th ID was the perimeter around your school and around the base area ever probed by the NVA or by Viet Cong?

EH: Not while we were there. I think they knew we were leaving too.

SM: How about lessons learned from the field? In your first experience at 9th ID would you get feedback from snipers that you would graduate and send out? Did they kind of send information back?

EH: Sure. Sure.

SM: Anything in particular stand out?

EH: It’s kind of funny about Vietnam. Almost every battalion, every area was a different war. Things like in the 9th division was a little different from the wars in the 25th. I can’t really, not any particular thing that really stands out. Something earth shaking that would have been new. It’s pretty well, basically the same thing. Then again the war was different. It was mostly farmland and swamps down in the 9th infantry division. In the 25th you had some jungle up there. More wooded areas and of course rice paddies. It was just less booby-trapped. There wasn’t booby traps up there, like down in the 9th division it just seemed like you were afraid of everything from booby traps to mines. They had them in the 25th enough, not like it was down there.

SM: What was the most feared of the booby traps found with the 9th ID?

EH: What was the fear?

SM: What was the most feared?

EH: Well, like stepping on things or trip wires and things like that, probably in the 25th division more like command detonated mines. Big things that would blow up personnel carriers or something like that. Down in the 9th it was like more individual type things. You didn’t want to touch anything. They’d put out things you know, like a souvenir type thing a Viet Cong flag or something like that. Stay the hell away from that.
Like I say we didn’t go out and operate. You would be out and everything not really on military operations. I went out one time with somebody. It has been so long. I can remember about it was daytime and the only thing I really remember much about it other than watch where you step and everything. We jumped a what, the heck is it? A Cobra, a Cobra snake. In these I guess you could call them not weeds, it’s almost like a rice paddy, but it wasn’t rice. It was just some kind of growth. That dad gum Cobra, we scared him, I guess and there must have been two foot of him off the ground. That old hood was flared out. Luckily he left us. He was more scared of us then we were of him I guess, so he took off. It was really a harrowing experience there. It was bad enough for the people, much less the critters after you too.

SM: Were there any other wildlife experiences? Tigers? Monkeys?

EH: When I was in the 25th division, we were on an ambush out I’m not sure of it was the Boloi woods or the Hobo woods, one of the forested areas. We were there at night and we heard this grunting and funny noises and everything. We figured it was a tiger. It didn’t get close to us. Of course, you had claymores and stuff and it would have been blown away if it would have. We’d never heard noises like that before. We just assumed it was like a tiger, grunting, growling. Not aggressive noises like screaming or scrawling. Just grunting, but they were loud. Couldn’t tell how close it was or anything. It was enough to get everybody awake.

SM: Did you guys lose any instructors down with the 9th ID to booby traps or anything like that?

EH: No. We didn’t.

SM: How about students?

EH: Yeah, we lost two snipers. It’s funny I can remember the names. I don’t remember then names hardly of any of the guys. Well, two guys I remember because they were good snipers in the 9th division and they didn’t go home. We took them to the 25th with us. I remember their names. The two guys that were killed in the 25th, one was Richard Wilson from North Carolina, and the other boy was Francisco Rodriguez from California. He wasn’t even an American citizen. He was a Mexican that came in and joined the American Army. I can see their faces now. Richard Wilson was a college
graduate who got drafted, just been back from R&R and got killed. Funny how those
faces stay with you.

SM: Yes, sir. Excuse me, go ahead.

EH: I said and names.

SM: Was there anything else as far as your experience and time with the 9th ID
that you wanted to discuss?

EH: No, not really. It was just a lot of hard work and hot and sweaty.

SM: Yes, sir. Were there many Vietnamese civilians around the base camp area?

Did you have Vietnamese people who came in to clean the hooches and stuff?

EH: Yeah. We didn’t in the 9th division. No.

SM: No you did not in the 9th.

EH: No. In the 9th we did not have anyone do anything. They had them in the
mess hall. In the mess hall where we ate in they had some Vietnamese KPs. We had
none ourselves. When we went to the 25th division it was like going to the city nearly.
We had some hooch maids there. We were just not with the Vietnamese at all in the 9th
division really that much. They kept them out. When we got to the 25th, they came in by
the hundreds. We would have them filling sand, you could hire them to fill sand bags.
They just did all kinds of stuff. Then there were some pretty bad situations. In one of the
engineer companies or transportation companies there the guys were going into the mess
hall and they had these big trays and racks. One of these Vietnamese had put some kind
of explosive device in there, blew it up and killed some guys. If I had been running that
boar in that Army there would have been no Vietnamese on those posts in those camps.
base camps or anywhere. They let them. The rear people wanted their comfort.

SM: Even after explosion killed a couple people they still let them into the mess
hall?

EH: That didn’t mean anything. People were more leary and everything. The
intelligence these people we’re taking out two with them. It was stupid I thought. At the
same time, even though they had more access being able to pace off areas in the base,
things like that.

SM: You said that when you were with the 25th you were not rocketed and
mortared as much as you were with the 9th.
EH: We weren’t in the 25th. We had a thing in our barracks too. I just remembered, one of the guys I believe it was Sergeant Panzer. You know our grenades, you break them out of their can of this little canister thing that they come shipped in. The M-26 frag grenade. The pin is like a cotter key and it’s straight. What you do is you bend that thing so the key won’t fall out. Then the pin falls out and the handle falls off and you’ve got an explosion. When you put them on your web gear, your belt and everything where you’ve got the straps there for you bend those things so they won’t inadvertently fall out and blow you up. Anyway, I didn’t carry grenades, I really worked at night. I had an old 12 gauge shotgun I carried along you know. You throw a grenade at night in the jungle and everything like that it may come bouncing back on you. Anyway, Panzer had these grenades tied on his web gear. His ammunition pouches, there were some little straps there. The pins were bent. He came and got me one day. He said come here. They called me Gator. He said Gator come look at this. He had two or four grenades, I don’t know what on his web gear. Everyone of the pins had been straightened out. We had hooch maids too. That’s when we got rid of hooch maids. Anyway he could have bounced up, grabbed it. It could have easily blown him up and whoever else was around.

SM: Were there kids on base too?

EH: Say again.

SM: Were there Vietnamese children on base too?

EH: No. The only children I saw on base, there was a bunch of little children that were wounded. We claimed that the VC did it with mortars. They said it was one of our artillery rounds did it. I don’t know it could have been either way, but some of them were killed. But there were some little children that were amputees. The most pitiful thing you’ve ever seen. They were in our 25th division EVAC hospital we had there. We had a number of wounded guys over the time. Anyway, I’d go up to the hospital to see the guys before they shipped them out. Those kids they were there quite a while. I think those doctors just wanted to keep them there and make sure they were taken care of. They had little crutches. It was really a pitiful sight. That was the only children I ever saw on post or on base camp.

SM: Were there any rules against fraternizing with the Vietnamese?
EH: No. Not really. If there were they were just totally ignored. You hear all kinds of stories. I know one thing, I don’t know if I ought to tell this story or not. We had an MP platoon across then road from us. These guy’s, the platoon Sergeant was a friend of mine. He was a Texan. He was a young staff sergeant. They had these V-100 armored car things. These guys were the ones that would provide us security on our convoys and they would bring girls back. They’d stop in the village and they’d pick these hookers up and stick them down in there, in their armored car, bring them out and spend the night with them in their platoon area. Then they’d drop them off the next day when they took off again. Anyway, he was telling me that they brought these two in and almost everyone in the platoon got some gonorrhcea. They brought in a little sabotage with them, booby trap. I was married, I wasn’t interested in all that stuff. Especially those people. They were pretty raunchy. Now, if Marilyn Monroe would have showed up, may have been a different story.

SM: O.K. Speaking of Marilyn Monroe were there any USO shows while you were there?

EH: Yeah. Bob Hope was there Christmas of ’69 at Cu Chi. I’ve regretted it ever since that I didn’t go see him. He was right down the road, could have gone. My Major Chetester went and had a great time. Bob Hope had the Gold Diggers. You probably don’t remember them

SM: I’ve heard of them.

EH: It was really a bunch of beautiful young ladies, like dancers and stuff. They were with him. I really messed up by not going to see him. I saw some other shows. Philippine shows, Koreans shows and stuff.

SM: How important was that to you?

EH: Not really. Here I am 30 something years old. To a young guy, it probably was more meaningful. I am married with three children. Guys would get the porno movies, the .8mm. You could buy them on R&R they could buy them over there. They’d bring them back to Vietnam with them. The young guys would say they’ve got skin flicks over at so-and-so. Some company or unit. It was a buck a head or something and I never went to them, just didn’t interest me. I just didn’t care for it. A lot of the young guys did. If it was 18 or 19 years old about to get killed it may have been a
different situation. That wasn’t. Things to us, the old guys, us old sergeants that were
instructors our big thing was mail form home. We all were married. We all had children.
Two of the guys that worked for me were Korean War Veterans too, older children that
was really an important thing for us.

SM: Now, did you get a lot of mail and send a lot of mail?
EH: Oh, yeah. I wrote my wife about everyday, even out in the field. She wrote
me about everyday. Kids scribbled a little note every once in a while. Sister in laws,
brothers sisters, mother. All of them everybody wrote. I had plenty of mail.
SM: How much of what was going on back in the States would they include in
their mail?
EH: They didn’t. They didn’t put anything like that. It was just family stuff. We
were pretty well informed what was going on in the States because of the Stars and
Stripes. If they didn’t censor it, I don’t know. Then they had television over there. I
didn’t watch television. They had all these old goofy TV shows that I wouldn’t have
watched at home. We didn’t have a TV but the MPs had one and then there was another
place down the road that had one. It was the AFN, Armed Forces Network. We did have
the radios. I’d listen to the radio and I remember it wasn’t the guy that Robin Williams
played you know, *Good Morning Vietnam.*

SM: Yeah. Cronauer.

EH: He had already gone by the time I got there, I’m sure. There was a guy that
would do that same thing in the morning. *Good Morning Vietnam.* They had a little
blurb thing called Chicken Man. Have you ever heard of that? It’s like a comedy thing
on the radio. It’s a bird, it’s a plane. It’s Chicken Man. He’s flying along. Just
nonsense, but kind of cute. You’d have to watch the GIs out on the dad gum ambush and
make sure they didn’t have a damn radio with them and turn it on and think they could
listen to it. The music, they liked the music. I couldn’t believe it. If I went out with an
ambush, with more than just another sniper and radio operator, like three of four guys,
they spent half the time trying to make sure that nobody was going to smoke. They’d
think they could get under a poncho and smoke a cigarette and nobody would know.
They put their earplugs in and listen to the radio. You had to watch that stuff. It’d get
them and you killed. It ended up if there was very many people, being like an NCO
rather than a sniper. It was a strange war. You know being a non-smoker, you could
smell that stuff. All the guys nearly smoked. They can’t smell it so they don’t realize it.

SM: How about smoking other things?

EH: My first thing that I did, after I took over that and being in charge, I always
would brief the snipers and new students when they came in and I promised them that if
catch you with any kind of narcotics, I’m going to court martial you, pure and simple,
period. Anyway, if they used it of course, they’re not going to be around me. They’d
buy it from these hooch maids and stuff. They never approached us old sergeants, they
called us the juicers. We were the juicers because we drank. They were the potheads.
The vast majority of them, I don’t believe did it. One morning we had a sniper scope
missing. One of the sergeants came and said hey there’s a scope gone. I’d like to have
had one of those scopes too, but I wasn’t going to steal one. I figure somebody stole it. I
said o.k. I told the guys, told the sergeants I said go over and close off the sniper barracks
and search it. They did. About 20 minutes later suddenly came in with a bag about the
size of a basketball full of green stuff. I had never seen marijuana before that I knew of.
I had really not. He said look what I found. Well, I didn’t fall off the turnip truck I knew
damn well what it was. It was marijuana. I said o.k. Who was it? It was a young
Mexican kid from Texas, young PFC, can’t remember his name. I called the CID MPs.
They came, picked up the stuff and picked him up. Anyway, I contacted the division
provost people to the judge advocate general I said I want to court martial this guy. It
was funny. They tried to discourage me. The most he can get because he’s got a clean
record is 90 days suspended sentence. I said I still want to do it. I promised these guys,
if I caught them with any of this stuff that I was going to do it. I’m going to. I want to do
it. I was a Master Sergeant at the time and it was my prerogative. Then this guy that was
the prosecutor, my guy, my lawyer, he says well “you conducted an illegal search.”
I said, “What do you mean?” “You were searching for A and you found B. If the judge
goes right down the line, he’ll throw this thing out.” He said if he thinks like you do, he’ll
probably convict him. I said I still want to court marshal him. We had the court martial.
It didn’t take 15-20 minutes. We had a Major from the first Cavalry division who was a
traveling judge. They swore me in, just took my statement and then 10-15 minutes later
he found him guilty, giving him 90 days suspended sentence. The kid came over and of
course we kicked him out. He’s not going to be a sniper. He came over and shook my hand told me he was sorry. And that I’d told him. I said yeah, I’m sorry too. You probably would have been a good sniper. About a month to 6 weeks later a reading in the division newspaper the kid got a bronze star for valor. He was a good young man. So many of them just didn’t realize that that stuff’s bad. Me and people of my generation feel that way. The Army really didn’t prepare us. The Army wasn’t prepared for the drugs. It just never was a problem. Any thing that goes on in civilian life is eventually going to hit the Army. The guys didn’t get their habits in Vietnam. I’m sure maybe some of them did. The hard-core drug people did that before they came in the Army. It’s easier to blame the Army on it and Vietnam. I got to be friends with the division Chaplain, a lieutenant colonel, a Catholic priest. He told me that we had some drug problems there. I never saw them. He said some of the rear troops. There are guys that have heroine problems that they’ll probably never survive. I just wasn’t around it.

SM: How readily available was alcohol in both the 9th ID and 25th?
EH: Beer was very very available, plenty of beer. The 25th division had no Class VI facilities, which means you could not buy a bottle. You could go to a club and get a drink but you couldn’t buy a bottle in a Class VI, is the alcohol dispensing. Class I is ammunition, Class II is food. Each area in the military is a Class. Class VI is alcohol. They always call the liquor store a Class VI store. There was none in the 25th division. We had ration books. It was rationed. We would have to go to Long Binh or Tan Son Nhut. One of those places, Bien Hoa. One of the big bases down around Saigon to buy a bottle. We had no trouble. We had a friend that had been wounded three times in the 101st Airborne, an old rifle-shooting friend. He ran a Class Six store in PX in gosh; I believe it was Bien Hoa. We could go down and just get all the booze we wanted and we had our own little bar. We would buy cases of stuff. We would keep it in a conex container up at our place. When our snipers would come in we charged a beer was 15 cents and a mixed drink was a quarter, something like that. We made money. We bought a thing for music, a big stereo thing. When we left we left all that stuff with our replacements. They kept it going. When a sniper came in to zero his rifle and clean his rifle up and everything we’d have a little party for him and everything. Give him some free drinks. We could get this Vietnamese charcoal that was really horrible, but it did
work and we could get chicken from the mess hall and we’d charcoal chicken and stuff like that have a little get together. The booze was available.

SM: What about other necessities, as far as the quality of the food, things like that?

EH: Food was just regular Army food. Institution food. It was horrible. We had arrangements with mess sergeants, like most of the mess sergeants in the Army seemed to be old drunks. We could take a bottle of booze and get a case of chicken or something like that. Sergeant Lebish was our cook. He would fix it with charcoal for us and cook things. I’d have my wife send me pinto beans and we’d get them cooked. The mess hall was right near a big garbage dump. The garbage dump was inside the wire. You had flies all over Vietnam, but the vast majority of them seemed to be in that dump. We would eat in the mess hall, couldn’t keep them off our food. It was disgusting. We didn’t eat that much in the mess hall. We just didn’t really eat a lot either. It was so hot. We ate a lot of C-rations. The C-ration fruit was really good and juicy. It was really well liked. I can remember over there eating wasn’t really important. Talking about the steaks and everything. I never saw a steak in Vietnam. I never had steak. I don’t know who was getting them, but we sure didn’t get any. Even the mess sergeants we knew and rifle companies didn’t have them. If they had they’d have traded for them. We got that one case of steaks when we were in the 9th division when I traded that ammo, but steaks were just not. We could get plenty of pork, we could get ribs and chicken and we’d cook it, charcoal it. Not every day of course. Most of the time, I just don’t remember much about it because it didn’t seem important. I guess I was fed. I was a lot smaller then too.

SM: You mentioned earlier that the schools. The sniper school at the 25th was quite different than the sniper school at the 9th. What were the major differences?

EH: We lived a lot better. I won’t say the school was that much. The facilities were different. We lived better and we weren’t living in a bunker we were living in like barracks. We had cleaner atmosphere like, we weren’t rocketed and mortared like that. That was it really. We had the same program of instruction. Everything worked so well in the 9th we didn’t change anything. The difference was the facilities and, maybe the area of operations. Everything wasn’t under water. People got immersion foot down in
the Delta. They didn’t up in the 25th. It was a drier environment. Of course, you had the
big mountain, Nui Ba Den, the Black Virgin Mountain not far from Tay Ninh. That was
always a pretty hot spot up around that area. We had the top of it. We had some radio
relay stations. Then we of course had everything unrun. The VC had tunnels all through
that thing and caves and things. You could always find something to shoot up in that
area.

SM: Did you guys have tunnel rats?
EH: Say again?
SM: Did you use tunnel rats?
EH: I didn’t understand you Steve.
SM: I’m sorry. Did you use tunnel rats?
EH: Oh, we didn’t but the division did. We were in the school system at Cu Chi
in the 25th. We had a tunnel rat school. We had an ambush school. We had an NCO
school and we had the sniper school. It was all under one system there. Major Chetester
that came over from Ft. Benning with us became the Commandant of the whole school
system. The tunnels were all through that area and Cu Chi. It was famous for it.
SM: Oh, yeah. Were there any major operations that you were involved with or
that 25th ID was involved with while you were there?
EH: No. It was mostly battalion and lift and things like that. Now, one thing
happened. We got to leave Vietnam almost a month early because Nixon was pulling
out, people were getting out early. About three weeks, four weeks before we were to
leave in late April of ’70. The division G3, a Lieutenant Colonel, I don’t remember his
name or anything called us to come up to his bunker, the division TOC. Where all the
big operations were originated. The division was run out of that TOC. We went up
there. This was well guarded inside the base camp. There’s no Vietnamese to get around
this place. Everything was secret and classified and taken care of. The guy that told me
to come up there, said come on up and come to the TOC and report to the Lieutenant
Colonel, whatever. So, the group of us that were leaving in about three weeks we
paraded up there. I’m a master sergeant the rest of them were sergeant first classes. We
went in to the division TOC and lined up. I reported to this Lieutenant Colonel. He says
now men you’ve done a wonderful job over there. Now, I’m going to ask you something
and you do what is in your heart. What you want to do, not what you think I want you to do. He comes up to me and he says Sergeant Heugatter would you extend for 30 days? I said no, sir. He went right down the line and everybody said no, sir. Now, if I’d have said yes, sir I’m sure some of my guys would have too, I believe. Anyway, I said no, sir. We were all career soldiers. He says I really thank you and the division commander thanks you for what you’ve done. You’ve done a good job. You go to your next assignment and we wish you the best of luck. I saluted him and we left. It’s really a strange situation. I had no idea what was going on. Our replacements were going to be in any day. They didn’t need us for that. Well, right after I got home the Cambodian Incursion, he wanted to go on the Incursion with them as snipers. I’m sure that’s what it was. He couldn’t say anything, because everything was so top secret. That’s the only thing it could have been. Because the 25th division played a really active, we were on the Cambodian border, played a really active part in that. In hindsight I’m still glad I didn’t.

Who knows I may have been killed?

SM: The area of operations where you were with the 25th ID did you run into more Viet Cong or NVA or a mix?

EH: NVA.

SM: Still more NVA?

EH: NVA. Yeah. As far as I know I never saw a live one. The dead people I saw over there all had uniforms, NVA uniforms. The ones at night, you couldn’t tell what they were. I’m sure they were NVA.

SM: What was morale like at the 25th ID?

EH: I thought it was pretty good. In the 9th too. I thought the morale was good. You had the people back in the support units were a lot of boredom and stuff like that. The infantryman gripes. But hell, I was an infantryman in Panama for three years as a young soldier and had everything every gripe. It just seemed like that goes with the job, the territory to bitch. You’re always going to find bitching soldiers. The soldiers would get tired and scared and they would be more outspoken than they would in a line infantry unit, not in a combat zone. Most of them, even toward the end when I left in April of ’70, they’d do their job. They wouldn’t refuse an orders or nothing. There was none of the mutiny and stuff that you see in these stupid movies and things. I never saw any of that.
There may have been. The units that I was in, one time or another was with most of the battalions in the divisions.

SM: What about the 9th ID what was morale like when you were with them?

EH: It was great, as bad as it was down there. I saw two things that I will take to my grave. One guy on the back of his flak jacket had written, “Yeah though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,” you’ve probably heard this. “I shall fear no evil because I’m the meanest mother in the valley.” Another guy had a damn bulls eye painted on the back of his. This was the kind of guys that were the best we had, maybe the smartest.

SM: Did you encounter any drugs with the 9th ID?

EH: In the 9th we had one situation that was really strange. We trained a group of Special Forces team and one of their medics was a dragger. He had morphine and whatever else he had. He overdosed on something while they were there. There wasn’t anything wrong with the rest of that team. We took him to the medics and never saw him again. I don’t know what happened. That was the only, I’m sure they were there, they were all over Vietnam I guess. I tried to keep them away from me and I think I did a pretty good job for my people.

SM: Did you notice any significant changes from the time you got with the 25th ID, I guess that must have been sometime around…

EH: July or August. About August.

SM: ’69. Then you left April ’70. Was there much of a change over the course of that time period as far as how things were going?

EH: It seems like there was less contact. Seems like there was more contact when we first got there. The GIs were not fools. They see them pulling out units and everything. They’re going to search and evade and try not to be the last guy killed.

SM: Did you do many operations in conjunction with ARVN?

EH: No. One time I was around some ARVN or whatever they were regional forces. We were at Nui Ba Dien. Me and Lebish were up there with a tank company. It was like a circle of wagons type thing. They had the RPG screens out in front. There was a Buddhist temple on the mountain off a little ways. What they had us up there for was first we ambushed dead bodies for a couple of nights. They never came and got the
bodies. There was a couple bodies there and they didn’t come get them. We were there too that if anything was around that temple, we were supposed to shoot. They didn’t want to hurt or destroy the temple. They didn’t want it damaged. What had happened they took one of our infantry battalions up to the top of Nui Ba Dien and they walked down this lava rock. This thing I think was 1300 meters high or something. It was a big mountain. The place was infested with them. Anyway, when they came down to the bottom, they got down to the bottom after a day or two or couple days whatever I can’t remember. They had ARVN with them of some type. They were going to be picked up by helicopter. They had all the GIs and their clothes were just ripped from that lava rock and everything, it was pretty raggedy looking. Anyway, they got the troops all lined up and like 6 or 7 guys per lift per helicopter. They bring a lift in to pick them up like 20-30 helicopters however many, a swarm of them. They had the ARVN over in another area to be picked up. They were going somewhere else. They had American advisors, Special Forces advisors, seemed like they were Special Forces advisors. The helicopters came in and about the time they started to come in and pick them up, we started getting mortared, mortars were falling. Helicopters lifted off with the GIs. The GIs knew how to get on helicopters, they got on big time. The ARVN was like a bunch of squirrels running around there. Anyway, the helicopters didn’t get them so they took off. I got under a tank. I didn’t see it anywhere else in Vietnam, but somehow or another, I don’t know what they did but somehow with their engines or whatever they smoked the place. They put like a smoke screen between the ARVN and the mountain. When they got it all smoked up good they came down and picked them up again and Special Forces guys were throwing those guys in the helicopters and everything trying to get them on, the GI’s. That helicopter pauses and there will be six bodies in there instantly. The Vietnamese just hadn’t trained with it. They hadn’t operated that much with them I guess. That’s the only time I was ever really around the Vietnamese soldiers.

SM: What was your impression of them in general as far as what little experience you had with them first hand and also what you had heard about them? What did you think were their prospects if the United States had withdrawn?

EH: What did I think about what now?
SM: What did you think were their prospects as the United States was withdrawing?

EH: Losing. They were not a good Army.

SM: Was that shared amongst other NCOs?

EH: I think so. The leadership was what was the problem of course. There was too much corruption in the officer corps over there. They didn’t have a chance, I don’t think.

SM: Were these observations you could make at the time or is this hindsight?

EH: Both. Of course I did do a lot of reading and it’s been reinforced. I read the book *Bright Shinning Lie*, John Paul Vann and this kind of stuff. I can relate to some of the things I read in these things back to observations. Probably most of my observations are now. I couldn’t see how they could win, when I was there. You take the weekend off, the enemy don’t take the weekend off.

SM: Did you encounter the black market or corruption, first hand yourself while you were there?

EH: Not really other going down to Saigon. You see all the military stuff for sale and PX stuff for sale on the streets down there. You could see things sold for sale on the streets. If they got a shipment of fans in, fans were very, very desirable. If they got fans in or some of this stereo equipment it would just be bought up immediately in the PXs and these base camps. Most of the time you couldn’t find them. You could go to Saigon and it would be down there, on the streets, black-marketed.

SM: Were you ever short any equipment? Either with the 9th ID or the 25th?

EH: No. Not us.

SM: Your unit never wanted for anything?

EH: Not that I can remember.

SM: Is there anything else that you’d like to talk about as far as your time with the 25th ID?

EH: No, other than I’m a member of the Association, made some really wonderful friends, the friends I went over with, it just reinforced the friendship. We are very close still today. We have a reunion every two years at the marksmanship unit at Ft. Benning. We’ll all get together and reminisce. No. I feel about the war that I think we
were right. I think we could have won it if they would have let the military run it, like
they seem to be doing in this latest thing in Afghanistan. It seems like the military are
being allowed to run these things. As long as the politicians stay the hell out of it, we’ll
succeed I believe.

SM: What was the trip like back for you?
EH: Ecstatic. That’s right I forgot about that. Myself and Hunkapeller, this one
Sergeant, Hunkapeller. Our families were on the West coast. We came back differently.
The other guys families were there at Ft. Benning. I went back to Ft. Benning but we had
to go to California to pick the wife and kids up. Anyway, we got on this plane, just
before daylight there at; I guess it was Bien Hoa. It was one of these contract planes.
We’re taking off, just got over the defensive wire going up to start this climb and the
plane shuttered. We didn’t really think anything about it. A guy comes running out of
the front of a plane with a flashlight. Me and Hunkapeller sitting by the wing and he gets
behind us and he’s looking out with a flashlight on the wing. Then he runs back up to the
cockpit. All the time we’re climbing. Pilot comes on and says I guess you know we just
lost an engine. We didn’t know. All of a sudden the pucker factor gets pretty tight. He
says but don’t worry this thing can fly on one engine. I knew that was a bunch of crap.
Anyway, he says we’ve lost an engine, he said there’s none in Vietnam, so we’re going to
fly to Taiwan and get a new engine. Don’t worry about anything. Yeah, don’t worry.
You had all these scared soldiers in there. It went from being ecstatic to being scared.
Then I don’t know how long an hour or two a couple hours later he came on the intercom
and he said we’re getting ready to land at Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines. He
says we’ll get rid of the fuel and he says as soon as the plane stops get off of it as quick as
you can. We’re going down to land and the only thing you could feel; the torque of the
plane was kind of pulling it one way. You could feel it, like it wanted to go one way. He
landed perfect, went down and soon as the plane stopped we all bailed off and got out on
the tarmac that was there and everything. No problem at all. Better landing than most I
ever had. We looked there then and had five bullet holes in it. There was two in that
engine and three in the wing. What I imagine is that some VC there in Bien Hoa village
or city probably shot at every plane that went out at night. He hit one, ours. Then they
told us all the NCOs and officers over here and the spec fous and PFCs, privates over
here. Now you spec fours and PFCs we’re going to put you on a prop plane and you’re
going home now. The rest of you we’re going to re-engine the plane or their going to
bring us an engine, they’re going to fix it. We’ll be here for a day, but we’ll probably
still beat that prop plane back. What they did and this was one of those contract planes.
They took us to this little Angelese City. A little town outside of Clark Air Force Base
and put us up in a Filipino Hotel. They scattered us all over this little town. There were
just small little hotels and things. It’s just a sin city for the Air Base there. They sent a
bus around three times a day to pick us up to take us to the NCO club to eat. They told us
eat anything you want, it’s all on us. The only thing is we pay for no alcohol. They put
us up in hotels and gosh we were eating lobsters twice a day. After eating over there a lot
of things we didn’t get. We put a hurt on them with as far as the food goes. All I had
was the one set of jungle fatigues and jungle boots. I had no clothes, nothing in a little
AWOL bag but my shaving gear. Hunkapeller was the same way. We had a room there
so at night when we got through the last meal, they had a little bar downstairs in the hotel,
we’d drink some beer. We’d go up and wash our fatigues out in the dang bathtub there
and shower and hang them up. Then put them back on the next day. Of course, in that
damp, humid area they never really got dry, but at least they didn’t stink. When we were
there I called my wife from there. I think we were there about two night and three days
or three nights and four days something like that before we got home. Then I got home,
landed you know in Travis Air Force Base and my wife had sent me a set of khakis. At
that time, class A uniform. If you were a senior NCO or officer and you had a class A
uniform you didn’t have to go get a haircut, get the new issue of clothes and all that stuff.
They just turned you loose there. I was going to keep those jungle fatigues and I had
some new boots and I was going to keep all that, but I was so sick of it all that I just left
them in the latrine there at Travis, took a little what we call whores bath and put that
clean uniform on and went down to the airport at San Francisco and flew down to Los
Angeles. The wife picked me up and you hear about all that protests and all those people
spit on people. I really believe that a lot of that’s myth. I can’t imagine a guy coming out
of the woods in Vietnam, that’s seen it all and let some longhaired hippie spit on him,
without breaking his face. I know right then I may not have done it, but I’d have been
dying trying. If somebody would have spit on me or done anything there would have

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been a battle. All the guys I knew would have been the same way. You hear a lot of these tales and I think a lot of them are just because they heard them somewhere else or imagined them. I’m sure it happened, but I went through there a couple of times with a uniform on and I never experienced anything like that. Then after I got back to the marksmanship unit we would travel in uniform and never experienced anything. I think a lot of it is just not true. Though there were plenty of them guys out there. You look at those scrawny hippies, I know you don’t remember them Steve you were too young. Most of those guys were like dachau survivors from all the drugs and no eating and long hair and scumbags and they were yellow to me in the first place because they were afraid to go in the Army. I can’t imagine most of them grabbing a hold of those young infantryman who’s just been through hell for a year. They just wouldn’t go for it. You read tons of people saying that. It just has not been in my experience. I’m just kind of leary of it. Other than that I got home, went back to the marksmanship unit at Ft. Benning and had a great career.

SM: What did you think as the events of the end of the war unfolded? For instance already the Cambodian Incursion, but then later on the Lam Son 719 in 1971? The Easter Offensive? Did you hear much about those things?

EH: Yeah. One other thing, this is going to sound pretty bad to you I’m sure. I still kind of feel that way. Another thing that happened right after I got back was the Kent State deal. I was kind of bitter toward these people that I felt were undermining or troops in Vietnam. I got mad about that Kent State deal. Like I say it’s going to gross you out, but I was mad because they didn’t kill more of them. Then after we found out that part of those people weren’t even students they were just rabble rousers out there. That was my mindset, hasn’t changed a lot to be honest with you. Then again by the time the war was over in ’75 and all the events leading up to it. I was at the military academy then, coaching the cadet pistol team. I was aware of it and all of that, disappointed of course. I was so busy doing what I was doing there. All of us at the NCO club, all of us were veterans. We all drowned our sorrows out there one time. One night because of it. It was just life goes on.

SM: Are you talking about April ’75 when Saigon fell?
EH: Yeah, yeah. That was a pretty awful time for us. But anyway like I say, it goes on.

SM: What did you think when Saigon fell in April ’75?

EH: Didn’t surprise me. I knew when they cut off the ammunition and they cut off the aid and the Air Force and they took the Air Force out of there it was just a matter of time. That was typical of the way the Vietnamese were. They way they were trying to mass in there and everybody get on the planes and all that stuff you know and get out to the ships, like rats leaving the ship. I didn’t have a real good opinion of them to be honest with you and still don’t. It’s funny. A lot of us kind of admired the North Vietnamese because of their dedication. We’d always talk about it you know. Here these guys have got no mail call; they’ve got no R&R. They’ve got no tour of duty. It’s until you get killed and carried out of there and they went on. We respected them I think, admired them. The South, not that much. Though we didn’t want to be on the losing side. Weird I don’t know.

SM: What were the important lessons you took away from your experience that you were able to apply later in your career?

EH: I just don’t know. I took away a tremendous respect for the young American fighting men, just admiration and respect. They talk about the baby boomers, how’s this and how’s that. They don’t remember baby boomers are the ones that fought and died in that war. They have my utmost respect. Just tremendous admiration for them and all of that. One thing I came out of there with is that death is a certainty, you just don’t know when and it’s kind of permanent. I got some good news yesterday. You know I told you I had cancer surgery?

SM: Yes, sir.

EH: Prostate, which is a service connected to Vietnam. Because so many of us that were over there because of Agent Orange have prostrate cancer. I have a number of friends that have it. Anyway, I saw my doctor yesterday, my surgeon and all that. He said I have the best possible news for you; you have no detectable PsA, which means the cancer must be gone.

SM: Oh, that’s excellent. Congratulations.

EH: Just ecstatic.
SM: Yes, sir.

EH: I started breathing again. You dread those doctor’s things and I don’t have
to go to chemotherapy or radiation.

SM: That’s wonderful.

EH: Oh, it is. Seems like I got a reprieve.

SM: What did you think as the United States started to change it’s policies
toward Vietnam?

EH: I feel we have to or we should. It’s funny. I really like these Vietnamese in
the States now. The ones you get to know, loved the Vietnamese food never ate it over
there. It’s my favorite Oriental food. I think we got to have relations with them or we
should, exploit them. Get all that cheap labor over there.

SM: What do you think we, as a nation should take away from that experience?

EH: Let the military run the wars. Keep the politicians out. Of course the
politicians are the ones that get you into it. Once they get you into it tell them to back off
and leave you alone. The media and the politicians were the death hell of Vietnam. My
opinion, I have nothing but disgust for most journalists, media people.

SM: You mentioned movies earlier. Is there any movie that you’ve seen about
the Vietnam War is fairly good depicting the experience for you?


SM: Yeah. Deer Hunter.

EH: Totally crazy. Just totally asinine I think. I like that Metal Jacket?

SM: Full Metal Jacket.

EH: Full Metal Jacket. Thought it was kind of humorous in places. It was more
relevant. What was the other one? Oh, Platoon. That was in the 25th division. I read
the book written by his company commander, Oliver Stone. It just didn’t happen that
way. Of course, he’s selling a movie. This company commander said that he, in his
company, Oliver Stone, was a good soldier. Good outstanding soldier just like all the rest
of them. He had no problems with him. He never caused any problems, he was a good
soldier. It’s just that movie depicting that company in the 25th division wasn’t right. It
wasn’t true. Of course, he’s going to say that too anyway. I feel at that stage of the war,
I think that was ’66-’67 it was not any real problem like it had become later on.
SM: Were there any incidents of fragging that you were aware of while you were in country?

EH: Any what?

SM: Incidents of fragging.

EH: My friend, the MP Platoons Sergeant, came in snockered to his hooch one night. They had these poncho liners we used for like sheets and blankets and all that. We didn’t have any of that blankets or sheets or anything. You just laid on that poncho liner. He had it saying down, he just sat down on his cot and he put his hand to the side of the cot and he wrapped his hand around a hand grenade. One of his troops or somebody had put that hand grenade there with a wire through the pin, tied it to that poncho liner and when ever he jerked that poncho liner it jerked the pin out and blew him up. Luckily, he said it sobered him up right then. That was the only time. I almost think it wasn’t his platoon because he was pretty well liked over there, probably one of the hooch maids or something.

SM: That’s the only incident that you were aware of.

EH: That was the only one. I saw a couple of people I wouldn’t have minded shooting. We had one sniper that we run through the school and he was a buck sergeant from the wolfhounds. I can’t remember his name. He was a real jackass, just a jerk. We just didn’t have much to do with him. We all outranked him anyway. The other snipers just hated him. He got shot in the rear end after he left the school out on a mission somewhere one time. All the other guys, when they were coming in, they would say see if we can find that dang Viet Cong or NVA sniper or something and run him through the school, teach him to shoot a little better. That way he’ll shoot to kill the guy next time, rather than just shoot him in the butt, kind of ghoulish humor. They were kind of disappointed he didn’t get killed. About the closest thing I guess.

SM: Did you ever have any contempt for American leaders, as a junior person? How about other senior NCOs or officers?

EH: You know it’s funny. I’ve been part of the system I guess you could call it. I can look back at my 26 years in the service and I can’t really remember an officer I had contempt for. I’m talking about brand new ones, right out of OCS or ROTC, West Point, whatever. I was very fortunate I was with I felt great officers and great NCOs that were
over me. But, who am I? I’m really World War II history. There’s so many of those people that really screwed up so bad, big leaders and everything. They didn’t pursue the war right I don’t feel in Vietnam. But who am I to say? I didn’t hate them or have contempt for them. At the time, I say these things I see after reading., now, at the time, I trusted everybody and respected them all.

SM: Is there anything else you’d like to talk about today?

EH: No. I don’t think so Steve I believe we’ve covered it pretty thoroughly.

SM: Well, let me put an end to this officially. This will end the interview with Mr. Emil Heugatter. Thank you very much sir.

EH: Yes, sir.