Stephen Maxner: This is Steve Maxner conducting an oral history interview with Major Ed Frazier on the 5th of May, year 2000 at approximately 9:30 a.m. in Las Vegas, Nevada. All right, Major Frazier, would you please begin by giving us a brief biographical sketch of yourself?

Edwin Frazier: My name is Edwin M. Frazier. I was born in Serapta, Louisiana. I was raised in the northern part of the state, up around Oil City and Vivian, Louisiana until I was 15 years old when I went into the Louisiana National Guard. That was in March of ’54. A lot of the guys there were joining the National Guard and I thought it was the fit thing to do, too, so I did. I joined the National Guard. My first unit was company D of the 199th infantry regimen, 39th infantry division, Louisiana National Guard. My first assignment, my first job was a gunner on a 75 millimeter recoilless rifle and then my family moved. That was in Minden, Louisiana and my family moved from Minden back to a little town called Vivian, Louisiana where I was transferred to company A of the 199th infantry regimen where I volunteered for active duty. They sent me to Camp Chaffee, Arkansas for basic training. I completed basic training. I returned back to the unit, company A of the 199th and I stayed there until the following June when I was transferred then on active duty, sworn in as an active duty infantryman, and was sent to Fort Ord, California where I again took basic training. So I had basic training twice at the early years of my career. This was in 19 and 56 when I went to Fort Ord. I completed my training at Fort Ord and was put into a packet which was the 10th mountain division as a light
weapons infantryman and we were sent to a Aschaffenberg, Germany to replace the…to round
out the 10th mountain division who was already there. They got there in ’55 and replaced the 1st
infantry division. So, my first assignment was overseas as a light weapons infantryman in the 1st
platoon of company I, the 87th infantry regimen in Aschaffenberg, Germany from 19 an 57 to
1959. We maneuvered, we went all over Germany training. We spent nine months in the field
out of a year and I went to non commissioned officers academy in ’57, came out as an honor
graduate, and was promoted to E4. We returned back to the United States to Fort Benning,
Georgia. We were relieved by the 3rd infantry division in Aschaffenberg and of course I was
assigned to Fort Benning as a drill sergeant training trainees for the…at that time, we deactivated
the 10th mountain, reactivated the 2nd infantry division, and I was a drill sergeant training trainees
up until 19 and 60. I had been promoted to E5 in 1960, 1960 I was promoted to sergeant E5.
Went back to Germany as a squad leader with the 39th infantry battalion assigned to the 8th
infantry division and I stayed there until September of ’63 at which time I was sent back to the
States to attend officer candidate school. I went through OCS, graduated in April of ’64,
immediately went to ranger school, trained as a ranger. Upon completion of ranger school I went
to airborne training and I was trained as a paratrooper and I was a distinguished military graduate
from OCS so I had a choice of assignment. I applied for my RA commission, I received my RA
and was assigned as the executive officer of 42nd company, the airborne ranger battalion at Fort
Benning training paratroopers. Vietnam build up was in progress at that time. I continued my
assignment as executive officer of the 42nd until I was moved up to battalion staff as a battalion
S4 for the 4th student battalion, which was the airborne training battalion. We also trained the
rangers at 44th company. But anyhow, my commander called me in one day and he said, “Ed,
the days of the airborne are slowly disappearing, and I think that you should go to flight school.
I’d like for you to go take the fast test and then I’ll write some letters and we’ll get you into
flight training,” and I did that. I was sent to Fort Walter, Texas, New Years Day of 1966 where I
attended primary helicopter training. I went from there to Fort Rucker, Alabama and I graduated
3rd in my class and I was selected to go into what was called Chinook transition, CH-47s. I was
transferred from Fort Rucker after graduation to Fort Seal, Oklahoma, and I joined the 243rd
assault support helicopter company who was in the process of building up to go to Vietnam. The
154th helicopter company was assigned to Fort Seal and they were our host unit who conducted
our transition and also got us into proper state to go overseas. That meant ARTEPS, Army
training tests, that meant issue of full compliment of equipment, all of the briefings and
orientations that we were supposed to have, and we finally left San Francisco in…I have to think
here a minute to get the year straight, it was in the fall of 1966. It was in October of 1966. We
went to San Francisco. We loaded out of Oakland Army terminal I think and we went overseas
with our crews into a little place called Dong Ba Tin. We landed at Quin Yon, we came down
the coast to Cam Ranh Bay and we debarked at Cam Ranh and we convoyed into Dong Ba Tin.
Our aircraft were down in Vung Tau, and we went down to Vung Tau, picked up our aircraft,
and we were then general support for the two corps area. We flew north, all the way up north to
Quin Yon. We flew as far south as Pham Thiet. We supported 101st Airborne Division, we
supported the Koreans, we supported the ARVN Army, and we also supported the ARVN
Marines. Our AO was around Phan Rang all the way over to the Cambodian border. We had
fire support bases we supported, was Small Kingdom, Grassy Silo, Pham Thuot, all of those fire
support bases along the Cambodian border. We would combat assault units with Chinooks.
That was unheard of afterwards and they stopped doing it, but we did it. We would take a flight
of three Chinooks and insert a company with a couple of gun ships. We would prep the LZ and
then we would insert the first sortie and then another two ships would come in and secure the
LZ. We had Chinook guns ships called ‘guns a go-go’. Sometimes they would escort us in, and
they had 50 calibers mounted. They were impressive. But, they were called guns a go-go. But,
we did…we ran combat assaults using the Chinook. We also did what we call our combat
support missions. In those days you could fly 25 hours and get an air medal if you were combat
assault, 50 hours if you were combat support. So, we flew both. We flew combat support, we
called cabbage and ice for the Koreans, we combat assaulted 101st people. We did the sort of
missions that a normal Assault Helicopter Company would perform. After that, for a while, I
was given the additional duty of providing security for our perimeter being the only infantry
officer in our unit. The rest of them were all transportation officers, transportation corps. But, I
was an infantry officer, so I was given the task of building a perimeter around our base camp
which I did and I received recognition from General Williams I believe his name was; the 1st
brigade commander, the 1st aviation brigade commander. That of course caused me to be
assigned to Pham Thuot as the airfield commander OPCON to the 101st to build a perimeter
around Pham Thuot city strip, to command that city strip as the airfield commander which I did
as a ground assignment. I went to that job in ’67, I think it was in July of ’67, June or July of ’67
and I stayed there until I DEROSED in November of ’67. I went back to the United States. I was the proud infantry officer and I’d served a split tour, ground and aviation, and I was assigned to the 177th assault support helicopter company at Fort Benning, Georgia as the executive officer and I served there and then ’68 the majors list came out and I was on the majors list. I wanted a company of my own so I volunteered to command the Charlie company of the 10th battalion Army training center at Fort Benning which I did. I commanded Charlie company up until I went to the advanced course in November of ’67…got ahead of myself, the majors list hadn’t come out yet. I went to the advanced course in ’67 and graduated in ’68. The majors list was out. my sequence number was somewhere like 3600 on the list and I graduated from the advanced course and was immediately sent to Vietnam after a brief training course at Fort Eustis, Virginia, air craft commander’s maintenance management course. I went to Vietnam in November of 1970. I was assigned as the executive officer of the 71st Assault Helicopter Company after a brief two week stay at the combat center. I didn’t stay two weeks. Colonel Rikowsky, the battalion commander, came over and brought me back to the unit I was assigned to a week early because he needed me, he said he needed me. So, he carried me over and turned me over to Major Davis, the company commander of the 71st and said, “Here’s your new executive officer,” so I was the executive officer of the 71st from November to December. I was two months XO and during that period, I found that the vehicle I was given…of course everybody knows the executive officer has two major areas of concern; vehicle maintenance and food service in the mess halls. Those are inherent duties that you immediately assume responsibility for. So the motor pool was in terrible shape. Vehicles were deadlined, there were no maintenance program, it was one terrible mess and that was the first thing I did. I got the vehicles all up and running. I went to the division, got a hold of a contact team from ordinance and I said, “Hey, you guys need to see what I see,” and they did. They came down and saw what I saw. Everything we had was loose, low, or leaking. Vehicles…I remember this one particular one, it was a ¾ ton with a winch on the front. They were trying to pull something, the cable broke, and when it snapped it came back and severed the radiator; sliced it down the middle. So anyhow, I got the motor pool straightened out those two months. We had airline shops for aircraft maintenance. They were sitting in the motor pool but they were dormant, they weren’t being used. These big cases, you open them up and in there are meals and tools and everything you need to set up your propping rotor, your engine shop, your sheet metal shop, etcetera. All
these allied shops. We had them in the motor pool but they were deteriorating; the tires were flat, the equipment was in bad shape, so I got it up and running. I got it all cleaned up during that two months. It took a lot of work. I had to change some priorities, but we did, we got them cleaned up and Major Davis supported me. I had to change some of the company policies because people were not controlling vehicles. They weren’t being dispatched. They were just being driven into the ground and that’s what the problem was. They were being driven into the ground. Well, I made them come back to the motor pool every night, they were picked up every morning on dispatch, and I did it the way the Army says you will do it. Well, I wasn’t too popular but I got the vehicles straightened out and it paid off because on the 8th of February…well, I assumed command the 1st of January. Major Davis was reassigned to another unit in Vietnam in country and I took command of the 71st and on the 8th, on the 1st of February we were called to battalion. We were told that we were moving north, we weren't told where. We were told to go back to our units and pack our bags, company commanders, and take our aircraft; I had my aircraft, Rattler six, took my crew, we flew north. We got to a place called LZ Eagle I believe it was and that’s where we were briefed by the 101st Airborne Division that we were going into Khe Sanh and we were going to retake Khe Sanh. We were going to take Khe Sanh with elements of the 5th of the 1st brigade of the 5th mech, mechanized infantry division, and other troops from I think ARVN…no, not ARVN at that time, it was the 5th mech and some other support units. I think a unit was coming up from the Americal, I’m not sure of that. And we did. We immediately…my whole unit moved north to Quang Tri. Now, Captain Sekowitz at that time was my company exec. I had him bring the ground convoy up and I’d like to mention at this time that Captain Sekowitz was able to bring my unit on wheels from Chu Lai to Quang Tri without the loss of a vehicle. I was the only unit that was able to ground convoy. Colonel Silver told me that because of that he thought that I saved our battalion and our group because we were able to convoy up. Other units had to borrow vehicles, vehicles broke down in route, they had lots of problems, but the 71st convoyed all the way to Quang Tri. The day before the convoy…no, that very day that the convoy departed Chu Lai, the aircraft departed Chu Lai and flew north and we were set up on the south end of the runway at Quang Tri and here again, I’m telling you things. They said, “Ed, because you’re an infantry officer and you know how to set up a cantonment area, we want you to set up tents and you’re going to set up a base camp at the southern end of that runway and you’re going to be responsible for the security of the southern
of organization called for tentage and sleeping bags and things like this but it didn’t exist. It wasn’t in the supply system. I don’t know what happened to it. So, I went back down to LZ Eagle and I scrounged from the 101st Airborne Division enough general GP tents, GP mediums, mess tents, cots, sleeping bags, enough to set up a base camp, a cantonment area. So, we did. We set up there at the end of the runway and we started flying support missions into Khe Sanh. The 5th mech had gone in, they had retaken Khe Sanh. We were flying combat assaults, we were flying resupply missions, we were flying reconnaissance missions, we even had artillery adjustment missions where we’d send aircraft out with a back seat party for artillery adjustment. We did…that was basically about it. But, the end of the runway was sandy. There was a heavy beach type sand in that area and it was costing us engines. We were going through engines like somebody’d go through socks, you know? We were wearing them out, so Colonel Reckowski and I went over to another location and we found a place for me to move the company and it was right over on the perimeter on the west side of Quang Tri. It was inside the perimeter wire, but it was right on the wire and it was an old dog kennels area where they’d had the 26th scout dog platoon had been there and they had manure pits that were still open. They had frames from some of the GP mediums were still there but the tentage was gone. There was three or four permanent structures and one mess hall. So, I liked the area. It was a blessing, it was a blessing in disguise because I was able to get over there away from all that traffic that was on the strip, the runway, I was able to build me a base camp that was presentable. I put my mess hall in the mess hall area, and by the way, when we came to Chu Lai, from Chu Lai to Quang Tri, the mess hall at that time was a part of a consolidated mess. They split it out and it went with me so we were able to have our own mess which is a tremendous morale factor. If you have your own mess hall you can do a lot of good things for your people. But anyhow, we set up in the new area. We covered up that dog manure. It was a horrible odor. We covered it up with shovels, wheelbarrows, and I’m using crew chiefs, door gunners, I’m using maintenance people. We’re building a base camp that’s totally out of their MOS but anyhow, we did it. We pitched those GP mediums, I put my officers in one of the permanent buildings, two of the permanent buildings, I put my orderly room in the small shanty, I put my operations in a permanent structure that was there, and I of course, I moved into a hex tent. I pitched the hex tent and that’s where I lived. We supported Lam Son 719. We went into Laos on the 8th of February of 1971
which was my birthday. I’ll never forget it as long as I live. We combat assaulted into Laos
with the 1st troops and we put them in LZ Delta. We call that going over the fence. Well, we
had LZ Hotel and LZ Delta. There was a fire support base right near the border. That was a
place called Lang Vay, and then east of Lang Vay was a place called Vandergrift, so it went
Vandergrift, Khe Sanh, Lang Vay, the fence we called it, LZ Hotel which was just inside the
border I think, and then of course LZ Delta. LZ Delta was the biggest fire support base. We
started combat assaulting troops into there. But, at the same time, we were flying combat
support for the 5th mech. We’re picking up missions every day from them, we’re supporting the
5th mech operations. We supply…they had a lot of patrol activity, we’d go in and insert patrols.
We would take a load of troops in, put them out, hang a poncho up, and fly out so it looked like
we still had people in the aircraft. That was one of the techniques of, you know, of trying to
disguise the operation, the fact that we had inserted troops for patrol activity. But we did, we
supported combat assaults for the 5th mech, we supported resupply for the 5th mech. At the same
time we were supporting the ARVN Marines and the ARVN Army. We would work out of the
leatherneck pad it was called, it was the old Marine…as you know, the Marines had Khe Sanh
and they lost it and we recovered it. In fact, they went in and they extracted the Marines in 1968.
I went in a Chinook and pulled people off the runway under fire in ’68 when they lost Khe Sanh
and that’s when they lost it, ’68, and we recovered it of course in ’70, two years later. We found
barrels on the runway with steel sticking out of them where they had tried to deny the active
runway. When we went in there was minefields along the aprons. We landed out in the
elsewhere area on our first combat assault into Laos, I mean, into Khe Sanh. I guess I forgot to
tell that. Yeah, we combat assaulted into Khe Sanh and we put the 5th mech troops on the ground
there and I led all of my missions that I could. When I couldn’t fly the mission as mission lead, I
would let Captain Grigsby, one of my platoon commanders, or a captain by the name of Arnot,
Captain Arnot was another one of my platoon commanders, they would fly in my place. But, I
flew all the CA’s until my colonel told me I was making unnecessary risks but I still insisted on
flying with my troops and I did, I flew with my troops. I flew every mission I could. That was
in February and March we started having maintenance problems because I was losing aircraft. I
mean, I think I turned over, out of the whole time of Lam Son, I think I changed tail numbers at
least twice, I mean aircraft losses. There was one day I lost ten, ten aircraft shot up, damaged,
flew into an inspection and I had to have replacement aircraft. My gun ships were Charlie
models. They did a good job in the AO. In fact, the unit commanders preferred the Charlie models over the Cobras because we had a better mix of ordnance. We could go in with 100 percent rockets or we could go in with mini guns or we could go in with a combination and we could tailor our gun ships, we could conduct a classic prep. I don’t know if you’re familiar with that, but normally we like to bring in tac air. We prep the area with tac air and then we bring in our own artillery and we prep with artillery and after we’ve prepped with artillery and it’s lifted, we then go in and prep with guns and at the same time we insert. Using what’s called a classic prep, you pretty well provide a safe environment for your people and your losses are almost negligible if you do a good prep.

SM: How long would that last from the tac air strikes to the artillery, to…

EF: We might start tac air at 06:00. We might prep with tac air for 30 minutes and then our artillery would start prepping. It would prep, let’s say, up to 0:730. At 08:00, we’d go in. that would be our PZ time. We’d send in gun ships, they’d go in. I would normally, if I was AMC, air mission commander, I would always go in, pop smoke in the LZ I wanted if I could get in and if it was safe enough I’d put smoke on the LZ to possibly…to perfectly identify it where it wouldn’t be misconstrued with another location, I’d put smoke on it. My guns would roll in, they’d start the prep. At the same time I’d bring in my 1st [chalk] and then I’d have guns come back around and escort that [chalk] in and when I started getting ships on the ground my guns would go cold and they would continue to daisy chain in orbit and they would stay on station and what brought this up was the fact that the Charlie model could have more station time than the Cobras. We carried a…I don’t know, we over grossed the Charlie’s a lot but it wasn’t all that dangerous to the aircraft or that much damage. They’d have to stumble off on a hot day is what I’m trying to say. They’d get that nose up and they’d almost drag those skids after they’d rearmed and refueled and they’d get off and of course they’d fly off a lot of fuel and there’d be a lot of weight. Expend ammunition, no problem. Come back, rearm, refuel, and do it again and we did that. That was our support for the troops in that area.

SM: Those Charlie models had the 2.75 inch rockets, mini guns, and the 40 millimeter cannon as well?

EF: Yes sir, and when I did the configurations for the rockets we had the square rocket tube I think was 12, we had the big round ones with 24, 48 rockets, my numbers are fading but you can confirm them. But, we had different rocket pods. We’d go on what we called the 100
percent hog and that was 48 rockets. Or, we’d go in with a combination of chonker, we called the 40 millimeter chonker. We could go in with the chonker, rockets, and mini guns depending on the configuration.

SM: Now what about the 40 millimeter cannon? Would you use different types of rounds in that or would you use…

EF: Actually they would be HE, HE.

SM: Did they have flechette rounds for that?

EF: I don’t know. They may have, I don’t know.

SM: Anti-personnel weapon?

EF: Yes, they were HE.

SM: They were all HE?

EF: Oh I remember when the M-79 first came out, the 40 millimeter grenade launcher showed up in the nose of these. Anyway, that was basically the mission. My troops went through hell. You couldn’t ask for better men, better officers. My officers worked close with the…it gelled the unit, this Lam Son operation. It brought the officers and men into a real good team, and we did. We had good teamwork. We had good officers. But, we weren't like that in the beginning. I would counsel with my commissioned officers and I gave them a sense of responsibility. Before hand, they didn’t have that. They didn’t…be careful how I say this, they were peter pilots. Commissioned officers peter pilots and that’s not the way it works. I made my platoon commanders perform as leaders to take responsibility for their men, to inspect their men, to make sure they had the health and welfare, to make sure that they were being taken care of, to make sure that they conformed to standards and policies and I gradually raised the standards. When I went in there, people didn’t…some of them didn’t wear name tags. They didn’t get hair cuts. They didn’t wear a pressed or clean uniform, not pressed but clean uniform. A lot of that was being neglected, so I impressed on them to be leaders and then be pilots. But you’re a commissioned officer, you’re responsible for your people. You’re responsible for what they do or fail to do. If they’re using drugs, it’s your problem. If they’re alcoholics, it’s your problem. If they have personal problems at home that needs to be tended to, that’s your problem. So, I made my officers conform to what I was trained to do and that caused a little problem initially but then it worked itself out. The old platoon commanders that were there, they had since DEROSED. I had two new ones, Grigsby and Arnot. I had a new gun ship platoon
commander. He was a sharp captain. He did a good job. We cleaned up the unit. I’m not
saying that it was in bad shape when I got it, but then again it was. You had what was called the
wobbly ones or the warrants. They were separate from the commissioned. You had
commissioned officers fraternizing with the enlisted. You had them on first name basis, and you
can’t have discipline in troops on first name basis in my opinion. When you’ve got to ask a man
to go out and die, you know, or put his life on the line, it’s kind of hard to do if you call him Jim
and he calls you Joe and y’all sit around and BS together, yeah, that’s not good. It’s not good for
unit morale and esprit. It’s just not. So, I made sure that my people did what they were
supposed to. I was never criticized for it and it seems like it worked. I did not lose a Rattler out
of the time I was a commander. Had a lot of them injured, lost a lot of airplanes, but we took
care of each other. I would take snake doctor, that was the maintenance ship. Before snake
doctor would go into the AO if I had a ship down somewhere he would go in. If he could bring
it out he brought it out if he could repair it. If he couldn’t he’d at least bring the crew out and let
the Chinooks sling it in. But, he normally stayed in base camp and he normally stayed there in
the maintenance area. When we went north to Lam Son I took snake doctor with me and I flew
him on my missions. I’d fly him high ship. If I had an aircraft go down, snake doctor was there.
He was there with McGuire Rigs, four 250 foot ropes, where he could at least pull the crew out
or if the area was safe enough he could go in and bring the aircraft out, whatever. But, I kept
him there and Mr. Weatherford was the pilot for my snake doctor and he would…just the fact
that he was there was a morale factor. If somebody went in and he could get him out, he would.
I started doing that, that wasn’t done before. Of course, we didn’t have a mission like Lam Son
either. We were being fired at with conventional weapons. We were being fired at with radar
controlled anti aircraft, I think 75 millimeter…I forgot now what it was, but 40 millimeter I
think, something like that we were being fired at with. It wasn’t uncommon to have aircraft
severely damaged with small arms or crew served weapons. Before, you know, if we’d get shot
at in the AO, maybe one or two a week, not that often, we’d have to turn in a shot at report. Oh,
that was something. “You got shot at?” “Yeah, I got hit today.” “Well, where’d you get hit?”
“Oh, I got hit in the tail rotor,” or, “They hit me in the tail boom,” so you’d turn in a shot at
report with the coordinates, time of day, what kind of mission you were on. It was called a shot
at report and then they’d plot that. Not Lam Son. At Lam Son everyday…I mean, shot at was
nothing. We were being shot at continuously. We had some pretty hairy missions.
SM: I want to ask you more specific missions about Lam Son. Before I do, I want to take a quick step back and ask you some questions about some earlier stuff first.

EF: Okay.

SM: When you went in your first tour as an enlisted man, when you finally made it to basic training, what did you think about that training? Was that training good?

EF: You bet ya. You bet ya. We had a good outfit. Right after the Korean war all of our NCOs and officers were veterans. They were Korean war…and officers and NCOs were veterans and yeah, we had a good outfit.

SM: What was the primary weapon you were trained with?

EF: The M-1 rifle. That was my basic weapon. Later on I became a machine gunner on the 30 caliber machine gun, the M1919A6 30 caliber and I was a machine gunner for a while.

SM: Did you ever transition to the M-14?

EF: Yes. We went into the M-14s when we were in Fort Benning in ’58 when we were training recruits. We had to qualify with the M-14, 20 round magazine. It was basically an M-1 with a flash suppressor and a 20 round magazine and you had a selector where you could select automatic or semi-automatic but we never got the selectors. It was really an M-1 rifle. It had a hinge butt plate where you could put it on your shoulder. Just as heavy or heavier than the M-1.

SM: Was one better than the other in your estimate?

EF: Yeah, you had better fire power. You had more fire power with the 20 round magazine. But, then again, you didn’t have ammunition…you had to be conserving your ammunition. You know, when you can put it on rock and roll and shoot up 20 rounds real quick, you’ve got to conserve your ammunition. 100 rounds per man per day was generally the basic load.

SM: And what about the M-60? Did you transition into that?

EF: The M-60 machine gun? I transitioned with the M-60 machine gun in Germany. It came in and replaced the M1919A6. I liked the machine gun. You could change barrels. That was one of the good things about it. You didn’t have to worry about head space. It was a good machine gun.

SM: And so that was an improvement from the 1919?
SM: And what about the M-16, from the 14 to the 16?

EF: Okay, we went from them M-14 to the M-16 and I did a staff study on it in the advanced course. I did not like the M-16. It was a...to me it was a carbine, it was ideal for small in unit combat in cities, a built up area of operations. I guess you might say it was okay for jungle operations where your targets were close proximity, anywhere from 50 to 75 meters. But, it didn’t...I don’t think that it gave the soldier the confidence that he got with that M-14 or that M-1 rifle. That 30 caliber cartridge, you know, the guys came up deer hunting in their younger days, they were accustomed to rifles, and then this little, tiny, 5.56 millimeter bullet just didn’t convey the...and I did a staff study on it too, I said, when I was in the advanced course and the effectiveness of the 30 caliber as opposed to the 5.56. Brush would deflect it. It had a tremendous hitting or striking force, I think 13,000 foot pounds per square inch was impressive.

SM: If the round tumbled.

EF: Yeah, but it would...yeah, it was, there were a lot of characteristics that I thought were...and I also was told, I don’t know if this was classified or not. Surgeon General thought it was inhumane at that time, the effect of that projectile when it struck the human body, but anyway. My preference was the old M-1 rifle or the M-14.

SM: Okay, now when you served in Germany with the 10th mountain division, I would imagine that the emphasis there was on the cold war, on the...

EF: Yes. “The Russians are going to come across the border any day.” We were sent to Fulda to build defensive positions on the only armored approach into Germany.

SM: The Fulda Gap.

EF: We were told, yeah, we were told that we were going to last about 72 hours and that we were sacrificial lambs and we trained hard.

SM: What did you guys think of that? You knew that basically you were expendable in this.

EF: We were there, hey, you know? World War II had ended there and Korean war was over and we were going to fight the Russkies and being a red blooded American, you know, a professional soldier at that time, even being young in the military, I was still going to be a lifer they called it. Yeah, I’d have liked to have gone into Russia. That’s what you’re trained to do. I’m glad I didn’t, but I remember in Germany in ’61 when the Berlin wall went up. They all fell
us in and we checked our ditty bags and our underwear and socks and Geneva convention card and gas mask canister that was a real one and we were getting ready to go to Berlin. We were going to fight the Russians. We were all excited about it and we were proud of it, you know? We were going to get to see combat. That’s your general attitude.

SM: Was there a lot of emphasis on, what we call the NBC trained, nuclear biological training?

EF: Yes sir. One of my additional duties was CBR NCO. I went to CBR school and yeah, emphasis was on NBC and ABC, it changed to CBR, different acronyms but it was all dealing with nuclear and chemical and biological. Those were some of the threats we had. Combat readiness was the key and we had a small Army. Right after the Korean war had shrunk in size and combat readiness was the key. nine months out of the year we stayed in the field. We would come in, clean our equipment, stand inspection, within the next three weeks, four weeks, we were gone again. We went to places like [Graphinver], [Wildflickin], [Holenfelt], [Bombholder], major training areas and we would stay 30 days, 45 days. Come back, clean up, have a few classes, get out of here, and maneuver around our own area. We’d march 25 miles to a training area, run operations at night, stay two or three days, come back. We did that constantly. Combat readiness was the biggest thing.

SM: The training that you did in the field, did much include live fire exercises, stuff like that?

EF: Only when we went to the major training areas were we able to do live fire. We would fire blanks in the training area. The Germans would follow us and pick up the expended cartridge. It’s kind of hard to camouflage with a bunch of kids on bicycles, but anyhow. Yeah, we trained in unit with blanks until we went to the major training areas. That’s where we did live fire.

SM: In the training that you did for chemical and biological threats, I was talking with Mr. Foley yesterday and he was explaining how when they would go through some of their NBC training or their chemical biological radiation training, that actually they’d have an injectible atropine kit that actually they’d inject themselves in training.

EF: Right, but with a saline solution.

SM: Yeah, but they’d actually…

SM: Only in CBR school.
SM: Only in CBR school?

SM: Only in CBR. We did not have our troops use it in training. If you went to CBR school, you would use the training atropine stvrette and that was one of the musts for graduation. You would also have to decontaminate mustard gas. They would put a little blob of mustard gas on you with a Q-Tip. Now, I’m sure it was linseed oil with garlic because it looked and smelled like mustard. I don’t think it was mustard. But, you had to use your M5A1 ointment kit and decontaminate that little blob of mustard they put on your arm and nobody ever got a blister. So anyway, we didn’t know. But yeah, we trained our CBR NCOs. Now, the troops, what training did they get? Masked drill. Some units would have it once a month where they wore the mask 24 hours. They had to wake up, put it on at reveille and take it off the next morning or they would be out in the field and they had to wear the mask. They had to drink the water, they had to have their meals with the mask on and kind of training is kind of hard to do but you can.

SM: How did they eat with the mask?

EF: Well, you take it off and eat but you go into a clean, safe area, you know? You have to be moved from your immediate area four or five men at a time to an area that’s considered to be safe. You’d feed them out of marmite cans, bring them back. Drinking water, you couldn’t drink water either until they came up with a way to do it, but anyhow that’s how you would do it. The troops would have masked drill where you had 15 seconds to don your mask or we would go into an area where they would pop tear gas and everybody would mask as you went into the attack. You got into the objective area of tear gas would be everywhere, you’d put on your mask and continue your assault. That’s the kind of training the troops got. But as far as injecting themselves? No. They had to be in the school environment supervised. You don’t want a bunch of people sticking needles in their legs without supervision.

SM: So the training and the experiences you had in Germany, what did you think of that in terms of it’s effectiveness, it’s importance when you got to Vietnam and the kind of war that was being fought in Vietnam? Do you think it helped prepare you?

EF: Yes, yeah, yeah, your frame of mind, your attitude as a soldier. You knew you had already been exposed to procedures, the discipline was there. When you got into Vietnam it was a counter insurgent type of operation, but you had already been trained in counter insurgency and guerilla warfare. You had seen it, you had studied it as an officer. There was some required reading like Che Guevara’s guerilla warfare. We had to read those things. Now what about the
young troop that came out of basic training at that time? He went through a basic training outfit,
he went into mock villages, he had an idea, too, what he was going to run into. How he
responded when he got there was another story. But, at least he had been adequately trained.
And, I would say good leadership and good equipment with a mission to defend the republic and
that’s what it was. You’re there because your country sent you to defend the republic. Yes, my
training prepared me for it. I run into situations that I may not had an immediate solution but I
was able to come up with what I considered to be a good solution. My drug problem, everybody
had it, you had to solve these problems.

SM: What was the biggest problem as far as drugs in your units in Vietnam?

EF: Hooch maids bringing drugs into the unit, into the area, having to constantly be on
the alert to watch for symptoms or signs that troops were using it.

SM: What kinds of drugs?

EF: Well, marijuana, heroin…that was basically the two. They had them little vial caps
that would come in and they were buying them for a dollar. The hooch maids would slip them in.
They were selling them to the troops. You had to watch. Me and my 1st sergeant, that was one
of our biggest chores was trying to keep an eye on the company areas to see what was going on.

SM: Was this more so in your second tour in 19…

EF: Second tour, yeah. First tour, no, no problems that I knew of. You see, in a
Chinook outfit, that’s a big airplane and your crews are technically trained. It’s like a flight
engineer on a 707, 747. I mean, I’m not trying to belittle anything, I’m saying that aircraft was
run with rigid standards and your crews were highly technically trained. Now, you had door
gunners. They were infantrymen but you know osmosis, exposure, those young infantrymen
learn. In fact, they were just as competent on that aircraft as the flight engineer or the crew chief.
See, on a Chinook you got a flight engineer and a crew chief as well and then you got a door
gunner, three enlisted men. No, we didn’t have that kind of problem that I was aware of.

SM: In your 2nd tour, how would you deal with a soldier who was obviously taking
drugs?

EF: I would get him to rehab, I’d get him over to the hospital, I would counsel with him,
I would probably use unit punishment, Article 15 if I caught him with possession. I tried to deter
with unit punishment. My biggest method was having the small unit commander or unit leader,
the platoon sergeants, the section leaders, the platoon commanders, those people, the pilots, talk
to your men. Watch them, you don’t want them jeopardizing your career or your life or your aircraft or anything else. Watch them. Identify the users. We had an amnesty program. I made sure they all knew, “Hey, we got an amnesty program. If you’re a user, come on. I’ll help you, get you sent to the dispensary, start a program, get you off of this stuff. No punishment.” No punishment.

SM: Was that Army wide or was that something specific in your unit?

EF: Army wide, Army wide and they encouraged it.

SM: Whose idea was that? Was that General Abrams?

EF: I guess it was probably at the time General Westmoreland, General Abrams. But, we had an amnesty program and I’d make sure my troops knew about it. I said, “Hey, look. You got a problem with drugs? Come see me. Go to your chain of command. We’ll help you. We’ll take care of you. Don’t worry about it. You’re not going to get in trouble. We’ll take care of you. If you don’t, God help you because we’re going to find you.” We had health and welfare inspections where my NCOs and officers and myself, 4:00 in the morning before anybody got out of bed, we went through and looked for it. Now I know they knew we were coming. I guess the company clerks were coming or it would leak out, but we would find contraband. We would find those drugs and stuff and we’d burn them right in front of them.

SM: What would you do with the soldiers that possessed it?

EF: I’d Article 15, unit punishment. I’d try to impress on him that he don’t need to be doing that.

SM: Did you find that those techniques worked?

EF: Nah, not effective. You know, a user’s a user. If he’s hooked, he’s hooked. He might deter someone else, but you got to do something, you got to do something.

SM: Let me step back again to the NBC or CBR training. When you transitioned to helicopters, was there much emphasis on that in the helicopter training? Having to fly with your mask on?

EF: Well, I think it was the M-24, where you plugged it in to a canister on the aircraft and that did your air purification and of course you had a problem with your mask fogging up. You had an anti dim cloth that you used for that but we didn’t train with that too much. We knew it was there, we knew it was capable. See, the armor, the tanks, and the other mechanized vehicles had the same systems and the aircraft had the same. But, we never flew with the mask
on. The mask had a lip mike in it, too, where I think you could talk. Yeah, it had a lip mike in it
where you could talk with the mask on.
SM: When you entered OCS in 1964…
EF: ’63.
SM: I’m sorry, ’63. What was that training like? Was that good?
EF: It was outstanding training. First of all, you’ve got to realize that in order to go to
officer candidates school you’ve got to have the characteristics they expected of a leader.
You’ve got to already have that. What OCS does, it fine tunes these things. It puts them in
proper perspective. We used to say that it takes your God given rights away from you and gives
them back to you one at a time as discipline or as privileges. It’s kind of like the Westpoint
program where they first break them in and then they develop them. Well, they do the same
thing but you only have a short period to do it in, nine months. We didn’t have to sweat any
pennies to the wall, but we did have to conform to some real strict standards of integrity,
discipline, things that you wouldn’t normally ask of a man like, everywhere you go for the first
three months you have to run. You have to sit on the first three inches of your chair. You have
to square your meals. These things are done during that period. But, at the same time, you’re
going to training everyday. You’re learning a behavioral science. You’re learning how to deal
with men. You’re learning management techniques, leadership, basic leadership principles.
You’re also learning small arms and basic weapons systems. You’re learning about vehicles,
ground mobility. You’re learning about Army process and procedures, your staff actions, but not
in any depth. You know about your G1 functions, S1 functions, you know, parallel. Personnel
management, operations, supply and logistics, you’re learning about these things and how the
Army operates so that when you do graduate nine months later as a 2nd lieutenant of infantry,
you’re ready then to be utilized effectively and you can be, but you’ve got to have some things
going for you first. The old saying is the platoon sergeant will break you in first. He’ll train you
to be a good officer, if he’s a good platoon sergeant. Fortunately, I was what’s called a mustang,
I had ten years. I’d already been a platoon sergeant. I was an E7 when I went into OCS, so I
knew what I was doing. I knew the tricks of the trade I guess you might say. I would be accused
sometimes of having an NCO attitude. That would be in jest I guess where they would call you
in an counsel you during officer candidate…”Candidate Frazier, you have an NCO attitude.
You’ve got to get rid of it.” “Yes sir,” you know, and that sort of thing.
SM: What did they mean by that?

EF: Well, your bearing. Your command presence, you know? Being already an old
soldier already, you know? That’s an NCO attitude. Anyway, you did, you worked on it, you
worked on it. Then, when I transitioned into civilian life, you’re not an officer anymore, you
know what I mean? It just a reciprocal of that, same thing.

SM: Actually I did want to step back and ask you a question about what you said earlier
with regard to counter insurgency training. You mention that you had received a certain amount
of training prior to going to Vietnam. Where did you receive that?

EF: Every year you had what’s called SAAU, it’s subversive actions against the United
States, how guerilla activities develop and how information is gathered and then you’d get some
training as far as small unit procedures, combat in built up cities, what else? Guerilla type
activities where your objective is not to hold terrain but to go in and neutralize or to go in and
cordon, search, capture, and then clear the area. That kind of training, but nothing extensive.
We learned that when we got into Vietnam, we called it search and destroy. Other people called
it search and avoid, it depends on where you were. We had some units that would do that, and of
course as aviators we supported those operations where we would insert them, combat assault
them in, they would do their cordon, search, and destroy, we’d go in and extract them.

SM: Now, that includes your first tour with the Chinooks?

EF: First tour, yeah, yeah.

SM: This was the…let’s see here…

EF: The 243rd.

SM: The 243rd?

EF: Yeah. That’s what we would do. We would go into Dak To, Dak Pek, Kontum,
Laos, and insert companies out into the field and they would set up a cordon, they would search,
they would clear the area, capture whatever was there, and then we’d go in and extract them.

SM: Okay, and this was in Fall of ’66?

EF: Yeah. Now, another thing we would do was insert them into what was called the
field location or fire support base. We would insert them into that along with artillery and then
that’s where they would operate at. They may operate there three or four months, but we would
always go in and come out of this secure area and we would resupply them as we needed it. The
bases would grow bigger and they would conduct operations around that AO.
SM: Now looking back at that particular strategy, the search and destroy where you’d cordon off an area, go in, search it, find whatever you could, destroy whatever you had to, and then pull out. In hindsight, do you think that was a proper strategy for the war?

EF: No. It probably would be good in a political environment where you had to worry about politics, but to go in and occupy a country, set up a main line of resistance, an MLR, move your MLR all the way to Hanoi where you would dominate terrain. You weren’t concerned with attrition or body count, you were concerned with control of terrain, real estate as the conventional concepts. But, it’s too expensive to fight a conventional war. This guerilla war’s cheap. Maybe that had a lot to do with why we used that technique, but I often wished that we would set up an MLR across that peninsula or across that boundary and then move it forward into Hanoi. That would have been…we could have done it. The Americans could do that, but that was not the politics. You don’t go in and take over a country anymore like we did in World War II. Look at Korea, that was a quasi type counter insurgent type operation where we did hold terrain but we didn’t keep it. We didn’t pay the last man for it. I guess Hamburger Hill…Pork Chop Hill was a good example of where we would expend, piecemeal a unit. Hamburger Hill in Vietnam, Dak To in Vietnam where we piecemealed. That was my first tour. I watched a unit go up on Hill…what was the name of that hill? Anyway, we piecemealed a battalion up it. Finally we found out that you can’t take it with less than a battalion, so…but by that time they’d lost two or three companies. You don’t know what’s up there until you get there so they underestimated the strength and they underestimated the enemy capabilities.

SM: That particular operation, was that primarily Viet Cong or PAVN?

EF: No, NVA’s were in Dak To.

SM: When was this?

EF: This was in 1966, ’67.

SM: What did you think about some of the I guess what you could call traditional counter insurgency programs, civic action programs and things like that?

EF: Win the hearts and minds of the people?

SM: Right.

EF: That was a good concept but it’s timely, it takes a lot of time, it’s a lot of effort. Then again, you know, we make the mistake of thinking that we can impose our concepts on other people that are totally foreign to them. The oriental is not really, I mean, you know, is a
democracy what the Orientals really want, you know? Are we going to give them a democratic
form of government or is that what they want? Who’s going to decide this? I’m getting up into
my older years now and I look back on a lot of things and you know, maybe those people fair
better in a socialistic form of government than a democratic. Maybe the Poles are suffering
today because of democracy. Maybe they were better off in a communist form of government, I
don’t know. But, I don’t think that we can cram democracy down their throats if they can’t
sustain and subsist. Did I answer your question?

SM: Yes sir. That’s an interesting point you raised and I’m curious, at the time, when
you were first going to Vietnam, how much were you aware of some of the behind the scenes or
really prominent Vietnam…

EF: We would hear about generals that were involved in drug deals, drug scams.
NVA…or Saigon generals. We would hear a general, what was his name…I don’t remember his
name now but I understand he was probably a drug lord. You know, we would hear about the
golden triangle type of operations as far as behind the scenes, what they were really all about.
But, it did not effect us as our mission. You know, we had a mission to accomplish and it had
been given to us in clear, concise form. Five paragraph field order. You had a mission to
accomplish, and you go for the mission keeping your welfare and your men in balance. That was
ideal if you could do that, mission and then men, and we went and did it. We accomplished our
mission. And I never, never, I don’t ever remember when we didn’t accomplish our mission.

SM: Now what about things like, for instance, in 1956 there was supposed to be…part
of the Geneva accords that ended the French-Indochina war was to establish a national election
that year.

EF: Yeah.

SM: And hopefully that would answer the question of reunifying country and who
would…

EF: Stabilization of the country, yeah.

SM: Right, who would lead the country. In the north they were ready to go, and in the
south they cancelled the election and it circumvented that political process of reunification
primarily because it looked like Ho Chi Minh was going to win. I was wondering, were you
guys aware of that kind of stuff when you were in country?
EF: Now Ho Chi Minh was loved by the people. He was loved by the North Vietnamese. We used to say that the Vietnamese, when they die, they’re going to Hanoi, you know? Ho Chi Minh was also loved by the South Vietnamese people. That boundary that was drawn between the north and the south, I don’t know who drew it, but it was there. I know this, and I don’t know if I’m giving you what you’re looking for, but it took a lot for a young man to come south 600 miles with a bag or rice and an old rusty rifle and fight for his country and the young Vietnamese running around on his lambrettas wouldn’t get out of bed to defend his. We were seeing that in Saigon, we were seeing that in some of the built up areas, the bigger areas, running around with sunshades and motorcycles, mopeds. Why ain’t you fighting, son, you know?

SM: Did you guys talk about that?

EF: Oh yeah. We wouldn’t…now you don’t just up and say, “Hey guys, let’s give up the ghost here. Why should we get out and sacrifice ourselves for these people that won’t even get out of bed?” We never talked like that, but if you were an intelligent person and you were in those areas you saw it and you would wonder. You know, like in Pleiku, downtown Pleiku, we’d go down there looking for little souvenirs and stuff to send home and we’d see these young Vietnamese males and females dressed out in their mesh T-shirts and sunshades and their lambrettas and you’d wonder, “Why ain’t this whole country conscripted and in uniform and out there helping the cause?” you would think that. I didn’t come back and voice my opinion in that area.

SM: Now during your first tour, how many times did you support ARVN operations?

EF: Frequently, ARVN and Korean operations. We would have the Mike forces they were called, Delta forces, RFPFs, rough puffs we called them, different organizations we would combat assault. Tell you a war story; we were down in Pham Thiet. We were supporting an American special forces and Mike force operation where we had inserted them out into the area around Bay Loc and we were supposed to resupply Chinooks and I had an internal load of clothing, small arms, rations, and among those rations were those donated rations, the bags with hands across the sea symbolism on the bags and all and we went in and we made our contact on FM, [?], come in, “Roger, we got you popped smoke. They popped the smoke. Roger, we got you purple.” Come in, we sat down, and all these little ARVNs started unloading our aircraft, running on, you know, like ants. Unloaded this aircraft, internal load. They got everything off of it and we took off, mission complete. That next day, or two days later, the American special
forces and Mike force went in and captured all this equipment that had been unloaded and
obviously the NVA had unloaded our aircraft and we didn’t know it. But, they found everything
that we’d hauled in and they’d gone in and captured the unit, surrounded the area, captured the
unit and all the equipment and material that we’d hauled in the day before. You know, that
makes you think.
SM: That again raises some interesting questions about fighting the war in Vietnam. It
was hard to know who the enemy was.
EF: Right, you know? They claim he cleaned or burned our toilets by day and fought us
at night. He filled our sandbags by day and worked in our mess halls and fought us at night and
that’s true. When I was airfield commander at [?] we caught a couple of them NVA
sympathizers. They were out pacing off the round, the distribution of rocket fire where they
rounds would come in and hit and they were pacing off the dispersion pattern. Another one was
hid beside the…we had these things, I didn’t approve of them but we had them, massage parlors
there on the compound, and souvenir shops and barber shops and this little gal, she was a
masseuse, I guess that’s what you call here, she’s outside marking down and every time a dust
off would come in she would scope it out and she would make a mark on the wall and she kept a
good body count, both KIA and wounded. We didn’t know. But, one day she was…one of the
young enlisted men saw her and then he went up and looked on the wall beside where she was
and she was making these little marks and so we watched her and sure enough she was an NVA
sympathizer and she was giving them back the information on how many…see, Ban Me Thuot
strip was where we [?] all our KIA and wounded. We had a surgical hospital there underground
and we also had great registration there and she was giving them accurate information on their
operation, how many KIAs and wounded that we were sustaining. So, we found these people.
SM: So how large an area Ban Me Thuot…
EF: City strip?
SM: …cover, as far as if people were wounded or killed?
EF: Oh, the whole AO down there the 101st Airborne Division was in there at Phan
Thiet, no, not Phan Thiet but Ban Me Thuot and there it was north and south to include special
forces.
SM: This for the whole corps tactical zone?
EF: II Corps area, the western AO over against the Cambodian border. Pretty big area to include special forces and 101st and ARVN. That was in the [?] sector and a lot of ARVN troops were there on the strip. In fact, my southern portion of the airport, of the airfield, was defended by ARVNs and they would rotate in and out. They’d go out in the bush, then they’d bring them back in on a defense mission, they’d stay there in defense of the airfield, and of course that’s one of the reasons I was sent in there to straighten it out and clean it up because they weren’t defending. Ban Me Thuot had already been overrun once, almost overrun. That’s why they sent me down there to straighten it out. I extended the runways, I built fencing, I put in fighting positions, you know, that sort of thing.

SM: With the…during your first tour with those gun ships, you said they created CH-47 gun ships.

EF: Yeah, guns a go-go.

SM: Guns a go-go. Was that exclusively just mini guns on those or did they have different arrangements?

EF: They had mini guns and 50 caliber, pedestal mounted 50s, in the windows. You know those round windows down the side?

SM: Yeah.

EF: Yeah.

SM: How many 50s?

EF: There could be four on each side and then they had one on the ramp, on tripod mounted on the ramp, guns a go-go.

SM: That’s a lot of fire power.

EF: It is.

SM: Did they standardize that eventually?

EF: It didn’t last long, you know? I think there was probably one or two units that were guns a go-go. It was a concept that somebody wanted to try with that particular platform, that aircraft.

SM: Was it effective?

EF: Well, I don’t know. It didn’t last. To me it was effective, you know? Tell you another war story? We had our fire support base was overrun one night and we captured the guys that had come in, had 26 of them, and we killed a lot of them in the wire and they were
placing satchel charges in Hueys. This was down in Dong Ba Tin, and naturally, I mean, I’m the
infantry officer, I’ve got the reactionary force, I deploy, we catch these culprits. They had come
through the Korean sector of the perimeter and then they’re interrogating them and we ask them,
“Look, why didn’t you place your charges in those Chinooks sitting on the same apron?” and
they said, “Oh, our officer says don’t ever shoot at them things because if you do, you’ve asked
for trouble,” in other words, words of that effect you know because of the guns a go-go
reputation of the Chinook. “Oh, don’t ever try to do anything to them,” and they didn’t. They
didn’t blow them up. They were only putting them in the Hueys.

   SM: That’s pretty impressive.
   EF: Yeah, we got nine of them that night. But, they could have also placed them in
   Chinooks and didn’t; same area.
   SM: Interesting. Also, you mentioned before, we were talking before the interview
   started, that during your first tour you would engage in sometimes village and hamlet relocation
   operations.
   EF: Yeah, yes sir. Around Da Lat north and Da Lat south there were a lot of hamlets
   that were being terrorized by NVA and VC. We would go in and we would relocate. We’d pull
   them out of an area that had been burned or just…the word I’m looking for, where they’d come
   through and destroy, the NVA would burn their hooches or the VC, burn their hooches, steal
   their rice, create havoc, threaten them. We’d go in and relocate them. We’d move them to
   another location and of course they would go in. These were Montagnards, Koho tribe was in
   that area. We would relocate them around Da Lat north and Da Lat south.
   SM: Was there much resistance to that from the Vietnamese?
   EF: No, they’d get on the aircraft with their bag and baggage. They’d come on, sit
down, we’d take off, and we’d go into a new location, they’d all get off, we’d go back and get
another load. Now I don’t know, maybe the people that were in civil affairs that were dealing
with this, maybe…but it seemed to me like they were all cheerful. In fact, they’d get on the
aircraft and they’d look around all friendly. One old woman gave me a basket. My interpreter,
we had interpreters that would fly with us on those missions. He said the basket was over 100
years old or had been in her family and she give it to me.
SM: Wow. That’s an interesting comparison because one of the problems I guess in the lowlands amongst the regular Vietnamese was when they relocated forcibly certain Vietnamese villages carried a lot of tension between the United States, the military units…

EF: I imagine it would.

SM: …and the Vietnamese civilians.

EF: But these were Montagnards, they were a nomadic type people, not to any great extent. You know, they could move. Resources were there for them to reconstruct. I guess it was probably difficult for them to give up their homes but if it meant their safety and welfare and they all understood it and it was well communicated, they should receive it favorably because it was the same area they were living in, we just moved them into a safer location. Or at least that’s how we perceived the mission. It was a relocation mission that day.

SM: Who would direct that relocation effort? Was that something that was done at the company level?

EF: Well, they would have people from special forces would be in there; communications, coordination, and you’d go into the PZ and you’d pick up your load and you were given the coordinates of your LZ and there’d be people in there directing you and when you’d bring them in they’d all get off with their bags and stuff. I guess they’d…I know that later on after we’d relocated then we’d haul in people from engineers that would see that water wells were being drilled. I even had a mission one time to transport an elephant. We picked up the elephant at Na Trang, they palletized him and drugged him, and I carried him down to a sawmill and he was a pachyderm…well, you know, sawmill elephant and run the sawmill for them. It was a scary type mission. I didn’t know when that sucker was going to wake up back there and wipe out my hydraulics. But, they had a vet with him and it was a well done operation. He was a small elephant that we carried in there for them. You know, missions like that after they’d been relocated.

SM: And can you describe some of the more memorable combat missions that you were on in your first unit?

EF: First tour?

SM: Your first tour.

EF: I guess the ones that were out close to the Grassy Silo and Small Kingdom were the names of them. There was a Montagnard division, infantry division, Montagnards, commanded
by a Montagnard general and he had moved his whole unit across the Cambodian border. There was some problem that he didn’t get along well with something. We were sent in there to bring him back, his whole unit, and I think it was maybe five ships. We went in and we landed there on an old strip, and old runway that had been abandoned and we brought his unit back in. They were all in their tiger fatigues and then we brought them back into South Vietnam over somewhere between…I’m trying to remember the name of the little place, it was east…it was south of Ban Me Thuot and east of Na Trang, somewhere in there we supported them and then I understand they went into operation. That was a memorable one. Hot LZs, yeah, we would go into some hot LZs, get shot at. I had a wire bundle on a Chinook carried both your number one and number two systems. I had a round through it that turned everything off in the cockpit and at the same time lit up a few things. That was scary. Now and then we’d find bullet holes in the aircraft after we had did a post flight where we’d been shot at. Busiest thing was dust off missions where we would go in. I went in on a dust…they had been trying to get this guy who’d cut a femur artery with a machete. They were clearing an LZ and he’d severed a femur artery, his machete bounced off him, they couldn’t get him out and I was out in the AO in the Chinook and I went in and I got him out. Well you don’t take a two and ½ million dollar airplane and you put it in that jeopardy along with the crew and I was chastised for it, but I got him out. The dust off…I went in with both guns blazing, the Chinook going in, and I don’t know why they didn’t blow me out of the sky. They had already shot down a couple of dust off’s that were trying to get him out. I went in and got him out, brought him out, carried him to the hospital in Pham Thiet. That was one that I remember.

SM: Did you suffer any damage at all?

EF: Yeah, I picked up some small arms but it wasn’t anything severe. Just superficial skin damage went through the aircraft. The whole crew was motivated to do it. You know, you got a co-pilot and you got yourself and you got the guys in the back and they say, “Yeah, let’s go get him,” you know because you’re listening to this traffic on guard, and I went in and got him.

SM: So it was part of a joint decision, something that you…

EF: Yeah, yeah, yeah, “We can do it, let’s do it, let’s go, let’s go get him, sir.” It’s kind of brought up in the crew there, you know, “Let’s do it,” and a lot of that happens, a lot of that happens. “Let’s go get him,” and we did, we went and got him.
SM: And what did you think of the other country forces that you worked with, for instance the Koreans. You mentioned the Koreans were…

EF: Professionals, hard charge it professionals. They wore starched uniforms. When they made a sandbag bunker they took 1x6s and squared the sandbags to where they looked like brick. It looked like their defensive positions came out of a field manual. Their concertina wire, their double apron fences, and their discipline. Well disciplined troops. I supported both the Korean and the white horse, the tiger division and the white horse division. Both combat assaults and ash and trash or cabbage and ice type. See, when we resupplied the Koreans, we carried them fresh meat; chickens in baskets, pigs in pokes. They didn’t have the refrigeration. Their water buffaloes were nine barrels welded together with a bail across it and a sling. They didn’t have water trailers. I’ll tell you a war story; down around south of Tuy Hoa we inserted the 101st Airborne Division battalion and we supported them for seven days. We went in and pulled them out and they little or no contact. We turned around the next day and inserted the tiger division, the Koreans. We inserted them and maybe we inserted them and they hauled out tons and tons of weapons. They had captured I don’t know how many NVA, I’m talking about hard core NVA, not VC. These were regular NVA regulars. They lined the roadway going into the AO with dead bodies so that they civilian populace could see them. These are soldiers in uniform, NVA soldiers, dead on the sides of the roads. They had a pile of weapons, machines, crew served, that they had captured in the same AO that we had just pulled the 101st out of. You use your own judgement in this case. Did they just move in there the same day the Koreans went in or did the…I don’t know. You answer that question. But, I remember that explicitly. Then they had a big parade after it was over with and I watched this Korean sergeant major eat the heart of an NVA with his bayonet; cut it out and eat it talking to his troops. See, we’re sitting in the area and they’re getting ready to have a parade. Then, I see this other soldier with an NVA head on a stick walking with it. Oh, they were hard chargers. These were Korean soldiers and then I’m on a mission one day into Tuy Hoa and the military police, Korean police, they say, “We want you to take these prisoners up to Quang Tri,” where their headquarters was…not Quang Tri, but Qui Nhon and I noticed that these are healthy looking NVAs. Their wrists are tied together with suspension lines and they hang on two sticks, one on each side of the aircraft, sit them down. Military police, Korean police are there with weapons watching these Chinese communists and we always flew feet wet, out over the water. We called it feet wet. We’d get up
around three or 400 feet off the deck and we’re flying up the coast, we’re going to Qui Nhon to
take these troops and the ramps down, you know, and the crew’s back there and the gunner’s on
his gun and the crew chiefs are back there on the hydraulics and all of a sudden the crew chief
said, “Sir, they’re throwing them out back here!” and I look back and this left side, all them that
was tied together, they were going off the ramp and I said, “Close the ramp and put the tongue
up,” meaning you close your ramp and you put that tongue up and we did. This Korean MP, “Go
back to Tuy Hoa,” so we went back to Tuy Hoa but I guess these on this side were the ones they
wanted to interrogate. That happened and I got back to my unit and I said, “Hey, it’s what I
saw,” and they said, “Write it up.” Tell you another one, when you ask about Koreans, when we
had the Koreans overrun and blow up nine of our slicks in the Dong Ba Tin, they came through
the Korean perimeter, their sector. Well, the platoon leader of the Korean platoon that was
responsible for that sector had found the penetration and repaired it. Loss of face. The general
came down from Tuy Hoa and held the formation. This was a white horse division that was in
our AO in Dong Ba Tin. He held the formation and we were all required to be there, 16th
battalion, combat aviation battalion, 1st brigade unit, general support, two corps area. They had
the formation and we had to watch this general discipline that platoon. He walked up to the
platoon leader and shot him in the forehead with his pistol and then he went down the ranks of
each platoon with a riding crop of each squad in that platoon and he beat, whipped each man
until he went to his knees. We had to go watch that. When it was over with we turned the unit
back over to the battalion commander I guess and we went back to our side of the fence. We
went and watched that.

SM: What did you guys think of that?

EF: That’s severe discipline, but the Koreans are accustomed to that I guess. I watched NCOs
butt [?], you know, butt stroke them, privates. I was hovering in one day with an external load of
expended brass and barrels, piggy back, I’d set it down and was hovering over to sit down to
discharge an internal load and I hovered over a stack of ammunition that was rigged for sling and
the young Korean hooked me up. I wasn’t going to hook up a load, I was going to sit the aircraft
down. Here I am now with this load tied to me and my aircraft was on a tilt and I had to recover
quickly and my crew chief punched off the load, he punched it off and we set the aircraft down.
Well, the sergeant took the man that hoisted me up out in front where I could see it and he
literally whipped him with an M-79, beat him to his knees because he did that. That’s about it.
The Koreans were well disciplined but they were also effective. Maybe they knew their enemy better than we did.

SM: What about other country forces? Australians…

EF: Australians, the Aussies, I worked with the Aussies down around Pham Thiet. They were working with the Mike forces and they were humorous. They were real tigers. They were the real special forces type guys. We had a lot of fun with them. We’d drink and sit around the fire with them at night after we shot down they would be in general perimeter defense of our LZ that we were in and I enjoyed working with them. They would sing Lilly Maulene, I mean not Lilly Maulene but that Waltzing Matilda…

SM: Yeah, Waltzing Matilda.

EF: They would talk about our hands across the sea, “We don’t need your damn hands across the sea.” It was good, it was good to work with them. They’d wear the bush hats with the side pinned up. The Aussie, the same tradition they carried through World War II, the coast watchers, that kind of a people. They were rough. One of them was telling about the time he was drinking coffee and a round came through and knocked his cup out. Well, he went out and found the guy and brought him back in dead that shot his coffee out of his hand. These kinds of stories you’d listen to. Whether they did or not, I don’t know.

SM: Okay, well let’s go ahead and talk about your second tour real quick. You went back in October of 1970, is that correct?

EF: Yeah.

SM: Americal?

EF: Yeah. Went and served as the XO of the 71st AHC from November to December of 1970 and then took over 1 January ’71. Did you want to talk about that transition at all?

EF: Yeah, when I was, I had already been selected by the department of the Army to go to boot strap which was the university of my choice for my master’s and I was expecting to go and when I received orders sending me to Vietnam from the advanced course, I mean, you know, that was a real blow. I said, “Well, it’s going to be my second tour,” and there wasn’t anybody that I knew that had ever had a second tour unless he volunteered for extension or something like that but I said, “Well, maybe I’ll get a job in Saigon, maybe I’ll be a good staff officer and wear khakis everyday and eat at the local club and a gentlemen’s assignment. My second tour certainly should be much better than my first,” but I got to Bien Hoa and they processed us in
and then I see my name up on the list because I was sent to Bien Hoa unassigned, my orders didn’t send me to the Americal but I had been to that damn maintenance management class and so they say, “That here marks you of the commander of…you can expect to command,” and I was already a promotable captain so I came out to get on a C-130 the next morning at six o’clock, bag and baggage for Chu Lai. “Now where in the hell is Chu Lai?” I’d never heard of Chu Lai. Well, I got there and hell, they put us in the combat center. That’s the first thing you got to do, go through the combat center and that’s where they tell you about the enemy threat and his booby trap techniques and how he comes in as a stealth and can penetrate defenses even with people watching and they demonstrate it and then a couple of weeks of training, but like I said, Colonel Rickowski came down in his jeep and told me to get in his jeep, that I was going to work, that one week was enough for me in the combat center so I got there and I looked the unit over and I liked the commander, I liked Colonel Rickowski, he was an old veteran and I had already had several years in the service. We identified, you know, that chemistry was there even with Banjo Davis, a real southern drawl, gentle kind of guy, permissive type manager. He was glad to see me and I told him, “Hey,” I said, “Banjo, that motor pool will get us relieved.” He said, “I know it, but you know, you got missions to…” they’d just flown a Cam Duc operation that was a terrible mission according to everybody that I talked to that had flew in support of it and he said, “You know, it just didn’t have the priority,” and they’d run those vehicles to the ground. But, I kind of judged the unit by their maintenance, discipline. Aircraft maintenance was excellent, couldn’t beat it. The fraternization was a real serious problem. I saw that right off the bat. Sgt. Harris, the first sergeant, old airborne 101st guy, he saw I was a parachutist and you know we hit it off real quick and he was telling me that they were a bunch of route steppers and pot heads and he was telling me all about the troops, the problems that he was having and hey, our maintenance NCO was a severe, heavy drug user and I’ll tell you about him. But anyhow, I was challenged, I was challenged. I was challenged to help this company commander do some of the things that the executive officer before me had not done. That was obvious. The XO that I relieved, he wasn’t even there when I got there. I think he was already gone, but he certainly didn’t look at his homework and do his homework and help the commander with his area of responsibilities, the XO’s area. But first sergeant and I, we got busy. I helped Banjo and Banjo will tell you to this day we were a good team and then of course he was reassigned but I mentioned the platoon sergeant, the maintenance platoon sergeant that everybody loved, Sgt.
Lopez, his mother passed away and I went in as the XO. We were going to pack his house, I mean his whole baggage, send it to him because he was on emergency leave and he wasn’t going to come back. He was full loss. They went ahead and early DEROSed him and I’m in there packing his stuff and you know an officer’s got to be present when you do this and I’m looking down this knot hole and I notice there’s a spoon, some white substance had been on the handle of it. We got to looking and we looked down through this knot hole and I had a man crawl down under the building and there was a pile of these vials, these heroin vials, about that high where he’d been putting them through the floor. Well, he was a severe, a heavy heroin user and I said, “Well, if this platoon sergeant behaves in this manner, certainly people know about it,” his close friends. “Certainly some of his subordinates are aware of it because you don’t sit around the hooch drinking a bottle of Jim Beam without offering a drink or two with your buddies,” and I use that as an analogy. I said, “Hey, this problem is bigger than I think it is,” and it was. We went on a campaign. We went through every bunker where they could hide their stashes. We watched all the hooch maids. We had the suspicious hooch maids we didn’t pick up the next day. You know, these kinds of things. Then we had some real harp with my officers and I said, “Hey, it’s your fault. It’s your responsibility. You best start taking care of it.” I don’t know if I made enemies or not but I’ll tell you one thing, I got some attention and we did start making improvement. There wasn’t anything else you could do. But anyhow these kinds of problems was with drugs but it wasn’t so insurmountable that it kept the unit from performing it’s mission. Now we all know that the NVA had directed this against us. I mean, where else can you buy pure uncut heroin, street value of 100 bucks, for a dollar unless it’s been well planned and well executed? So being aware of that, plus Colonel Rickowski brought some people in from the department of the Navy that were real subject matter experts on it and they held a conference and a seminar with us up at battalion. We were told how it works and what their objectives were and how they were accomplishing their objectives and of course I, at the same time, trained our officers on the same things. I said, “Hey, this is directed against us and we’re going to have to fight it,” and we did.

SM: Any racial tensions in your unit?

EF: No. My exec was a black captain, Berry. When Sinkowitz DEROSed and went back to America my executive officer was a black captain and I wished he was here today, James Berry. I loved that guy. Yeah, there was racial tension. I’ll tell you about it. But, it wasn’t
severe in my unit. I had black people working in my unit that did their job and did a good job. I
don’t know of any that I had to reprimand or punish. But, we did have a problem at the mess
hall and that was where the blacks would dap. They would go through the little…and they
would disrupt the feeding of the troops. They would wear these black fists on a bootlace around
their necks. They would wear black bracelets with a cross made out of black bootlace. It wasn’t
part of the uniform and we had to stop that. We had to put a stop to that. Colonel Silver issued a
direct order that there would be no dapping in the chow line because that was disruptive. You
got 1,500 people to feed in an hour and these guys are going through their traditional welcome
and it’s disruptive and we had problems with that. They didn’t want to conform, you know?
They felt like that we were discriminating against them. Then, when we make them pull of those
bracelets and the way they got around that, they took a watch and bound it to the black bootlace
bracelet and then it was a watchband. Then you’ve got to leave it now. But the black crosses,
they went under the T-shirts. What else? That kind of stuff. If you call that racial tension,
maybe there was, but it was…I’m looking for a word, it was not obvious, it was well disguised.

SM: No open conflict between groups of whites and blacks or anything like that?
EF: No, no, no. It was covert I guess you might want to say. You didn’t see it.
SM: They had a subculture but it did not disrupt the unit cohesion.
EF: That’s right. Now we heard about other problems in other units where the blacks
would damn near mutiny. You know, say, “We ain’t going to go,” you know? “No, no, we
won’t go,” or we used to make a joke. The 6th paragraph of the field order was “Provided the
troops concur,” you know? We didn’t have that problem and like I said, when we moved north
to Lam Son, that gelled my unit. It was a fine unit. We’d made our sacrifices. We didn’t lose
the Rattler and I say that was because of leadership, that was because of planning and judgement
and I believe that to this day.

SM: What kind of differences existed from your first tour to your second tour say with
ARVN, with the ARVN units that you worked with?
EF: The first tour with the ARVN units, they were real combat hardened troops. It was a
pleasure to work with them. The second tour they were somewhat sloppy. They were
complacent. I worked with a colonel up in the, I think his name was Colonel Thong, he was the
counterpart to Colonel Hathaway of the 196th at Hawk Hill. I worked combat assaults with him.
He was a damn good officer, trained in Hanoi. He had been to the French military academy, but
he professionalism just wasn’t there in his subordinates, his staff officers because I’m a company commander, I go to Hawk Hill, I coordinate missions. That was something I did everyday. I’d get with the ARVN colonel, I’d get with his staff, we’d do our planning. We knew what we were going to do that next day and then I would go with that combat assault. I would fly him as my backseat party and we would be the overhead command and control, C&C. His staff was on a scale from one to ten about a five being compared to our staff, our thorough planning. Of course, they were not accustomed to the resources that we were accustomed to. You see there, you learn a lot as to it depends on what you have to work with and these young staff officers in this ARVN Army didn’t have that much. They weren’t brought up the same way we were. They didn’t go through the steps of progression. I was given a mission after I had gone up to battalion as the battalion operations officer to put together a training program that would cause the units in the field, the ARVN units in the field, to utilize our resources more effectively; i.e. pathfinder techniques. Sling loading, combat assaults, how to enter or depart an LZ or PZ, and I put together a training program. I even wrote a field manual and had it translated into Vietnamese for these people and I conducted this program from I guess September and October or August and September, a two month program. I used my pathfinders, I pulled people up from the units that I knew about that were good teachers, and we went out and we trained but there again, you didn’t see the…well you can’t make a silk purse out of a sow’s ear, you ever heard that expression?

SM: Uh huh.

EF: And it’s kind of hard to take these guys, in their language, with interpreters which is slow; the instructor says it, and then he says it, and then he hears it, and you don’t know what the feedback is. You don’t have a complete communication process and you don’t know until maybe the next day when that unit is being combat assaulted, “Well how did it go? Did they know what they were doing? Could they rig the loads for sling or did they properly enter and exit the aircraft?” This sort of thing. Yeah, I had that experience with them and I guess that was a good experience and can answer your question. They were a shade less than what our troops were able to do.

SM: What did you think of the Vietnamization process, program, that was established by the Nixon administration?
EF: Sounded good, it looked good on paper, but it wasn’t working. Look what happened in Lam Son. We were supposed to show the world that the South Vietnamese, both ARVN and Marines, could hold their own. Rather, when we went into Lam Son, they were writing off ARVN and Marine battalions like we would steel helmets. We went in and extracted them. We gave them grenades to commit suicide with. We were pulling them out while the enemy was in the wire. We were trying to extract artillery because the Marines says, “We ain’t leaving our artillery in the field,” so we went in trying to extract artillery. The wounded that could not E&E. Now that’s what they told them, they said, “Okay, you guys here in the field,” ARVNs and Marines, “You’re going to have to E&E.” You know what that means, escape and evade? “You’re going to have to E&E out of here because the monsoon is in, we don’t have the air assets, the enemy situation is such that we can’t get anything to extract you without severe losses, so start E&E ing.” Those who could not E&E, those that were wounded severely, I’m told, we would haul in grenades and small arms as support, that they were using these grenades to commit suicide to keep from being captured by the NVA. These were troops on LZ Delta in the final days. Myself and Captain Arnot, we went in to carry…we had carried in on the lower end of the logistical pad, we had dumped off small arms, medical supplies, grenades. We were coming back around to drop off slings so they could prepare the artillery for sling load and we were shot down. Armor piercing incinerary came through my side, I was in the left seat. It came through, filled the cockpit with smoke, cut his arm real bad, and we were falling out of the sky and it was all because of pilot error. We didn’t get on the RPM and get it back up. When you come in on a hot overhead approach you got to keep milking back your RPM on your cyclic and he was on the RPM for me, I was flying, I get it in, he gets hit. I get on the controls now, he’s wounded, and I’m trying to fly that with low RPM and it’s tumbling out of the sky. Finally we realized what it was and we beeped it back up but we were able to get back to Khe Sanh. But, that’s when we were going to pull these poor guys out. NVA was in the wire, monsoons was coming in, and we aborted the whole operation. It’s, you know, 5th mech, they pulled out and went back to Quang Tri and their base and we left them there. We wondered, you know? We said, “Hey, what about those poor bastards that were in Charlie, the 17th cav, that was supposed to have been down in the AO? What about them? They going to come back to Khe Sanh? There ain’t going to be nobody there!” you know? So did the Vietnamization look like it failed? No.
SM: Now you’re primary mission in Lam Son 719 was to provide aerial support for the ARVN troops on the ground, correct? Going into Laos…

EF: That’s right, that’s right. We had a combat assault. The biggest one that we flew was 125 lift ships, 40 gun ships, I was the mission lead. I was sent there by my outfit to coordinate the whole mission. The Rattlers were in the first chalks and there was ten minutes separation between flights. We were going 125, I don’t know how far we went in, way in there. It was a hell of a long way, enough to go on one sortie and have to refuel to go back. You carried a load in, went back, refueled, picked up another load, and carried them in. We were all on the leatherneck pad, we were giving crank times, we were going to crank it this time, go in the PZ at this time, head out for the LZ. The gun ships, there were 40 of them. They were working the same way. We carried them out there and we inserted a brigade. Not a shot fired in anger. We inserted them. The only aircraft lost in that combat assault was an aircraft that had a hard landing in the LZ and we were making a joke, “The LZ is marked by a downed Huey,” but it was a cold LZ. But, while we’re sitting in this damn leatherneck pad waiting to crank, 130s started coming in so obviously they knew what we was fixing to do. Hell, everything’s scrambled, I mean, you know, everybody got off. Here we got aircraft out now trying to say, “Well where are we going to refuel,” because we had a long turnaround. “Well, are we going to go to My Loc and refuel, are we going to go to Vandergrift and refuel, are we going to go to Lang Vay and refuel? Some of us can go back to Quang Tri.” Well, I was hoping to get all the Rattlers together. We were in the area and I said, “Hey, it’s PZ time, let’s go,” and I started the combat assault and it worked. Everybody was able to, instead of sitting there waiting, they was refueling. But it worked. We got them off. We got the brigade inserted, but then again the brigade was lost. See, that was the thing. There was a beginning, a middle, and an end and it just didn’t work out. There again, you see, you got to have conventional tactics. You got to dominate the terrain. You can’t throw people in and piecemeal.

SM: What do you think about the argument that during a lot of the war, speaking of conventional tactics, dominating the terrain, the Clausewitzian context, maintaining the initiative, a lot of times that didn’t happen, did it? Neither the American or the ARVN soldiers controlled the initiation of contact or the breaking of contact and the initiative seemed to be controlled by the PAVN or the Viet Cong units that were engaged. What do you think about that?
EF: Profound statement. It’s not the way to fight a war. It’s not the way to expend your resources. You got to have control of the situation. You’ve got to develop the situation, and then you’ve got to control it if you’re going to expend your assets, your people. But, you see, that was a cheap way to go in there and hopefully resolve that situation, you know? A guerilla type operation is cheap. If you read anything on guerilla tactics you see you make the enemies rear your front. You make him behave as a fish out of water, I know that’s some of the expressions. You use his supplies. It’s the cheap way to fight a war, but it’s not our way of what we were accustomed to. You know, if you look at the progression of tactics back from the old first rank kneel and fire and your dismounted drill as to how they fought the Civil War and the Revolutionary War and then we fought World War I from the trenches and then we fought World War II with glory and domination of the real estate. George Patton and his charges, and then all of a sudden…Korea, I think, was the quasi type. It was both conventional and guerilla type. Then, all of a sudden, this pure…you know, it’s just…and then we’ve had some experiences since then haven’t we? Grenada, we’ve had Panama, we’ve had some experiences where we went in and supported the Sudanese, we saw what happened there. It’s expending resources that are precious.

SM: What did you think about Westmoreland’s emphasis on attrition and the body count?

EF: How else could you measure progress? You say, “Okay, we advanced to this parallel today,” I mean, “We’ve occupied this FEBA,” and that’s how you measure success. “We accomplished our objectives. We took objectives one yellow, blue, and red and we’re now reorganized for a continued attack.” That’s one way. Well, how are you going to measure success in the field where you’re going into an AO and you’re searching and destroying and you’re trying to attrite the enemy. How are you going to measure attrition? Body count. What do I think about it? I think it’s archaic, it’s crude, but how else can you do it? We went out and we fooled around for two weeks, we killed a bunch of these things, we captured all this tonnage and that’s how you measured. As a professional soldier, I like the traditional concepts. Do I like measuring with body count? No, I don’t like that. You know the way I feel. I was thinking about a couple of…I lost my train of thought, but anyhow, measuring success like that.

SM: In Lam Son 719, how aware were you and your other officers that you interacted with, with regard to some of the political decisions that were being made by President Chieu?
And after, my understanding is that after the ARVN's sustained a certain number of casualties that they were going to pull out.

EF: We were not fully aware. Our information came from armed forces radio, Vietnam. Our information came with the Stars and Stripes, but we didn’t’ know about these other political decisions or it wasn’t something we discussed. We were there to defend the republic in our minds. We didn’t get involved in the politics of it. Yes, Senator Fullbright and Proxmeyer, they came to Hawk Hill, they came to LZ Center, they wanted to talk to all the troops from Arkansas. We stopped the war and we ferried troops from different fire support bases into LZ Center so Fullbright, I think it was Fullbright, yeah, to talk to his constituents. We saw that end of politics and we didn’t like that either. That ain’t the way you fight a damn war. But, he’s over here to look around and maybe, you know, “Let’s end this war as soon as we can, let’s get the troops home.” That’s the objective, right, is to win the war? That’s kind of how you’re thinking, but you didn’t get involved into whether Johnson should have us there or not or if Nixon should pull us home. We didn’t get involved in that.

SM: What about on the American side? Take a step back, 1967, November, General Westmoreland comes back to the United States, declares the light at the end of the tunnel, victory is eminent, Tet ’68 occurs and then by the spring of ’68 President Johnson declares he’s not going to run for the presidency again. What did you and your fellow officers think about that?

EF: Well, our commander in chief, you know? We’d fought for Johnson. He’d come around to the posts and talked to us. He showed up. It was kind of a disappointment. It’s kind of, you know, change your command at midstream. But, we didn’t think that it was going to be detrimental to our success in Vietnam, you know? Who the commander in chief is, to a professional soldier, really doesn’t really have that much of a bearing, you know, whether he’s democratic or republican, other than the budget. You want to make sure there’s enough to finance what your operations need, but we didn’t get that involved with who our commander in chief was. He was our commander in chief.

SM: It didn’t affect your confidence level?

EF: No, not mine. It could have been because of my ignorance. I wasn’t fully aware of what was around. He was withdrawing from the race. I hope that answered your question.

SM: Oh yeah, it did, yeah. So what did you think of the Paris Peace of ’73 when that finally came about?
EF: Kissinger, and…
SM: Uh huh.
EF: It was helter-skelter from what I was able to see because we followed it you know, that this is going to mean de-escalation, this is going to mean…and when I saw, and then they increased the bombing of Hanoi I think as a result of poor progress or lack of…
SM: Christmas bombing of ’72?
EF: Yeah, so we were glad to hear that, you know, “Let’s step it up and let’s do something.” There were rumors about how much armor and how much munitions and POL was immediately across the 30…what was it, the 37th parallel that went across north and south Vietnam? North of My Lai, right there on the DMZ.
SM: Oh, the 17th?
EF: Huh?
SM: The 17th parallel?
EF: Yeah, the 17th, that’s what I’m talking. I got the 38th, Korea mixed up in my head. But anyway, yeah, we knew that there was lot of material over there, that those people continue to fight so, “Let’s go and bomb all that,” or “Why don’t we go up there and destroy all that,” you know? I had some missions on the Ho Chi Minh trail where we would go in and insert trail watchers, you know, about how much traffic was coming down that trail. “Why don’t we go over and do something about that,” you know? These are the kind of questions you asked. You probably did not have the assets to do it, but being a soldier, you know, you’d wonder why you didn’t go in there and neutralize those threats.
SM: When you inserted trail watchers, these were LRRPs?
EF: LRRPs, yeah.
SM: How would you get them out or would they walk out?
EF: Hell, well, they would walk out to a safe haven where we would go in and they tracked them. If they weren’t there, we left. You come up on fox mike, you make a call, “Roger,” you know, it was usually a whisper, you went in, picked them up, and got them out.
SM: Fox mike, you mean FM radio?
EF: Yeah, yeah, you was given a fox mike to contact them on. You’d go in, pick them up, bring them out. Or they’d walk out. You’d go put them in and that would be the end of it.
SM: Yeah, you didn’t worry about that.
SM: And what did you think of, when in 1974 North Vietnam starting their assault against south Vietnam?

EF: What did I think of that?

SM: What did you think of the American decision not to provide support?

EF: I thought it was a hell of a waste. Here we have…we’ve spent all these years, we’ve spent all these troops, and all of a sudden here these people come south. I said, “You know, I wonder if they’re in my old company area now? I wonder if they’re flying our aircraft?” I didn’t like the thought of that. I felt like I’d contributed to that area and that effort and I hated to see it to become unsuccessful politically. I told you earlier in the beginning we won that war, we didn’t lose that war, and I don’t like to hear the media say we lost it because we didn’t.

Now, the politicians may not have accomplished their objectives, but by God the Americol division and the units I served in, we accomplished our mission and then some. I didn’t like it. I didn’t want to see the war go on either, but hey, I’d sure hate like hell to think that Sgt. Harold Tyson from Tipton, Georgia gave his life for nothing. I was survivor’s assistance officer between tours and I’d have to go out and bury these guys and deal with the family and their heartaches, but that’s another story.

SM: That was hard doing, I’m sure.

EF: Oh man. I went in one day and they wanted me to pull off my uniform. They said, “Mister, we don’t want you in here with…you take off your uniform,” they said, “Carl over here will give you a coat.” I said, “Nah, I ain’t taking off my uniform.” I took command of the situation and then I left there with honors. We buried that old boy. He came back and he looked like a roasted ham in a coffin with cheese cloth wrapped around him covered with lime. That’s how much was left. They wanted me to make sure he’s in there. Betty Ruth, his wife, she asked me, she said, “Would you make sure it’s Harold that’s in there?” I said, “Yeah, I’ll look,” so I get with the mortician. They had an open…a sealed casket. I said, “Yeah, I’ll look,” and I went in and we looked and we closed it and we sprayed that perfume around and then we opened the doors back up and said, “Yeah, Harold’s in there. He’s in there.” And he was, he was in there. Looked like a burnt ham. But anyhow, yeah, I had that experience also and those guys were, wasn’t Cannon Fodder, didn’t want them to be Cannon Fodder and when they decided not to prevent that…I don’t know. The North Vietnamese came back down and reinstalled a communist form of government and here communist governments are folding around the world.
Why? That’s something else. That’s beyond me, now. I’ll go to my grave wondering why and there’ll be others after me, other situations.

SM: How did the Vietnam war most profoundly affect you?

EF: I told myself when I left Vietnam the second time, “If I live through this, I will know how to live. I will know what happiness is, and I will appreciate each day that comes with it’s fullest,” and I haven’t always been able to do that, but those were my thoughts. I’m proud I served, and I’m proud of my unit and I’m proud of my country. Even with the dissentation that we had among the hippies and the demonstrators, that’s happened in centuries before. It don’t cause me to think differently. I don’t like the way we were treated when it’s compared to Grenada and Desert Storm, I don’t’ like that. I think we were mistreated. Our government should have showed us a lot more than what they did. I don’t’ mean monetarily, but I mean with what do you do. Look what happened to the French after they went back into France! They were laying on the docks and the citizens were spitting on them.

SM: Well, that brings up an interesting point. One of the problems with recognizing veterans from the Vietnam war, you had the 365 day rotation system where…he com es back by himself. One day he’s in Vietnam, the next day he’s back in the world. How can you…

EF: I can answer that. We’ve got some people that do some pretty remarkable things in our government in planning and providing and implementing. Certainly they should have put some wizards onto that situation and said, “Hey guys, let’s come up with a solution to our returnees. Let’s bring them into a centralized port of embarkation, let’s wine and dine them a week or so,” you know, “Let’s get the families there, let’s do something to welcome these boys home.” Don’t let them get off the plane in San Francisco and a hippie walk up and give you a note ‘Don’t fight in Vietnam’ and here you are coming back, you know. The first reader knows better than that. What did I think about the 13 month rotation or the one year rotation? I was told that the reason for that was because nobody could guarantee your health for more than 12 months in that environment in that area of the world because of liver flukes, because of other diseases that you were subjected to or exposed to, that it was safer for you in the long run to go in 12 months, 12 or 13 months, and come out. Guarantee your health almost. Now I don’t know how much truth is in that, but that was one of the things I was told in my time. Same with Korean tours, only 13 months. Then again is a hardship tour considered to be only 13 months as opposed to a European assignment? I think it was a hell of a waste of experience. You know,
when the troops went into World War II they were there for the duration and that meant four years, it meant whatever and your units certainly could be more combat effective with old time veterans. Give you an example of that, the infantry point man was usually allowed to grow his handlebar moustache and you look for the guy with the longest moustache to make him your point man because it is experience. He survived long enough to grow a big moustache. It’s a trade off I guess. You lose combat effectiveness because of your experience, the experience factor, seasoned troops as opposed to cannon fire guys fresh out of… a young 19 year old kid fresh out of basic looking up to that platoon sergeant to save his life. Now, we did have good non comms in most cases. The movies that came out afterwards didn’t depict that, but we did. I didn’t like any of the movies. I went to most all of them and none of them were like it really was. Apocalypse Now, that was a joke. I don’t remember the titles of the others, but the movies that I’ve seen “Full Metal Jacket”, was that one of them? No, nothing like…what was that Dorfus that was…

SM: “Forrest Gump”?
EF: Yeah, “Forrest Gump”, it wasn’t nothing like it. Oh yeah, there was moments of stark terror or moments of boredom punctuated with moments of stark terror where people were getting torn all to pieces. But, I don’t know. I’d rather have gone over there and then again lots of other things had to fall in place, too. You can’t go out on search and destroy missions for four years. You know it’s the experience factor there. If you do it one time, you’ve learned. You do it better the next time or you survive it.

SM: Had you heard of the combined action platoon program that the Marines ran?
EF: No.
SM: Okay.
EF: What is it?
SM: It was a program where they had Marine platoons that would sit outside of a village and work with a village and they would stay there for a long duration type mission.
EF: What was it called?
SM: Combined action platoons.
EF: No.
SM: They would train the village forces, the regional forces, and provincial forces…
EF: Oh, that was similar to our B team, our special forces, right? B teams did the same thing I think.
SM: Yeah.
EF: I think the Marines learned from us.
SM: Maybe.
EF: You know, they need a few good men, the Army needs all good men.
SM: Well, what would you think are the most important lessons we should take away from the Vietnam war?
EF: When we fully commit ourselves to a particular operation that involves the expenditure of time, men, money, material, let’s be fully committed and let’s see it all the way to the end. Let’s don’t let politics…let’s have defined objectives first. Let’s have realistic goals. Let’s properly plan and then let’s vigorously execute. Let’s don’t have any half baked operations. Let’s define our objectives, obtainable objectives, before we ever start and then when we start, let’s go all the way. We should have learned that. I don’t know of any weapons systems that we’ve finally proved or any tactics that we finally proved in that operation because it was always, “Let’s try this, let’s try that,” or the weapons systems, “Let’s…” I think the Russians and the Chinese communists benefited more from that operation than we did because we were able to prove their tactics, they were able to prove their weapons systems and their leadership. I don’t think we benefited greatly from that except it put a bitter taste in the American’s mouth. But, it wasn’t’ the soldier’s fault. He did what he was told to do. We need defined objectives. I hope that answered your question.
SM: Yes sir. Would you like to add anything else?
EF: That’s about it. When I came back from Vietnam I went to the University of Tampa and I matriculated with young draft dodgers and pot heads and I was able to see the coin on the other side. You know, guys that said, “I wouldn’t have gone.” I saw all that afterwards. Then the Army went VOLAR (volunteer Army), I didn’t like that. Then, the Army went where we mixed males and females in the same area of operations, I don’t like that.
SM: What don’t you like about the all volunteer force?
EF: It’s a welfare state.
SM: Could you expand on that?
EF: I was on Fort Benning training trainees and Macnamara came out with his 100,000
and we got into the Army at that time, we had to organize a special training company, STC,
where we had knucklehead college, we took these project 100,000 people and we prepared them
to join another unit in basic training and I got to see the caliber of people that were coming in
and today I see progressive deterioration. Anybody and everybody I guess. I see units that are
predominantly black, I see units that are heavy in female, I see units that are…this is from my
experiences today now, looking at units coming through. I watch units that come out, we call
them augments. They come out and we don’t have enough trained employees to staff out a
village so we get some active duty males and females to come out and they’re augments. They
wear the civilian clothes and they act the part of a shepherd or a waitress and I watch this
fraternization of this intimate relationship. That just goes against my grain. I’m an old soldier,
and I know what happened to the Partisans in Poland. I know what happened in those areas
where they had mixed units, male and female, and how they were caught asleep in their beds
because the guy on guard duty was trying to get a little bit, you know? This is documented, this
ain’t something that I just heard about. It just, I don’t know, goes against my grain. That’s
probably why I wouldn’t make a good politician. I’d be a better soldier. You know, there’s a
way to do it and there’s a way not to do it. You weigh the difference and you say, “Well its more
advantageous to put the females back like they were,” you know? I love them and they work
real fine in a hospital environment or as clerical, light duty, what a woman…I say that with
reverence and respect for the female, not in disregard. I think it’s degrading for a woman to want
to act like a man, you know, to want to put on a helmet and grab a rifle and sure they can do it.
The Jews prove it in Israel that the women are hell of a good fighters and I guess women have
been good fighters through the years.

SM: But they’ve stopped that.

EF: I give them more reverence. I give the women more regard, more respect. Let’s
give them something that they can do to help the cause. They ferried aircraft all over the United
States during World War II, they worked in factories. I’m not taking anything away from the
woman, but let’s don’t put her out there in the field where she has to sacrifice her femininity and
her privacy, and that’s it. I hope that answered your question.

SM: Sure does. Anything else?
EF: Nah.

SM: Alright, then this ends the interview with Major Ed Frazier.