Stephen Maxner: This is Steve Maxner conducting an oral history interview with Albert Childs. We are at the Southwest Collections interview room on the 3rd of February (2000) at 9:13 a.m. Mr. Childs, if you would please, begin by describing where you grew up, where you were born, your childhood?

Albert Childs: I was born in New York City in December of 1936 and so my early years, you know, we followed the Second World War, and by the time…well, my family moved to, I was born in New York City but raised in New Jersey and then in 1949 my family moved to Vermont. I went to high school there, completed high school there, and while I was in high school I joined the Vermont National Guard. Later I went to Paul Smith’s College in upstate New York and joined the Army reserves. Then when I went home I was not in a unit and I got a letter when the Lebanon crisis started up advising me that if I did not get into a unit soon, I would be drafted. Well that’s fine, I didn’t mind being drafted, but I wanted to get my military experience out of the way so I wouldn’t have to maybe get started in a career and then have to stop to go in the Army. Well I went in the Army and I took basic training at Ft. Benning, Georgia and then I went to Ft. Bliss, Texas for Nike Ajax missile training. I did not see a future for myself during my two years in the Army. I could not stand it. I had since gotten married. Had I stayed, I would have gone to Formosa which is now Taiwan, but my wife didn’t want me to go so I got out and never dreamed that I would ever go back in the service. I worked in construction for a while, worked for the telephone company. 11 months later I went back to the Army and stayed 25 more years.
SM: Now regarding your decision to go into the Vermont National Guard, what compelled you, when you were in high school, to join the National Guard?

AC: Well I had some friends that did that and it was a little extra source of money and we got to go to summer camp and that was kind of fun. It was kind of, in a way, it was like a social group for us.

SM: Was your family supportive of this?

AC: Yes.

SM: Did your father serve in the military as well?

AC: My father was too young for the First World War and too old for the Second World War, but he was very supportive. My whole family was. We’d just gotten over the Second World War and barely gotten over Korea when I went in the National Guard in 1954. It was just a thing, being raised in Vermont. It’s just the thing to do. Everybody who is able goes into the service. And a very high number stay in the service and make it a career because there’s no employment there and they have to go elsewhere. It just seems that the military fits the bill for most of us.

SM: Okay. You’re basic training at Ft. Benning, you mentioned in the questionnaire that it was much less structured than it is today. You were actually trained by the 3rd infantry division. Now what kind of training did they focus on when you were in basic training? Was it just the physical aspects, physical training? Did they get into any kind of patrolling techniques, or things like that, things like that would be useful later? What was the primary focus?

AC: Well, in those days, see we were trained by the NCOs from a unit of the 3rd Infantry Division and a lot of these guys, they were good soldiers. They were not necessarily good teachers, but we…and it was kind of a lax time, you know. Korea was over, there weren’t any wars going on at the moment, and so it was kind of different. Of course the big thing was the M-1 rifle. Everything we did seemed to revolve around the rifle. We got very little training in the way of first aid, CBR, Chemical Biological Radiational training. We learned drill and ceremonies, you know. That was pretty important. Things like military courtesy, how to wear the uniform and beyond that we did not receive that much training. A lot of physical training. We went on road marches. We did lots of push ups.

SM: Which you mention as the primary form of discipline slash punishment when you were in basic training.
AC: Right, right. Yes. And we were generally left on our own after 5 o’clock unless we had night training which we didn’t have very much of that.

SM: What kind of night training did you do?

AC: I really don’t recall. Well, like for instance bivouac, of course we were out there for several days. We might have gone to see a demonstration or two at night, but nothing serious.

SM: Did they do any live fire exercises with you?

AC: Yes. When we went through the infiltration course we had to crawl under barbed wire and they fired live ammunition over our heads.

SM: Wow. And this was what, a…

AC: I know it was because you could see the tracers.

SM: Oh yeah, right. What weapon did they use? Was it a .50 cal?

AC: No, I think it was more…I think it was probably a .30 caliber.

SM: .30 caliber, wow. I’m sure that still got your attention.

AC: Yeah, it does. And then they had these mines blowing up all over the place. It was kind of different. It was interesting.

SM: Did they have the grenade thrower? Did you practice with live grenades?

AC: Yes. We practiced with live grenades but there were no grenade launchers then.

SM: You mentioned also that the NCOs that trained you in basic training were primarily Korean war veterans. Did they talk about their experiences in the Korean War, lessons that they learned in combat? Did they try to impart anything like that in the training?

AC: No. In fact, very little mention of the Korean War.

SM: Did you find that odd at times?

AC: A lot of them had 3 or 4 rows of ribbons. Most of them had the combat infantryman’s badge, so we know they were there but they never really talked about it. They never related our training to Korea.

SM: Okay, so you moved from Ft. Benning to Ft. Bliss for you Nike Ajax missile training and you were a Nike Ajax missile mechanic?

AC: Yes.

SM: Could you explain a little bit about the Nike Ajax system? What kind of missiles were they and what was the primary…
AC: It was a surface to air missile, it’s now obsolete. We don’t have them anymore. It was a surface to air missile and my training consisted of learning to assemble and disassemble the missile, to arm it, disarm it, fuel it, unfuel it.

SM: What kind of fuel did it use? Was it liquid or solid fuel propelled?

AC: [The booster used solid propellant and the missile used a liquid fuel.] Well, you know, let me back up because there were two or three different missiles. That one had a solid propellant as I remember now, but outside of the two months that I spent in that school I never really worked with it. After that I was assigned to a missile unit. You know, we’d go out there and wipe down the missiles and pick up all the trash and stuff but we never really…

SM: Never actually worked on it?

AC: No. [In fact, I never even saw one fired during my first tour.]

SM: Wow, okay.

AC: And then a short time after that they were phased out. I was more of a duty soldier during the rest of that tour. Guard, KP, that sort of thing.

SM: What kinds of war heads would they put on those missiles? Were they primarily conventional or did they also have nuclear war heads for those?

AC: No, that one did not have a nuclear capability. It was conventional.

SM: And so you weren’t really able to develop any kind of an assessment on that missile system? How easy it was to maintain or anything like that?

AC: Well, the unit I was in was, that unit developed a procedure to make that missile [semi-] mobile so we could pick up and move somewhere fairly easy. [Everything was moved on trucks and trailers.] But it was never tested in combat, [to my knowledge].

SM: How would you move it?

AC: Yeah, they have a series of these rails, you know, you hook them together. They’re easy to disassemble and throw them in the back of a truck. The missile itself was on a trailer but and then they had these big vans where they had all the electronic components which could be towed. Have to tow them very slowly, but they could be towed.

SM: Okay, and you wouldn’t be able to take them over rough terrain, then?

AC: Not very rough, no, because everything’s very sensitive.

SM: Wow, so it wasn’t really all that conducive to the combat environment it doesn’t seem then?
AC: No, but they were, at the same time they were developing lots of new stuff, some of which is still in existence today.

SM: Let’s see. You mention that by the time you had gone to Vietnam and was asking about how your training in your earlier experiences prepared you for Vietnam, you mentioned that you felt like you were pretty well prepared since you had spent time with an infantry unit. You mentioned Panama, and also 8 months of Vietnamese language experience. How did that compare with your fellow soldiers? Did they share that kind of preparation, and it seems that almost confidence, going to Vietnam that you felt?

AC: Well let me back up here just a little bit. I went to Panama and I was stationed over there for a little over two years. I went over there in January of ’64 and by this time Vietnam was starting to build up and so all of our training over there was in the jungle anyway, but then since Vietnam was building up it was all geared toward Vietnam. So we were either in the jungle being trained or we were detailed to assist others. For instance, we would support the Special Forces when they were training people.

SM: Down in Panama?

AC: Uh huh. For a long time there they were bringing officers and NCOs who were in route to Vietnam, they would route them through Panama for a short course at the jungle school and then we would support that. I was usually an aggressor.

SM: Okay, OP-4 or aggressors? Yeah, okay.

AC: And so we had a lot of that. We spent a lot of time in the jungle. You live that life and you get used to it and you learn to survive and get along.

SM: And that was good training, especially in preparation for Vietnam?

AC: Oh yeah, it was. Yeah. We got to fire all our weapons every year and practice jungle techniques; patrolling and that sort of thing.

SM: Did you go through survival training while you were there as well?

AC: Yes. At that time if you were assigned to a unit there you were required to go through the jungle school each year, so each year we went to a two week course (on survival).

SM: What was the most difficult part of that?

AC: I would say learning to use a map and a compass. And the reason I say that, you can step off a road, go 25 feet into the jungle and you can become completely disoriented. So you really have to learn to rely on a map and a compass. That’s probably the most difficult
thing. Well, that and the heat. Didn’t see too many snakes, didn’t have to worry about that but
mosquitoes were a big problem. Not in the Canal Zone. They had that pretty well controlled,
but just learning to cope with the heat and trying to maintain your location. Big challenges.

SM: And that helped you in Vietnam, then?

AC: Well, yes and no. I worked on a job in Vietnam where I dealt with maps all the
time but I was not out there in the jungle. See, I worked on a division tactical operations center.
But yes, we dealt with maps so I was well prepared when I got there. But I also had another
advantage in that I went to Vietnamese language training at Ft. Bliss, Texas for 8 months before
I went to Vietnam so I already had a lot of insight on the people, the language, the culture, the
customs. Not so much on food, but we had…our teachers were all, they were the sons and
daughters of the people who had fled Vietnam in 1954. Their families went to France, so these
teachers were raised in France. Some of them were born in France. They were all well
educated. Most of them had college or were already working on a Ph.D. maybe, trying to get
some money ahead and this was a good opportunity for them to visit the United States and earn
some money and continue on with their education.

SM: And you found that when you got to Vietnam what they had taught you was good, it
was accurate, it was helpful?

AC: I’m glad you asked. Okay, I have several things to say about that. Yes, I had some
background there and I could communicate basic things. But, after a week of processing in
Saigon, they put me on a C-130 and sent me up north and more processing, then I caught a
helicopter and went back south a ways to Ban Me Thuot and when I got off there at East Field it
was not a soul around. I was all by myself except for some Montagnards and then this jeep
pulled up. It was an American lieutenant with a Vietnamese driver, so the lieutenant asked me
where I was going and I showed him my orders and he said, ‘Well go ahead and get in this jeep,’
and he said, ‘and my driver will take you where you need to go.’ So here’s this guy, you know,
got a South Vietnamese uniform and everything and so I tried using my best Vietnamese and he
looked at me and said, ‘Come on man, give me a break! Speak English!’ You see, a lot of these
interpreters got paid extra money. Well, if we spoke the language very well then they wouldn’t
need them, right? They’d be cut out of their extra money and they’d have to go fight the war.

So it was kind of interesting and I worked in the 23rd ARVN division headquarters where we had
a bunch of interpreters and we really didn’t have to speak Vietnamese because for the most part they spoke English quite well.

SM: But this was in 1968?

AC: ’68, uh huh.

SM: Before we get into your Vietnam experience, a couple of real quick questions about some of the last things you said about basic training. You mentioned the humorous story about the sergeant who charged you off of the buffer. Did y’all get your money back?

AC: I don’t recall. I don’t think so because we found out about that deal the day we were supposed to leave and I think he might have indicated or one of his cohorts might have indicated that, ‘Well, yeah, if you pursue that though we’ll have to hold you here,’ you know, and nobody wanted to stay.

SM: Oh yeah. And one last thing about enforcing discipline in basic training. Of course one of the things that you hear, especially when you see multiple generations of veterans talking, you know, the younger generation with the older generation, the older generation’s perspective is, ‘Oh when I was in, it was a lot harder, they were a lot meaner,’ and of course when you see some popular pictures of basic training or boot camp in the Marine Corps in the 1950’s and ’60s it’s a pretty violent place. It seems like your experience was pretty absent, it was with absence of violence. There wasn’t a lot of slapping or hitting or fighting or anything like that as far as the NCOs to the trainees.

AC: No, there was none of that but when you talk about discipline, we were disciplined in different ways like I remember a young man who was caught chewing gum in a formation and they made him put the gum on the end of his nose and he had to run up and down the street with his rifle over his head shouting, ‘I will not chew gum in ranks!’ I guarantee you, that cured everybody. It never happened again.

SM: So they didn’t have to hit you, they would punish you in other ways?

AC: No. Maybe, ‘Go dig a hole under the barracks,’ or something. But it takes one person to do that and the rest of them to see that. They’re not going to make that same mistake.

SM: Okay, interesting. Regarding your early perspectives, I guess when you had a 3 year period where you were in the Army, I guess some of that time spent in Panama, between 1965 and 1968 when you actually went to Vietnam. What were you hearing about Vietnam?
What were you learning about Vietnam in terms of what was going on in the war, what the war was about, so that when you finally were sent to Vietnam in 1968, what were your expectations?

AC: Well, it depended on who you listened to. If you listened to soldiers who’d returned, I didn’t hear the bad stuff. We heard all the bad stuff from all the protestors. I got lots of mixed messages there.

SM: What were the soldiers saying that were coming back from Vietnam?

AC: Well they, you know, they would explain how…see, the ones that I knew were not all in these combat units and a lot of them were advisors, so it’s a different deal when you’re an advisor. You know, they would see some combat but it’s not like some guy in an infantry division who’s out there for a whole year sleeping in the mud and what not.

SM: Did you remember what their reactions were regarding their interactions with the South Vietnamese, with South Vietnamese military officials? Of course, one of the stereotypes of the Vietnam War is this, the ARVN commanders that don’t want to engage the enemy.

AC: Well that’s true. I learned about that after I went to Vietnam and I remember an advisor really mad at his counterpart because he had intelligence that would indicate the enemy over here and when he presented that to his counterpart, his Vietnamese counterpart said, ‘No, we’re not going over there. We’re going over here.’ So there was some of that, but please, don’t misunderstand me. There were lots of very, very fine…our Vietnamese counterparts were super. They were really good.

SM: Now, but the perspectives, the attitudes that were related to you by advisors coming back from Vietnam before you went, were they all pretty positive?

AC: For the most part. But I just can’t think of any instances off-hand, but just in the back of my mind I would say they were mostly favorable.

SM: Now again, before you went to Vietnam, you went in June of 1968. That’s when you went to Vietnam the first time?

AC: Yes.

SM: A lot of interesting events occurred between November and December of 1967 and June of 1968, in particular of course in late 1967 General Westmoreland and a number of other military officials came out with some messages to the United States, to the American people, and to politicians that, ‘Hey, this war is going to be won. It’s going to be won soon.’ You know, the light at the end of the tunnel so to speak and then of course the surprise of TET in early 1968 and
then before you went, President Johnson’s decision not to run for reelection and when all that
came together how much were you aware of it in terms of I guess you were still in Panama at the
time?
AC: Let’s see, ’67?
SM: Late ’67, early ’68?
AC: I was in language school.
SM: So you were in the United States so you were probably getting lots of information.
How did that affect your perspective about going to Vietnam, especially the decision of President
Johnson not to run for reelection?
AC: Well, it didn’t concern me at all because I was destined to go to Vietnam, and
especially as a career soldier that was the thing for me to do, to go get some combat time. So I
never paid any attention to that and I really don’t know much of it and what I saw on the 6
o’clock news, you know. And again, I have a distrust of the media anyway but that really didn’t
concern me. That didn’t bother me at all.
SM: Speaking of the media, a lot of controversy about the Vietnam war because of the
type of media coverage that occurred. In particular, of course, actually viewing on television
combat, scenes of combat. What did you think of that? Did you think that was appropriate?
Now having grown up as part of the World War II generation, you’re pretty young during World
War but certainly during Korea. I’m sure you remember news coverage of Korea. What did you
think about the way things were happening in terms of the media coverage as a soldier?
AC: Well, a lot of it was good but then we find out too, you know, there were reporters,
for instance, that were stationed in Saigon. Some of them never left Saigon, and yet they’re
writing like they’re in the combat zone. Well, they were using file film, file pictures, and I don’t
know. I’ve heard a lot of stories about that. Then again, there were some good ones, too, so you
know.
SM: Do you think that, as an example of poor media coverage or inappropriate media
coverage, that there should perhaps be a degree of censorship in wartime? Do you think that
might be a lesson that we can draw from Vietnam, that you shouldn’t just have absolutely open
media coverage and that the government should publicly restrict certain things?
AC: Well I’m sure Iraq welcomed Peter Arnett with open arms because…and I think
there’s a reason the hotel where he reported, the rooftop that he reported from, was protected for
a reason; because Iraq was getting all this good information from Peter Arnett and CNN. I think there needs to be censorship. Definitely needs to be censorship. A lot of people won’t agree with that, but I think it’s a very necessary part of war.

SM: Okay, so now you go into Vietnam, you’re in defense language, or you’re taking Vietnamese language classes and I was curious because you mention that you felt good about going to Vietnam, you know, it would be good for your career as a career NCO…

AC: It was a necessary…

SM: Right, a necessary satisfaction.

AC: The way that I saw it.

SM: Other NCOs were getting combat experience, so to be competitive in that environment, you need to go yourself. No fear of death or maiming?

AC: Never thought about it, it just never occurred to me.

SM: And did you know, when you found out you were going to Vietnam, that you were going in an advisory capacity?

AC: Uh huh.

SM: Okay.

AC: But we had our orders probably a month before we left language school, so it wasn’t like I just got my orders and jumped on the airplane and went, you know. I had some advanced warning.

SM: And how old were you when you went to Vietnam? Do you remember? 1967, you were born in’36, so yeah, okay, you were in your early 30s.

AC: Which was old.

SM: Yes.

AC: The majority of them are quite young, you know, early 20’s.

SM: 18, 19, 20, right. You described your, or you listed, your assignments. First assignment was part of the MACV advisory team 33 at Ban Me Thuot and you were assistant operations NCO, 23rd ARVN division.

AC: I worked in the division tactical operations center.

SM: Could you describe basically what your role was and how you interacted with the Vietnamese soldiers?

AC: Well, we had, can I pull out this picture here?
SM: Oh, absolutely.

AC: Let’s see, I need to organize a little better. Here’s where I worked the first time, the first few months I was there. You have to understand that up until TET of 1968, they didn’t have any bunkers here in [Ban Me Thuot], and so when TET happened they threw this one up in a hurry, and what’s interesting is that as time went on this thing started to settle. I have to tell you a cute little story here, but I will not mention the gentleman’s name because he might…he’s still alive.

SM: Okay.

AC: But inside this bunker there were big I beams to hold up all the weight, but they were settling down and one day this colonel was bent over something right underneath one of these beams and the phone rang and the sergeant answered the phone and the colonel said, ‘Who is it, sergeant?’ And the sergeant said, ‘It’s for you, sir. It’s II Corps.’ And he shot straight up and knocked himself out! Well colonel, I apologize if I embarrassed you, but that’s a true story. But anyway, but inside here we had all the maps of our area and one over 50,000 and we took telephonic reports and radio reports from all the advisors in our region. We posted maps, we kept logs of everything, we requested support. Let’s say that one of our districts needed artillery support, we could get that for them. But, before they could start firing artillery we had a laundry list of things we had to check like make sure there were no friendly troops in the area, no civilians, no objects of a religious or cultural nature. There were probably 12 or 15 different things, so we spent a lot of time getting clearances for artillery, for tactical air support, for B-52 strikes. We requested medevacs for units out in the field. We just took care of a lot of problems like that.

SM: The restrictions or the having to receive these authorizations, would they make your missions more difficult and was it trying sometimes?

AC: Well, they were time consuming. You know, sometimes if you have a unit that’s getting shot at, they want help right now, and sometimes you just can’t do that. You have to get these clearances. The Vietnamese side of the house had to get clearances, and then we had to get clearances on our side.

SM: And they were the same clearances, just from the different chains of command?

AC: Well, see, what we did, we kind of…what we did, we kind of…well the Vietnamese were supposed to do everything and what the advisors were supposed to do was to check to make sure that they were
doing things the way they were supposed to but oftentimes we ended up doing all of it which we
weren’t supposed to, but then if you have people out in the field that are getting hurt or need
help, sometimes you do what you have to do.
SM: Yes sir. And the units that you’re helping out in the field, these are all ARVN or
are they also ARVN and American?
AC: Well, they’re ARVN units with American advisors, MACV advisors with them.
SM: How many per company or platoon? How many American advisors, or would
they…
AC: Oh, with a…well that’s a good question. With a battalion there may be 3
Americans, 4 Americans.
SM: Okay, so not all that many?
AC: No.
SM: Were there ever any instances where you got a call for help, whether that be air
support, artillery support, where you weren’t able to get clearance because of one of those
restrictions?
AC: Oh yes. It happened frequently.
SM: Really?
AC: You had so many people running around out there in the jungle. We not only had
American units, Vietnamese units, but you know then you have Special Forces over here and
somebody else is doing something over there, and communications is a big problem. It’s
hopefully better now. I wish we’d had cell phones then. That would have been a nice
innovation. But communications was difficult there, number one because of the jungle canopy,
it eats up a lot of the radio signal and so sometimes you can get through and sometimes you
can’t. Land lines, oftentimes the enemy would cut the lines. Or, maybe you have a lightening
strike and burnt something up.
SM: When those incidences occur, were there ever times where you couldn’t bring in
artillery or air support because of religious objects, religious…
AC: Well, I don’t remember that one particularly but we had to ask.
SM: What was the most frequent problem as far as for getting clearance? Was it other
units in the area?
AC: Yes. Either Vietnamese or Americans or civilians.
SM: Or civilians? Did it cost people their lives, the inability to bring in this kind of support?
AC: I don’t know. I really don’t know.
SM: There must have been some tough decision making.
AC: Yes. You know, with the rules of engagement and all, there’s some pretty sticky times.
SM: What did you think about that while you were there? I mean, here you are, here are American soldiers fighting along side South Vietnamese soldiers trying to win a war and there are all these restrictions, all these rules, yet the Viet Cong, they don’t have any rules. The North Vietnamese soldiers who are fighting the south, they don’t have any rules.
AC: That’s an excellent point, but we have our guidelines that we have to go by and sometimes they don’t follow, like the Calley incident. We can’t have that, you cannot have that.
SM: Did you and your fellow advisors discuss these types of issues?
AC: No, not that I recall.
SM: And what about your ARVN counterparts? What did they think about rules of engagement and rules of war that seem, in some respect, to be a rather western phenomenon, especially chivalry and rules?
AC: Yeah, you know…sure. The Vietnamese have been under siege for 4,000 years you know? I mean, that’s all they know.
SM: China?
AC: Yeah. So it’s a difficult…but we had a lot of concepts that were hard for them to understand and they had a lot of concepts that were hard for us to understand.
SM: Did they ever display impatience with these rules that were pretty much set up by Americans? Did they ever display disgust?
AC: I think so. I can’t think of any particular incident, but yeah, they…I’m sure they were upset with us a lot of the time.
SM: Okay. Anything else that you want to add about your first experience with the 23rd ARVN division? Anything stick in your mind?
AC: After my first few months there we built a new division tactical operations center across the street and it was a beauty, but it took forever to build it and the reason was here we are during the rainy season. Well, they dug a hole in the ground and it filled up with water before
they could build anything. Every day they get the pumps out, pump the water out, but wait!

Come 12 o’clock their general took a two hour lunch. He couldn’t have any noise, so they would
turn the pumps off until 2 o’clock. Well guess what? The things filled back up with water
again! [This went on for over a month.] This went on for a long time before they finally got it
resolved and built the new operations center. But it was nice. We had everybody together in
there; Army, Air Force, South Vietnamese.

SM: Did those kinds of things happen a lot as far as the rather quirky desires or needs of
a particular Vietnamese officer?

AC: I’m sure they did. That’s the only one I can think of right offhand.

SM: Yeah, that’s kind of interesting. Anything else from your first tour with the 23rd?

AC: Let’s see. I didn’t show you these pictures here. Let’s see if there’s anything.

That’s from the back of our compound. This fellow here was one of our drivers. He was there at
Dien Bin Phu when it was overrun in 1954.


AC: Yeah. Notice his name? It’s not a Vietnamese sounding name. I often wondered
about that. He might be half French or something.

SM: Interesting.

AC: Here’s one of our medics. This is the compound where we lived and let’s see, this…

SM: Oh, that’s awfully nice.

AC: Oh yeah. Let me tell you about this place. I mean, everybody, especially among
protesters, you mention combat zone and you hear all these horror stories. Well let me tell you.

Here’s the front of this, the building on this side. This was the central building and looked like a,
you can’t tell with this gate here, but it looked like a big Swiss chalet.

SM: And this is a compound that was part of Bao Dai’s compounds?

AC: Exactly. Now, this walkway went across and then you have a smaller one here and
then a similar one on the other side. Well, in this main building, we used that for a movie
theater. We had movies at night. Didn’t have TV then. They did in Vietnam, but we could not
get TV in [Ban Me Thuot] and we didn’t have VCRs, another…we had a theater there and a little
library and then officers lived in these other ones here, and underneath we had some offices and
then a little PX. There’s another picture of the front of that.

SM: Wow, the grand bungalow?
AC: Yep. And another shot of it here.
SM: This looks like an SF guy here.
AC: Well, no, I don’t think he was. He was wearing a beret but I think he was with one of the other advisory units. And there’s another picture.
SM: This is a really nice looking compound. It’s very well maintained. Wow.
AC: Well now let me tell you about this place. This used to be a hunting camp that was owned by Bao Dai. People came from all over the world, dignitaries came from all over the world to go tiger hunting so they had elephants there and in the day they would ride out into the jungle and hunt tigers. Here’s one of our interpreters there in the operations center. This was outside the front gate. There was a big wall, and then they had a…well I’m sorry, it’s right there. And they used this to play soccer. Here’s where the enlisted folks lived. It looks kind of…these photographs look kind of bad, but I got these developed downtown and they used their chemicals over and over so they’re not always the best quality.
SM: Well, they’re pretty good. They’re clear.
AC: We call this fellow the friendly undertaker. He was a mortuary advisor for the Vietnamese.
SM: A mortuary advisor?
AC: Well, that’s what we called him. That may not be the proper title.
SM: What was his job? What was the purpose of…
AC: Well he, I don’t know. But they had a place where they took all the bodies…
SM: The Vietnamese bodies?
AC: Yeah, the South Vietnamese and a lot of them the cremated and some they sent home for burial.
SM: And this guy worked for mortuary affairs?
AC: Well, I don’t know. He was with Team 25, whatever they did. They advised on all kinds of things, probably more logistical type things.
SM: Seems kind of odd.
AC: I know.
SM: Interesting.
AC: Here’s a place we worked out of for a while. Here’s another picture of the grand bungalow. This young lady here used to work in the mess hall and that was okay, but then she
moved over to the officer’s club and her father made her shave her head because she’d brought
disgrace to the family. She’s wearing a wig here. That’s the significance behind that picture.

SM: What disgrace in particular had she brought? Just the fact that she worked there or
did she…

AC: Oh, it’s not very nice to go work in a club. You know, that’s number 10. Number
10.

SM: Yeah. But she seems to have taken it in stride.

AC: Oh yeah, well, she was making good money there, let’s face it.

SM: Was she married?

AC: I don’t think so. Here is the camp at [Duc Lop] which was over on the border and
you may or may not have heard of that. They had a big offensive there. This little camp, you
can’t see it in this picture but it was a triangular shaped compound. The morning after that
happened…well, let me back up a bit. Every afternoon at precisely 5 o’clock the Vietnamese
would fire from the Cambodian side. You could set your watch by it. Well everybody would
just go to the mess hall and say, ‘Oh, yeah, it must be time to eat. It’s 5 o’clock, let’s go eat.’
Well they never hit the place, but one afternoon they did and then they followed it up with a
ground attack. There were 3 camps involved. This one, the next morning, they got something
like 3 or 400 bodies hanging up on the wire around this compound. That battle went on for about
a month before it was entirely over. I got involved with that one mainly in the operations center
because I was working the radios, but I did get to go there to make a combat assault. Now, that
sounds like I really did something. All I did was go down there on a chopper with some fresh
troops and dropped off some rice and brought people back. That was my only combat assault.

That hole there in the roof is from enemy fire.

SM: What’s that building?

AC: That was where the advisors stayed.

SM: Was anybody injured in that assault or killed?

AC: Well, they weren’t all injured. I remember hearing over the radio, and I had this on
tape and my kids went and taped over it! But it was an advisor in a bunker in the center of this
little tiny little compound and he could only see straight out. But they had the Spooky aircraft
circling around and he asked them to drop another flare and the enemy was getting ready to crash
the front gate as I recall all this and so he asked Spooky to let them have it and they did with the
mini guns and I remember him saying, ‘Oh God dang it Spooky, you’re a guardian angel. We’ll remember you forever.’ In fact, that made the New York Times, too. And that was kind of dangerous. But the units that were there, the South Vietnamese, they were decimated. I mean, just hardly anybody left. And that’s just some of the surrounding countryside and that’s a picture of Ban Me Thuot downtown.

SM: And could you show me on the map, real quick, where this compound was? The compound that was assaulted. Was it near the Cambodian border?

AC: Yep.

SM: Hopefully it’s on there, might not be.

AC: Here it is, Duc Lap.

SM: Oh, okay.

AC: There were 3 camps there. One was Special Forces, one was South Vietnamese, and I’m not sure what the other one was, but every afternoon they fired from the other side of the border.

SM: In the middle of Duc Lap province?

AC: Uh huh. Let’s see, I don’t know what else to tell you about Ban Me Thuot at this point in time.

SM: Well we can move on because you had some experience next in Pleiku from ’72, July of ’72 to November of ’72?

AC: Well when I left (Pham ?)…

SM: What happened in the interlude from ’69 to ’70?

AC: I went to the University of Delaware and served on the ROTC there and I was an operations sergeant there.

SM: So you arranged for the ROTC cadet’s training?

AC: Uh huh. Well, in ROTC see the officers do all the formal instruction and the NCOs help with the field training and we assist the officers in any way we can. I know we go to summer camp and help train the cadets there. A nice assignment, and I really enjoyed Delaware. Super school there. Well then, in May of ’73 I left there and went back to Vietnam, and I was glad to go back to Vietnam because I knew what to expect there. While we were at Delaware, they had a lot of problems there. The SDS, Students for a Democratic Society, the Weathermen, and it was difficult for those of us in uniform. We couldn’t walk around the campus by
ourselves for fear of being attacked. Police department had the same problem, and we had a lot of protesters. One week they camped out in front of the ROTC building. They put up a parachute canopy and they had a big long table with peanut butter and jelly and lots of flies and a sign that said, ‘Food for the people,’ and these people didn’t even have anything to do with the university. One of the girls that stayed there, we found out later, was only 12 years old and then one week they all jumped in their vans and took off for Washington because there was a big protest there. Meanwhile the university sent a dump truck around and they scooped everything up and hauled it away. And another time, well just before I got there, they burned down the ROTC supply room. Burned up 4,000 uniforms! But that old colonel we had there, he didn’t bat an eye. He called up Ft. Dix and they delivered uniforms and issued them right off the back of the trailer truck, right by the schedule, right by the schedule. Said, ‘Issue uniforms at 10:00?’ ‘Yep, 10:00. Start issuing uniforms.’

SM: Wow, didn’t miss a beat?

AC: No, so we had some great folks there. We really enjoyed that. But then, back to Vietnam and this time I went to Pleiku. I was assigned to the II Corps headquarters there and initially they didn’t have a job for me because things were starting to wind down and everybody said, ‘Oh yeah, it’s going to end any minute now,’ and I had a lot of, there were a lot of folks who had gone back to the States on leave and on their way back maybe got as far as Hawaii and they pulled them off the plane and said, ‘No, you’re not going to Vietnam, you’re going somewhere else because they don’t need you there anymore.’

SM: What did you think about…here you went back in ’72, July of ’72?


SM: What did you think about going back given the change in leadership from, you know, presidential leadership from Johnson to Nixon, military leadership from Westmoreland to Abrams. What did you think about going back? Any different perspectives?

AC: Well, I never thought of it in those terms, you know, in terms of the leadership.

SM: What about the Vietnamization project and the process of turning the war over to the Vietnamese?

AC: Well, we were attempting to do that more and more and more because there were fewer of us and so the Vietnamese were going to have to take on more.

SM: Do you think that was a good policy?
AC: Oh sure, sure. That was one of the goals in the first place was to get them to do more (for themselves). When I went back they really didn’t have a job for me by the time I got there, so they put me in the II Corps G-2 shop for a while.

SM: Intelligence?

AC: Intelligence. I didn’t have any intelligence duty up there, just strictly administrative, but then when there was an opening for me I went to the G-3 which is where most of my experience is, anyway. So I worked there, but again I did administrative stuff there in the G-3 office. November and December of ’72 I went to G-3 air. Now, things got interesting. We had to step up bombing. I worked with the Army and the Air Force, and we were processing B-52 strikes, 30 or 40 of them a day so I spent all my time clearing targets. Well, each day the powers that be would have a meeting. They would come up with intelligence on possible targets and then we would have to clear those targets to see if we could strike them without violating anything. Then they would have a remaining out of the remaining…we might process 80 of them, and out of the remainder they might strike 30, 40, maybe only 20. But then they would decide which ones they wanted to strike and we also got a lot of tac air that came down from I corps because if they had bad weather and they couldn’t drop their ordinance they couldn’t land back on the ship with it so they would come down to our area so we were clearing those targets too.

SM: Targets of opportunity?

AC: Yes, a lot of them. We had free fire zones, too, where they could drop even without clearances.

SM: What did you think about that policy, the free fire zone?

AC: Well, you have an area that you know that, where there’s a lot of enemy activity going on, and you don’t have friendly civilians out there or military, why not? I think it’s great to have a place like that to use for emergencies. For instance, what would these jet fighters, for instance, do if they couldn’t drop their ordinance somewhere and drop it out in the ocean? You might as well put it where it’ll do some good. Or maybe a Spooky that has stuff to get rid of. They need a place to do that.

SM: But, of course, one of the controversial aspects of the war was the rather large refugee generation that occurred throughout the south.

AC: The what?
SM: The refugee generation, the generation of refugees. You know, the creation of some of these free fire zones resulted in a lot of people moving from their homes and in some instances some forced relocation and things like that. Did you and your ARVN counterparts ever discuss those types of issues?

AC: No.

SM: Or even with your American counterparts, the effects that some of these policies were having in country?

AC: No, well certainly never discussed it with counterparts but I really never thought about it that much. Pleiku, I’ve got some pictures here. These are not in any kind of order. The night before we left we had a party and this is the last of our stuff that we had there. I’m sorry, that’s not Pleiku. Let’s try this bunch. This dog, by the way, was our mascot and his name was Farto. He’d gotten blown up and lost his vocal cords and the only sound he ever made was when he passed gas, but he was an old dog. He would chase a jeep just like a dog here would chase a car barking at the wheels. Well, he went through the motions…

SM: He just didn’t make any sounds?

AC: But no sounds would come out.

SM: That’s a cute play on words.

AC: Oh, we worked with a great bunch of people over there. I have to tell you, back in your questionnaire you asked about drugs and stuff? Well I was very fortunate. I was never in one of those places. I know it went on, but I’m happy to say it didn’t go on where I was. If it did, I sure don’t know about it. I think you’ll find that was mostly in units where they didn’t have defined objectives and goals and weak leadership. But the ones we worked with, we were all older guys anyway, so drugs were not our thing. Alcohol, well, we’ll talk about that. But drugs, no. And all was not war.

SM: Are you speaking of alcohol?

AC: Yeah. I went to Nha Trang one time for 3 days when they decided I need a little break from the radios and whatnot.

SM: Beautiful place.

AC: Oh yeah. This was an old French hotel. Pleiku, here’s a picture looking out. If it wasn’t for this and this you’d probably think you were somewhere in Lubbock.

SM: Very flat.
AC: In fact, you’d look out there and expect to see Indians coming over the rise, but those weren’t Indians. They were [North] Vietnamese soldiers. This is a 122 millimeter rocket, one of the most feared weapons over there.

SM: And you mention in your questionnaire primarily because you never knew where it would land?

AC: That’s exactly right. They have a launcher for it which they can use to point it with some degree of accuracy, but normally the troops in the field jammed a couple of pieces of bamboo in the ground to make a cross and they just laid it in there (and fired it). The beauty of it to them was, you didn’t know where it was going to land. Now it’d be nice, you know, ‘Well let’s see. They fired tonight, they’re going to fire at those helicopters over there.’ You don’t know that. Yeah, they’d like to hit the helicopters, but it could very well hit over here, too. So that’s why it was so fearsome. Here’s a picture of the II Corps headquarters. Here’s another picture of it from a distance. This is a tiger. They shot it with a…

SM: A very large tiger!

AC: 40 millimeter grenade from a helicopter and they got in trouble, too. Even the Vietnamese got upset with that because there were only about 1,200 left.

SM: I was just going to say. Why did they do that?

AC: Who knows? But the government, I have to say one thing, the South Vietnamese took that and had it mounted.

SM: So they got upset, but then they mounted it anyway?

AC: Well, for whatever reason.

SM: Is this the young man that shot it?

AC: No, no. He and I worked together in the G-3.

SM: Beautiful animal.

AC: And there at Pleiku also, well here’s another shot looking out from the headquarters. I only saw one B-52 strike and that was one morning when I got off duty and they laid this B-52 strike right across this ridge over here. Well, it was so far away you couldn’t hear it but you could just see the earth erupting in a big cloud…it is fearsome.

SM: How far away was that do you think? About 20 miles?

AC: Oh, not that far.

SM: Maybe 10?
AC: It’s hard to tell. Maybe 4 miles, 3 or 4 miles.
SM: Oh, that close?
AC: Uh huh.
SM: Wow, okay.
AC: You know how they do the B-52 strikes?
SM: I’m a little bit familiar with them. Why don’t you tell us about it. Give me your experience with calling them in.
AC: I don’t think this is classified, but anyway when we cleared targets we cleared…like on your 1 over 50,000 map, 1 grid square wide and 3 grid squares long. But they fly 3 of those, they fly 3 aircraft, they fly 3 of those boxes but they kind of overlap so there’s one here, one here and one here. Now don’t ask me why they do that. Sometimes they vary from that. But when we cleared these targets we had to make sure there was nobody within that box and all the other normal things. But if you get people that get too close to this box right when it goes in, they just become vegetables. You could go back to a North Vietnamese soldier, I’ve had a lot of people tell me this, you could just go up to their most fearsome soldiers and just grab them and lead them away. So then what’s interesting is now you have all these big craters. When the enemy knew that we wouldn’t go back and bomb that anytime soon, so they’d move into those craters and camp out. Smart.
SM: Yeah. Very smart. Speaking of that kind of activity, I take it that you learned of those types of things through certain intelligence sources.
AC: Well, friends and acquaintances.
SM: When you, for the small period of time that you did work in the G-2 shop, and for purposes of operations when you worked all those years in operations, did you find that the intelligence that you were receiving was good? Were you guys getting good intelligence to conduct the operations? Was it adequate? Was it okay? Was it lacking at times?
AC: Well I think, for the most part, we had good intelligence but then it’s up to the commander what he does with it and then you’ll find a lot of combat commanders that don’t really always trust the intelligence people. So, they get an Intel estimate and he says, ‘No, I don’t trust that. We’re going to do something else.’ That’s just people. But we have a lot of means for intelligence, aside from people out on the ground who can observe what’s going on
and now we have so many sophisticated listening devices and aerial this and satellite that, it’s pretty fascinating.

SM: Yes sir, it certainly is.

AC: Here’s where I lived when I was stationed there in Pleiku, right there. This building had been hit before I got there, that’s why the new group got there. Here’s where the main compound was. This is where the officers and high ranking civilians lived. These buildings…this compound was built by the French. But, nice looking landscaping. A very nice place. Interesting point here in this one…no, you can’t see it too well. I was looking for a better one, but in 1965 when the North Vietnamese attacked that place, they set up machine guns on either end of these walkways, and when the stuff started people rushed out of their rooms and they just got chopped up. So what they did after that, they built these concrete little, I don’t know what you want to call them, but they were about this high and this thick and so one would come out from the building so far and then they’d have one from the edge of the sidewalk that came in so they couldn’t just shoot down the whole deal, and you could come out and kind of weave in and up and get where you had to go.

SM: Smart.

AC: One year, I don’t know what year that was, they built an Olympic sized swimming pool for the troops and that same week the North Vietnamese lobbed a mortar right in the middle of that thing and cracked it. Here’s a guy I worked with and his interpreter. Here’s another picture from Pleiku looking out away from the headquarters.

SM: Now is it, in the picture it looks kind of dry. Is that just a by-product of the photography?

AC: It was that time of the year. They have a dry season, too.

SM: Of course the cloud cover looks like it’s bringing in a storm, but I was just curious.

AC: It may have been. And I did see snow there once at Pleiku.

SM: Snow, in Pleiku?

AC: We had guard and we had snow flurries, and I had everything on that I could put on. It was cold. But we were expecting something to happen so all of us were on guard that night and I’m not just imagining this because I was tired. We actually had snow flurries.

SM: Wow, that is amazing. A rather strange question; you mentioned the landscaping. This place looks so well manicured. How did they manicure their lawns?
AC: Well, I never saw a lawn mower. Every time I saw one of the Vietnamese workers [they were squatted down using machetes to cut the grass]. They squat down to do everything. Well they didn’t care, they get paid by the hour right? So they didn’t care if it takes all day, he’s making money.

SM: We visited Vietnam two years ago, a group of graduate students. I was among them and of course the countryside there’s water buffalo eating the grass everywhere so I was just wondering if there were any kind of animals that grazed?

AC: We didn’t have any animals there other than some mangy looking dogs, but no. No pigs or sheep or cows or anything like that.

SM: Now from November of ’72, January of ’73, MACV, II Corps, Pleiku, operations. Anything, any major operations you were a part of?

AC: Well November and December and January when we had the stepped up bombing. So that’s the only major thing that I was involved in there. But, when they signed the cease fire on the 30th of January we had a meeting that morning and the general got up there on the stage and it was…no, he announced that they had reached an agreement and of course there were people from the press there and they asked him how he felt now that we had the agreement, and he said, ‘Well, until the President tells me otherwise, they’re still my enemy.’ Words to that effect. Well that day we split up into teams and we went to…the team I was on was at Phan Thiet which was down on the coast. We were told to be at the chopper pad in front of headquarters at 1 o’clock, bag and baggage ready to go, and transportation would pick us up there to take us down to the airfield. Well, we had friends who had jeeps so we got them to just take us straight to the airfield and after we got to the airfield we found out that a round had hit right near that chopper pad. If we’d have been standing there, we might have been injured.

SM: Or killed.

AC: So that day we went to Phan Thiet and we moved into an old hotel that had been owned by the French.

SM: This is the day after the cease fire, or the day…

AC: Same day. The 30th.

SM: The day of the cease fire?

AC: Yeah, the 30th of January.
SM: And this whole bombing campaign, this was part of the Christmas bombing, during the Paris peace talks, and then eventually the negotiation, the settlement that was signed. The Paris Peace Accords.

AC: Right. Now we got to Phan Thiet and I think there may have been as many as, I’m going to say 85. I really couldn’t corroborate that one way or the other. But we moved into this hotel and then they…well, we were to become part of the 4 Power Joint Military Commission whose job it was to get the North Vietnamese, the VC, the South Vietnamese, and the Americans to talk to each other. Lots of luck! Now, there were 2 different, additional countries represented on the enemy side and two more on our side. We had the Canadians and I think it was the Indonesians on our side, and the Hungarians and another group with the enemy’s and I can’t remember who they were. I think they were Polish. And so they had their own hotel. It was just Americans in our hotel. But, on the 4th floor we had a mess hall where everybody came to eat and after about a week…sorry, I lost my train of thought there. Let me think about that for a second.

SM: While you’re thinking about that, could you show me where Phan Thiet is?

AC: Yes. It is down here. Here’s Phan Ran…there it is, right there. Right on the coast. Okay, after about a week, though, there were only 895 of us left in country in which there were about 85 of us in our team and when we first went there each day as they moved Americans out, we’d send a helicopter to each of the nearby camps and get all their food that they had left, and then after that we were on our own. We didn’t have any source of supply. We couldn’t call up Saigon and say, ‘Hey, send us up a truck load of this or a plane full of that,’ so we got a lot of our food from the local economy. We even had a fisherman who brought us shrimp and lobster. The thing I remember about those shrimp, the first time we had shrimp, three shrimp without the heads or tails filled a dinner plate. Humongous, and one day he brought a lobster. He came running over to the compound. He was about 45 years old and had fished all his life like his father before him. He said it was the biggest lobster he’d ever seen, and our colonel bought it from him and he was going to have it mounted and I could not find that picture to bring with me, but the body of it…he had a mahogany plaque about this high when it was resting on the ground and the antena stuck up probably this much further so I don’t know how he got it home. Well, while we were there they had to have a place for these delegations to meet and they had to have three delegation houses. They all had to be identical, and we had a little problem there because
in one of the buildings they had a big, long, rectangular table. Another one had a oval shaped

table. Another one had two square tables butted together. All the chairs were different. It took

about a month to get furniture that was identical to each building. You could not have…in other

words, everything had to be identical. There could not be any meeting until that was

accomplished.

SM: And that was part of this notion that everybody has to have an equal…is the

equality issue the face issue?

AC: Right. Your chair can’t be higher than mine because that would make you better

than me.

SM: You can’t sit at the head of the table because that means you’re in charge.

AC: Right, right. So finally they’ve got the meetings started…

SM: After they got all the right furniture.

AC: Yeah, yeah it took a while. I got to go to one of the delegations. We had a liaison

officer whose job it was to go around to the delegations and deliver messages and pick up

messages and whatever and he asked me if I wanted to go along. So we went to one of the

deleagations and had a North Vietnamese soldier out there with a big, long, raggedy coat.

Looked like a Russian coat really. Well he had to go call his sergeant, and that sergeant had to

call the lieutenant, the lieutenant had to call the captain. Well, we finally got in there and sat

around this table and the liaison officer introduced me because they hadn’t seen me before. Then

they went through this ritual where we had to drink tea and they passed around these North

Vietnamese cigarettes. God, they were ghastly, taste of smoke but we had to do it or we might

offend someone. So, we did that and then the captain passed the message to the delegation chief

and then he looked at it and then he as much said, ‘Well thank you very much. Now get the hell

out of here,’ after all that ritual we went through.

SM: So what was the result of this, the four Power Joint Military Commission at Phan

Thiet? The goal was to bring all four sides together to…

AC: To come to some agreement.

SM: To come to some agreement. Just concerning that particular province?

AC: No, the country.

SM: The country? This was the…

AC: This was on a national level.
SM: Yeah, this was the big meeting.

AC: We were one of seven different regions and they had their main headquarters in Saigon, but the ultimate goal was to come to some national agreements.

SM: And the end result was?

AC: We left there on the 30th of March of ’73 and nothing had been agreed to yet. Now, near the end of that thing…oh wait a minute. When they brought the North Vietnamese delegates, they flew down there and they landed on…okay, they were supposed to land on this hill top over here and they didn’t want to do that. They wanted to land over here. Well, at the time of the cease fire, and see this was under our control, they wanted to land over here so they could say…well, this over here was under our control, too, but they wanted to be able to say it was under their control. Political thing. So, after a lot of contact back and forth from Saigon, they got permission to land where they wanted to land so we sent helicopters out there. I didn’t go. I wish I had, but I didn’t. But, on the agreement, our helicopters had to be unarmed, our people had to be unarmed which is scary. So they land out there in this clearing and then the North Vietnamese came out into the clearing and they’d brought their families with them.

SM: How about their weapons? Were they armed?

AC: No weapons.

SM: They weren’t armed, either.

AC: No weapons. They motioned for the Americans to follow. Of course, we had some interpreters. So they go back in the jungle and there was a little house back there, no windows, just a little…from the pictures I saw probably as big as this. So they went in, they introduced everybody and sat down at a table and they exchanged gifts, little flags and they smoked the nasty cigarettes. All their family members are looking through the windows. Then they all went out and got on the helicopters and they brought them back to Phan Thiet. Then they weren’t too happy because we kept them at the airport, at the airfield. They were upset about that because they said, ‘Well this is our home country and we want to go visit some relatives downtown,’ but the Americans were afraid to let them go for fear of reprisals. Touchy situation.

SM: These are northern…

AC: North Vietnamese (delegation members).

SM: North Vietnamese that are now in the south visiting, correct? And they actually thought that it would be safe for them to walk around amongst the South Vietnamese people?
AC: You know, that’s interesting. I don’t know if they would have worn their uniforms. Maybe they would have gone in civilian clothing, but I don’t know. We took them to Saigon one day for a meeting.

SM: There’s quite a little air field here at Phan Thiet.

AC: Oh no, that’s at Saigon.

SM: Oh this is Saigon, okay. Tan Son Nhut.

AC: You know, I don’t remember exactly where we did land. It probably was Ton San Nhut. On the way down there we were told we were forbidden not to take pictures. Well, this many years later I think I’m safe. But I was sitting behind this gentleman here and I took his picture. I’m sure they sneaked a few pictures.

SM: Oh of course, of course. Now what was the significance of the arm bands that they’re wearing in this picture?

AC: That identified the wearer as a member of the 4 Power Joint Military Commission, and that badge I gave you, that’s the other ID that goes with that. I was going to give you my orange arm band and I cannot find that rascal.

SM: Oh no.

AC: See, we had them on our vehicles, too. Here’s some of the meeting houses. These 2, I guess 3 of them are in there.

SM: You’re on the coast, that’s nice.

AC: This is a funeral procession we were looking out of the window from our place. If you looked across the street, right over here at this building, Ho Chi Minh went to school there as a child. I guess that’s a duplicate there. Here’s a good picture of the meeting houses. Another picture at the airfield. That’s just some extraneous. I started to show you earlier, I have a bunch of pictures of flowers and things. Everybody expects to see all this stuff shot up, but there’s a lot of beautiful things there, too. This fellow, by the way, there’s a man in a pit below and they’re cutting boards with this cross cut saw to make coffins with. Yeah, he was the local coffin maker.

SM: Oh wow. That’s very interesting.

AC: Okay, let’s see.

SM: What kind of wood would they generally use for that? Do you know?

AC: I really don’t know.
SM: Of course when we think of wood coffins, pine, but there’s not a whole lot of pine around there.

AC: In Ban Me Thuot it was probably a hard wood of some sort, but I’m not sure exactly what. But they had some beautiful pine forests at Da Lat. You went to Da Lat?

SM: Yes, yes. Way up in the mountains.

AC: Let’s see. What else can I tell you about the four powers? We left there on the 30th of March. All the Americans had to be gone by the 30th of March. There might have been some embassy people left in country, but the rest of us had to be gone. That was a very interesting morning. That was a very sad morning. This lady here, I loved that lady. She was really a character. She spoke French, English, and Vietnamese. She worked for the Americans for 11 years and that was her livelihood.

SM: This was a mamason woman?

AC: She worked in the mess hall, and not only that she raised pigs so she used to take all the garbage to feed her pigs. She got shot in the leg by an American captain in the hotel with an unloaded weapon. Here’s a dummy captain shot her in the leg. I mean, it was an accident, but you know. And she stayed there. Even so, she stayed. Well anyway, altogether there were probably 25 of the Vietnamese workers there, you know, the mess hall folks and the ones that took care of the rooms and maintenance man and whatnot. But we left that morning. They were all in tears because there was nobody else to hire them. They’re out of a job, out of a livelihood.

SM: What about fear of what was coming in terms of without the Americans there, the possibility that not only is their employment ending but their way of life once the North Vietnamese take over.

AC: When I was in Pleiku, Mr. Long who worked for us, he was a sergeant but we called him Mr. Mr. Long, super fellow, and he spoke very excellent English and French and Vietnamese and he used to talk about that and he said, ‘Yeah,’ he said, ‘After you leave,’ he said, ‘All of us that worked for the Americans, well, we’re going to have a rough time,’ and he said, ‘I don’t expect to live after they round everybody up.’ That morning then we loaded up on the trucks. Boy, lot of boo-hooing going on. Some of the soldiers there had girlfriends in the group I guess. They were going (starts sniffling). Then we went to the airfield and the Province Chief, I can’t remember his name, but he’d been educated at Harvard. Spoke beautiful English, and he had a very nice speech. They had the school kids out there and each class has a different uniform
so it’s kind of colorful and they’re all lined up and then they sang for us and they had the military band and they had the little school kids come out and give each of us a little thing of candy.

Well, meanwhile way down the valley, so far away you couldn’t hear it, you began to see these puffs of smoke. You knew what it was, artillery fire, mortar fire, whatever. It gradually kept creeping closer and three aircraft showed up to pick us up but one of them had a problem and then all three of them returned to the base to get repairs.

SM: These were the caribous?

AC: Yes. So meanwhile, about every half hour or so, ‘Boom!’ Some of our guys really getting nervous. The Vietnamese said, ‘Don’t worry. That’s just Charlie’s way of saying goodbye and he’s not going to hurt you because he doesn’t want you to come back.’ We never did really get close enough where you could hear it before the planes came back and then we went to Bien Hoa. I think it was and they already had all our stuff processed and all we had to do, we waited around for a couple of hours, drank up all the rest of the booze that was left in the clubs. The mess hall over here was kind of interesting. There were Vietnamese that had stormed the gate and crashed the mess hall and they were stealing furniture out of there.

SM: This is in Bien Hoa?

AC: Uh huh. And then they took us to the planes and we went back to the States. Boy, it was quiet on that plane I’m going to tell you. We got to Travis and the day before was the day (after) they had brought the POWs back. Well they had a big thing for them which I’m glad they did. They didn’t have anything for us, but there was still banners flapping in the breeze. We didn’t even have any protesters. Everybody just left there. We just all went our way. A lot of them, of course when you come back (from Vietnam) they would take you to Oakland (for processing) and give you a new uniform and a steak dinner, but most of us just took a bus and went straight on our own and went straight to the airport in LA and took off from there.

SM: And you got a 30 day leave when you got back in country?

AC: Oh I probably did. I don’t really…yeah, I think I probably did. I’m trying to think…where’d I go from there? ’73…oh, yeah, I went back to El Paso and my next assignment was at Ft. Jackson, South Carolina but I didn’t take the family right away because we wouldn’t have quarters for 6 months. So, I went over there by myself and anyway, back to Pleiku huh?

SM: Your last days.

AC: We had a…
SM: These are Pleiku or Phan Thiet?

AC: Excuse me, Phan Thiet. I bought these two Buffies (ceramic elephants). They were
10 bucks for the pair.

SM: Wow, okay, these are the ceramic elephants that you were talking about? The
souvenirs that you brought back?

AC: One of them got destroyed in transit, but I still had one of them.

SM: Boy, they are beautiful.

AC: Oh, they’re gorgeous. Here’s another picture of the place where Ho Chi Minh went
to school. Right beside that is a building that the French used. Their G-2 section used to
interrogate prisoners there. According to the Vietnamese, now I don’t know if this is true or not,
they said the French would interrogate these people and if they died they would dissolve them in
acid and wash them out in the ocean. Scary. But the Vietnamese would not walk on that side of
the street. When they get close to that building they’d come over to this side of the street until
they got past and then come back over here. Maybe there’s something to it.

SM: Pretty strong taboo.

AC: Very. There’s another picture of our compound. We had this open area here and on
this side we had a volleyball court. We had international volleyball games every night. Well,
you couldn’t go downtown, so we’d have these international volleyball games. You know, the
Americans, the Czech, the Indonesians, the Poles, the Hungarians.

SM: That’s neat, yeah.

AC: So we had some neat games.

SM: The Vietnamese would play, too?

AC: They never did because most of them lived there so they were home with their
families. But for those of us who had to…we could go downtown, but we had to be back by 9
o’clock.

SM: Your curfew.

AC: Yeah. And there’s our party we had the last…

SM: This is the last night?

AC: The night before. And see, in the old days there in Vietnam, if you wanted
entertainment you could get anything you wanted. There’s an agency in Saigon that hooks you
up with a band, a singing group or whatever, and all they had left was this Vietnamese gal who
sang opera. Well, she lasted for about 5 minutes and I think they paid her not to sing.

SM: Poor woman!

AC: And I started to tell you earlier, while we were there at Phan Thiet I went up to, I
got to fly up to Pleiku one day. Went up there for a little liaison trip. This is the tower at the
field there at Pleiku, but when we got there which was in March of ’73 this had been blown up.
It was lying on the ground and there was grass coming up in the cracks in the tarmac. There was
grass as tall as this. Cows walking around the airfield. Way over here we drove around just for
the heck of it and the South Vietnamese had an aircraft going. Of course they were still fighting
the war. I started to take a picture and boy here came some military police from out of nowhere.
They were going to take my camera. I just took the film out and gave it to them, gave them a
pack of cigarettes, and they let me go. I don’t know what they would have done with me
anyway. Probably just wanted a little shake down, you know. We got to go to Da Lat one day.
Love that place. Went to this lovely little restaurant. It was run by some French nuns. Look at
this, real linen on the table, live lilies, real silverware with a beautiful view out the window, and
not this direction but I guess in the other direction though, solid poinsettia as far as you could
see, about this tall. So all was not…you know, mine was a little different war than for many.
But you have to understand too, you know, how many people were actually out there in the
trenches? I think we said it was more like 17 to 34 people in support for every guy out there in
the trenches. There are people who never got mud on their boots at all. You know, like at Ban
Me Thuot, you go out to the airfield at 7 o’clock in the morning. You think you’re in Hoboken
New Jersey. Here are all these commuters. I mean, they have nice, pressed fatigues on, shiny
boots, shiny rifle, carrying a briefcase. Then the helicopters come in, they pick up two or three
and take off and then here comes another one, it picks up somebody and takes off. 5, 6 o’clock
they all come back, go to the back of the compound, take a hot shower. Go to the mess hall and
have the same food you’d expect to get here. You know what their biggest complaint was?
There was a period there where we had roast beef 3 times a day. Where else but in the United
States Army would people complain but, you know, ‘Roast beef three times a day?’ But they
young soldiers, no. If you had hamburgers three times a day that would be alright. But not roast
beef. That’s for you old guys. So those are my memories of Vietnam, and I enjoyed it, and I
know this may sound strange but I just never really figured the war would end like it did. I
figured we’d have a cease fire and we would have occupation troops forever and ever like we did in Germany and Japan. I even entertained the idea of, ‘Hey, I’ll just go ahead and retire at 20 years and come back and get me a cushy civil service job and get another retirement.’ But it didn’t pan out that way.

SM: Well take a step back and let me ask you a quick question about your experiences with the…in operations. The areas in which you worked, I forgot to ask you, how much of the areas were controlled by the Viet Cong or PAVN units? Or, when you were in Vietnam from ’68 to ’69, and then ’72 to ’73, was that even an issue, who controlled what? You mentioned that as part of a negotiations that there was concern about who controlled what.

AC: It was a different deal in ’68. I mean, the VC were everywhere. We probably even had some working in our compound. It’s like looking at a group of people and trying to sort out the Democrats and the Republicans. You can’t do that, they all look the same. How do you know who’s who? You really don’t. [The South Vietnamese had no national identification system.]

SM: You mentioned in some of your responses to some of the questions on paper that you always knew when a Vietnam attack was going to come because the masons wouldn’t come to work.

AC: Well, that’s right. Some mornings or early in the afternoon or maybe right after lunch they would not come back, and whenever that happened, when none of them came back at all, you knew something was up. And, often times something would happen. Maybe not…well okay, that compound where I was, we never got hit and I didn’t tell you this before. There was a lady there, her name was Ba Sheba who was a girlfriend or mistress or some similar arrangement there, I don’t think they were ever married, but she was related to, in that sense, to the former premier. What’s his name? I blew it. [Boa Dai.]

SM: In what year?

AC: Well, he left in ’54.

SM: Not Diem?

AC: No, darn it. I said it earlier and I can’t…I lost it now.

SM: Oh, oh, oh, the Prince or the King? Bao Dai?
AC: Bao Dai, okay. Supposedly he still owned this compound where we were [stayed] and she [Ba Sheba] had a little tailor shop there. She also collected the [rent] money from the U.S. and paid off the VC not to hit us. That’s the story I always heard.

SM: Wow, protection money!

AC: Yeah.

SM: Interesting arrangement, haven’t heard that before. Wow.

AC: She was very nice. She was very influential. She had a lot of pictures, a lot of photographs of American officers all around her place and so I…

SM: The second name, S-H-E-B-A, or is it Vietnamese?

AC: I don’t know how you would spell it.

SM: The Sheba part almost sounds like a nickname.

AC: Well, one of your Vietnamese could tell you.

SM: Yeah, I’ll have to ask.

AC: But then we had French people around the area there, also. They had rubber plantations, tea, coffee, and we had a conflict there. Well, they had a heck of a conflict. The VC or the NVA would come in and tell these French people, ‘You better tell us what we want to know or we’re going to burn your plantation down.’ Now what do you think that guy’s going to do? He’s caught between them and us. So, it was a pretty interesting experience.

SM: Now in terms of intelligence, because I’m sure that’s what the VC were getting from them in those contacts. What about more over intelligence gathering from people like the mamasons? I mean, obviously they knew what was going on. If they knew not to go back to the compound on a particular day or a particular afternoon because it was going to get hit, then they know something.

AC: Oh sure.

SM: Was there every any overt?

AC: If they’re not going to come and tell us because if the VC found out they told, that’s the end of them. So they were in a hard spot, you know.

SM: How about, so was there a big difference between ’68 and ’72 when you went back?

AC: I thought there was. For one thing, they kept telling us, ‘Well it’s going to end any day now,’ you know, and, ‘Keep your bags packed and just be flexible because nobody really knows what is going to happen,’ but they were telling us as early as September, ‘Oh yeah, any
day now. For sure by the end of September,’ and then it was, ‘For sure the end of October,’ ‘Oh, you’ll be home for Thanksgiving,’ and things didn’t quite work out that way. But there were fewer and fewer Americans. I’ll tell you an interesting thing you may not have heard about is one day in November of ’73, oh, ’72, we had an NCO meeting in Nha Trang, all the key NCOs flew to Nha Trang and we stayed over there for a couple of days and we had lots of high level people come and talk to us like the provost marshal and a bunch of different topics, but it seems there had been a lot of American GI’s who had cleared their unit and got on the helicopter to fly down to Saigon to process out and go home. Well they flew down to Saigon and then they disappeared. They never showed up to process out, never went home and so…you haven’t heard this, have you? So we were told to be on the lookout for these people because some of them had been caught hanging around military bases, eating in the mess halls, maybe knock a GI over the head to get money, selling drugs, whatever. But we were told that when the cease fire took place, that these people would be turning themselves in because it would be their only chance to go home. Well it didn’t’ happen that way, and when I went to Phan Thiet when we were first there there was an American company that was working on the helicopters, you know, maintenance people, to get them ready to turn over to the South Vietnamese. This one fellow said, we talked about that one night and he said, ‘Oh yeah,’ he says, ‘They’re not going back to the states, but you see,’ he said, ‘There’s all these people who made all this illegal money in Vietnam and they have influence and power, they’ll get these guys, fix them up false documents, let them carry the money out of the country and when they go wherever they’re going then they’ll pay them off and they’re on their own.’ Now I don’t’ know if it really happened like that, but it makes a nice story.

SM: Yes, very interesting. I wouldn’t be surprised.

AC: And I don’t’ know how many of those people are still unaccounted for.

SM: Did you have much experience with dealing with or coping with the black market or seeing the black market in action while you were in Vietnam?

AC: It was there, not as bad as it was in Korea. I was in Korea more recently, but it was there. For instance, you could see a Vietnamese sitting on a street corner, got all this stuff, hairspray, all kinds of stuff, and the GI says, ‘I could get that cheaper in the PX,’ and the Vietnamese says, ‘Yeah, but PX no have…’. In that little compound where I was, we only had
maybe one or two females. This is Ban Me Thuot. I think in one month they sold something
like 800 cans of hairspray. Where do you think it went?

SM: Well with two women, obviously outside.

AC: Nothing else to do, we’ll fix our hair tonight.

SM: Any other differences when you went back? How about the control issues? Who
was controlling what territory? Was it still pretty much the Viet Cong and PAVN that controlled
territory?

AC: I have no idea. I really have no idea on that. That’s an interesting question. I
couldn’t even venture a guess on that one, and there were fewer of us to monitor that. I just
really don’t know.

SM: Anything else you want to add as far as your in country experiences?

AC: I think I’ve probably just about covered everything.

SM: Okay.

AC: There was an artillery unit somewhere else and it relocated to Phan Thiet and we
kind of followed along with them. That was the province chief’s house there in Ban Me Thuot.

SM: That’s pretty nice.

AC: Oh, it was gorgeous even though it’d been shot up some.

SM: That’s a beautiful bush.

AC: Yeah, it’s Croton. It grows here. It’s best suited for Mexico than this continent, but
it will grow here in Lubbock, grow outdoors in a protected environment. You couldn’t put it in
the hot sun, but if you had a shady place to protect it from the wind, it will do quite well.

SM: Now, for some reason, this to me looks like…no, it’s not.

AC: Hibiscus?

SM: Okay, this is a hibiscus.

AC: That one is, too.

SM: Beautiful flowering trees in Vietnam. One of my favorites was the dragon flower.
The trees, the orange, the bright orange, the deadly that’s what they called it. A real bright
orange flower. An absolutely gorgeous tree. Well let me ask you to clip that real fast.

AC: Did we miss anything there?

SM: I’m checking to make sure I didn’t forget to ask for clarification. I know what I
wanted to ask you. Before you left Vietnam, once the cease fire occurred and the peace accords
were signed, the peace with honor, what did you and your fellow soldiers think of that? What
did you think of the situation? You mention that the flight home was very quiet. Was there any
discussion about what was going to be the end result of this? Was there any talk about the
notion, the sense that the United States was abandoning South Vietnam?

AC: Well, we used to talk about that in the last days. Not on the plane. Everybody was
sound asleep on the plane I guess but we used to talk about that, you know, what would happen
when we leave and people have mixed emotions but I think most of our people felt like the
Americans had let the Vietnamese down and things would probably revert to the way they were.
I don’t know.

SM: Was there any talk about or concern about a North Vietnamese assault right away?

AC: No, we never…we knew it would happen, but we had no idea when. But that was
inevitable. You know it’s interesting because when we were there in Phan Thiet we could go up
on the 4th floor of our hotel, and we had our mess hall up there and we also had a little club, you
could go up there at 5 o’clock, we didn’t open the bar until 5 o’clock, but you could go up there
and get a drink and walk out on the balcony and watch the Vietnamese put in napalm down
through the valley and every once in a while something would blow up downtown in the market
area. The bad guys were doing that, and a few people were hurt. Maybe a few killed, but and
like that trip I made up to Pleiku in March of ’73 while the South Vietnamese were still fighting
up there. They knew the end was near but of course nobody could tell how near.

SM: What did you think…you mentioned napalm? What did you think about the use of
that, of napalm? Do you think it was an effective weapon, a useful weapon?

AC: Oh I think so, in certain situations. I don’t know about the way they were using it.
Of course, when you’re standing up here and you’re looking a mile away, you know, it’s kind of
hard. We don’t know what they’re looking at.

SM: But from an operations standpoint, an operations NCO standpoint, you would call
an air strike that might involve the use of napalm or incendiary devices?

AC: Well, there area situations like bunker situations, caves, that sort of thing where that
might be the only way to go.

SM: How about…

AC: You would not want to be the victim of one.
SM: On the receiving end, no sir. How about the use of Agent Orange or other defoliants? Did you have much sense of how those were being used and the effects of those? Was there a bunch of talk about that? You mentioned that you don’t think that you were ever exposed or suffered any ailments.

AC: I didn’t know what it was until after I came back to the United States.

SM: Had you heard of defoliation missions?

AC: Oh yeah, because when I worked in the operations center, oftentimes we would have to get the artillery to shut down one of our ranch hand missions flew in the area. Oftentimes you know the ranch hand guy would come on the radio and he’d say, ‘I’m going to be in your area in a minute. Could you please notify the artillery,’ and oftentimes what would happen is before we could get the artillery turned off this guy’s back on the radio, ‘Oh, I’m leaving your area now.’ Just as matter of factly as he... But they would fly over highways and largely highways and valleys, but we also had these Rome Plow operations, are you familiar with that?

SM: No.

AC: It’s a bulldozer [called a Rome Plow] with a second blade on it that cuts trees and throws them back and then we would have to clear, in other words tell the artillery not to fire in that area or keep the aircraft out of there so they wouldn’t bomb their own people. Or, sometimes we’d have helicopters providing cover for them. But the Rome Plows would go in and then sometimes the Agent Orange would come right behind them. What they try to do is clear all the foliage back for 500 meters either side of the road. And why? That defected the (that’s the range of) small arms fire.

SM: RPGs and small arms weapons, small weapons? Wow, okay. You come back to the United States. Did you talk much about your Vietnam experience with your fellow soldiers?

AC: You know, ‘I was here. Where were you?’ You know, and we could compare experiences.

SM: Did you ever come across soldiers that were having a hard time dealing with their Vietnam experiences?

AC: Still on active duty? No.

SM: While you were on active duty. Just after the war, you know, ‘74-’75 and on.
AC: Not really. I can’t recall any that had problems. I’m sure there were some, but I’m not aware of it. But not like these people we see out on the street and stuff. I wonder about some of those people out on the street too. I wonder if they wouldn’t have had problems even if they hadn’t gone to Vietnam. You always have those people, and then they kind of use Vietnam as an excuse. But that’s not…don’t get me wrong, that’s not everybody. But, I’m sure there’s some of those.

SM: What did you, when you came back, what did you think of your Vietnam service and what did you think about what the United States had done in Vietnam?

AC: Well I was glad I went. I thought we did a lot of good things. I thought that the things that didn’t’ go well were the results of politics and such, but I’m proud of the American soldiers. I’ll tell you, man. They’ll do what you tell them to do, but you’ve got to have some firm guidelines from up above. You have to have specific goals and somebody to give them a little direction, you know, and support them.

SM: And you think that was lacking in Vietnam?

AC: I think so, from what I’ve read and from what I’ve heard. I think if you read up on Vietnam, everybody’s got a different idea of what went wrong. I don’t know.

SM: Do you think there was a way we could have won?

AC: Well I think, I definitely agree with General Westmoreland. I think they should have given them license to go ahead and move north and do what we had to do rather than prolong the thing for so long. That was a long time. Long time.

SM: Anything else that we could have done to win besides just maybe taking the war on the ground or to the north?

AC: Well I don’t know. I really don’t’ know that much about that end of it. I’m sure there’s things we could have done. What can I say?

SM: Let me ask you…

AC: I don’t know, that’s a hard one. A pretty hard one.

SM: What did you think about the American decision in 1975 not to support the South Vietnamese?

AC: Well, they had to cut the strings somewhere. I hated to see them do it, but it’s not the first time we’ve done that. Look at Dien Bien Phu when we let the French down. But, I
think you can only do so much and there comes a time that you either have to go all out or get
out.

SM: You mentioned in the questionnaire that you felt your Vietnam service did help you
after you got back. In what ways did Vietnam help you in either the military or personally?

AC: Well, it definitely gave you a better appreciation for our way of life. That’s for
sure. I kind of like my standard of living, I could not revert to…I feel for those people, I really
do. But for many of them that’s all they’ve ever known. But, I think I have a better
understanding of our fellow man and how our government works.

SM: Militarily did it help you in terms of your military career?

AC: Oh yeah, I’m sure it did. I’m actually retired as a sergeant major, so I don’t know if
I would have accomplished that without Vietnam. I might have. But, in the infantry they kind of
look down on you if you haven’t served on a combat tour. So I’m sure that had some influence
there.

SM: In terms of looking at Vietnam and US relations now, do you think that the current
policy of trying to normalize relations is the right one?

AC: Personally, I think so. I think it’s time to forget the past, let’s move on. Let’s open
up doors. We need all the friends we can get in that part of the country, and I think that if we
normalize relations there are a lot of businesses that are poised right now to start up in Vietnam.
Some have already. But I would kind of worry about China, and I think we need all the friends
we can get in that part of the country. North Korea is another one that kind of concerns me. It’s
a different world. Hopefully never have to go to a nuclear war, but it would be nice if we could
normalize things with everybody and establish more trade and encourage peace. Everybody get
along.

SM: In instances where people aren’t getting along, do you think the United States
should maintain a policy of intervention like we did in Vietnam?

AC: Well, I look at different places with different things in mind. I think in Vietnam, it
was the thing to do and all that time we were lead to believe the domino theory. Now when I
look in other parts of the world like Bosnia, what are we doing there? I have no idea. I mean, a
lot of places, Somalia and a few others, I think we had no business. I think the Europeans should
have taken care of Bosnia. I think they should take care of their own over there. I don’t’ think
we had any business intervening there. I think you have to look at each situation and evaluate it
and go from there, but certainly not a blanket policy of intervening. Our military is stretched so thin right now it’s pathetic. That’s why we have a lot of people who are giving up the service. Their turn around time is too short. They don’t have enough time with their families. If it weren’t for the reserves, our military couldn’t operate. I have friends here in town who are in the reserves. They’ve spent more time on deployments than active military. Gulf War, Kosovo, and of course they’re subject to call at any time on short notice, boom, they can be gone. That’s disruptive for them. God bless them, I’m glad we have them. You know, that’s an interesting point too because when I first went in the national guard, the Vermont national guard, it was right after Korea and the national guard and the reserves were really looked down on. But now, they perform as well as and are equipped as well as the active military. They have a whole new look.

SM: And they’re buying playing an increasingly important role.

AC: Exactly.

SM: Now you mentioned turn around time. Question back to Vietnam real quick. What did you think about the 365 day rotation system as a senior NCO. Did you think this was as smart policy or do you think that detracted from efficiency and effectiveness? You’ve got them going in and especially when you’re looking at it from a combat perspective. You’re just getting in, probably really into and understanding ground combat in Vietnam and then you’re…

AC: You mean only spending a year there?

SM: Yeah, right. In previous wars soldiers served the duration.

AC: Well, in Europe, WWII 5 years…well I understand that. But I understand, too, you have to look at the whole picture. We had the protestors and all the anti war types and I think in a way that was partly to ease up the pressure from them. But I don’t think that…okay, Vietnam was not a war like we fought in the Pacific in the second World War. No. The Second World War was a necessity. We had to, we were always talking about the yellow peril and if we didn’t get them, they were going to get us? Well, we didn’t have to worry about the Vietnamese getting us. I don’t think that was a bad policy, the one year tour. I don’t think that was a bad policy at all in that situation. Now, if it were the other way around and they had the capability of coming to us or Hawaii or Alaska, then it would be different.

SM: So what do you think were the major lessons that we should take from the Vietnam war experience?
AC: Well one, if we’re going to go to war at all, we need to have some more specific goals and let’s say, ‘Okay, let’s set a time limit. We’re going to go in there and accomplish this by such and such a date.’ But just to protract that thing like we did? Not a good idea. I don’t think we were wrong in going to Vietnam. I think we might have been wrong for staying there that long, but that’s my opinion.

SM: Do you think the sacrifices made were worth it?
AC: Well, if you’re talking in terms of people lost, that’s a hard one. That’s not acceptable. In terms of the money expended and resources, in different ways you could look at that. One, you could say, you could say, ‘Well it’s training.’ Some people will tell you, ‘That was really great because it gave us a chance to test new equipment and new tactics and such,’ but no. I can see some good in it, but only up to a certain point.

SM: And lastly, in what ways did the Vietnam War most affect you personally?
AC: Well, that’s a hard one to say. I don’t know if I could really answer that one. I don’t think it affected me in any bad way, but I certainly appreciate our military more. I appreciate the Vietnamese people. All they’ve been through but yet they just accept that and move on. I’m glad I had the opportunity to go and if I’d had to stay there longer it would not have bothered me at all. That was my war, my Vietnam. Like you go here to the VA and you have all these vets from the Second World War and they kind of stick together. One of them asked me, he says, ‘What war were you in, sonny?’

SM: Sonny? My goodness.
AC: So I don’t know what he expected me to say, but I said, ‘Vietnam was my war.’ And then he didn’t talk to me anymore.

SM: Have you run across that before? That’s one of the complaints that a number of veterans have made is, for instance, especially when they first got back from Vietnam is a lack of acceptance or reception at VFW or places where veterans were supposed to come together, they weren’t welcomed by the World War II generation. Have you ever come across that yourself besides that particular incident?
AC: This VFW here, they’re kind of cliquish. I don’t go there anymore.

SM: Same attitude?
AC: But all the other ones I’ve been to have been real sociable and accepting and helpful. I don’t think it was me when I went over there. I’ve been over there several times, it’s just not like the other ones I’ve known.

SM: Not as welcoming?

AC: No.

SM: Anything else you’d like to add?

AC: I can’t think of anything right now. Probably after you turn that thing off…

SM: Oh, we can do follow up interviews and stuff like that. Alright, well this ends the first interview with Mr. Childs.