Stephen Maxner: This is Steve Maxner conducting an interview with Mr. Bill Quigley on the nineteenth of April 2003 at approximately one o’clock. We are in Charlottesville, Virginia, at the Sleep Inn Conference Room. First of all, sir thanks for consenting to this interview.

William Quigley: You’re welcome.

SM: Why don’t we begin with a discussion of your early life and if you would just tell me when and where you were born and where you grew up.

WQ: I was born in Portland, Oregon, December 1947. Nothing extraordinary there at all, natural birth. I lived in Portland until I was eleven and we moved to rural eastern Oregon in Baker. That’s essentially where I call home and where I grew up.

SM: Baker, Oregon?

WQ: Baker City. It’s called Baker City now, but as far as I’m concerned it’s just Baker.

SM: What was it like growing up there? I mean was it a rural community, small town?

WQ: It’s a small town. Ninety-five hundred, something like that, one high school, junior high, senior high school. We lived out of town, rode the bus to school. Nothing—didn’t participate in a lot of things in high school. My time was spent out in the rural part of the country in the woods, hunting and fishing as much as possible. That’s what I liked to do so that’s what I did. I did participate, you know, went to the game once in a while but not a lot. I wasn’t antisocial, but I wasn’t a gregarious kid by any stretch of the imagination.

SM: Did you play sports at all?
WQ: No.

SM: Okay. What did you hunt?

WQ: What did I hunt? Deer, elk, pheasant—I hunt predators, coyotes. That sort of thing, and in the summer when there’s nothing else you hunted ground squirrels. Some of the ranchers and farmers would pay you bounty on them. You’d get two bits, you know. So that paid for your cartridges.

SM: Do you have many siblings or any siblings?

WQ: I had a brother six years my junior and a sister ten years younger.

SM: Okay. Did you all do activities together, collective stuff?

WQ: No. They were the little kids. I left home when my sister was seven. I mean so—

SM: Oh wow. You were very much the senior.

WQ: Right. So I moved out of home when I was seventeen when I graduated from high school, went off to basic training. I enlisted in the Guard in ’64 when I was seventeen. So I went off on my basic training at seventeen right, you know, three days after graduation.

SM: Were there any particular subjects in school that you enjoyed, that you gravitated towards?

WQ: I liked history. Actually, I liked—the last year was literature, English literature, and I rather enjoyed that. I seemed to have a knack for interpreting Shakespeare. But in high school I didn’t shine at much of anything. I was getting through high school because I had to, you know. I had a father that, “You will graduate,” or you weren’t going to exist very much longer.

SM: Oh, okay. What did your parents do?

WQ: Father was a dentist. My mother was a homemaker. Dad had a practice, had to practice in Portland and then he moved it to Baker.

SM: Okay. When you were nearing graduation from high school and you enlisted in the Guard, what led you to that decision?

WQ: I think as much as anything it was—as I understood it at the time, all healthy males had a military obligation to their country. I just got started on it as soon as I could. The recruiter did a good recruiting job from the local armory. He came to class
and I was already predisposed. It was apparent that I could do it right away soon as I was
sixteen and soon as I turned seventeen I could enlist with a signature from my parents.
My father served in World War II. It wasn’t a problem so that’s two weeks after I turned
seventeen I was in.

SM: Okay. Now, what did you go in in terms of expectation for an MOS
(military occupational specialty)?

WQ: It was an infantry unit. There weren’t any expectations. You were a grunt.

SM: Yeah. Okay. 11-Bravo.

WQ: I was 11-Charlie actually, heavy weapons.

SM: 11-Charlie. This Guard unit was there in Baker, Oregon?

WQ: Yes.

SM: So then where did you go to basic training?

WQ: When’d I what?

SM: Where did you go for basic training?

WQ: Fort Ord, California. Was in the 1st Training Brigade, C-11 was the
company. It was the first basic training cycle after the closure of the post for spinal
meningitis. We had a lot of recruit deaths there. So they closed it down for a while
trying to figure out exactly what the problems were and why and what they could do to
prevent it. This was the first cycle after that. So it’d been closed for a couple three,
several, four months, something like that.

SM: Do you know what they discovered was the cause of that?

WQ: Well, I don’t remember particularly. Some of the precautions that they took
were at night all of the windows were open. In the Monterey Peninsula in early spring
the fog would roll in and the fog would roll out. It was rather cool, but it kept the
barracks aerated. We weren’t supposed to get within hands reach of anybody. You
know, some of these precautions were a bit much like the hands. I mean, when you’re in
a barracks situation, you know, but that was supposed to be the SOP (standard operating
procedure). They cut back on training. The training was far less strenuous than it had
been. They wanted to reduce the fatigue level. I think those are the primary precautions
that they had. They restricted you. We couldn’t go anywhere. Not that you had a lot of
free time in basic in any event at any point, but when we went through the PX (post
exchange) we couldn’t just go to the PX. We had to go there in formation and they had
to open up all the windows. So they kept everything very aerated and I think that was the
biggest precaution to it.

SM: Now, when you left for basic training in 1964—
WQ: Five.
SM: Oh, you left in ’65.
WQ: I was in the Guard for about six months before, seven months before I went.
I had to graduate from high school.
SM: Okay. How aware were you at that time of major either Cold War events or
maybe even some of the Vietnam specific stuff?
WQ: I was aware that it was going on. Being in the Guard you really didn’t feel
that any of that affected you. My father was very political. He had ran for the congress
of the 2nd district. This is U.S. Congress. You know, I heard a lot from him. He had a
reserve commission in the U.S. Navy, spent a lot of time doing correspondence courses
through the War College. You know, so I knew what was going on. I understood
isolation, containment, the Monroe Doctrine, and that fairly well from just listening to
him comment and talking with him. So I had some idea what was going on, but I didn’t
really feel it affected me at that point.
SM: What about Vietnam War specific things—the Gulf of Tonkin incident in
August of ’64, that kind of stuff?
WQ: I was aware of it. At least I had some idea that there was some kind of
inter-reaction going on, but we didn’t have television. It wasn’t in the American
problems in the senior year. They didn’t go into it. They were focused in on primarily
the Constitution and what the Constitution was and how it was amended in the process in
the civics classes. I don’t remember having a history class, per se, my senior year. I
think I had all that out. World events just didn’t play real heavy in rural Eastern Oregon.
You know, you’re aware of it and that’s really all. I knew that there was a lot of advisors.
The buildup hadn’t started. It was mostly advisory. I knew that we had a couple three
thousand advisors over there and that was really it.
SM: What did your dad think of Goldwater, you know?
WQ: What did he—
SM: Yeah. What did he think of Barry Goldwater?

WQ: At the time, I liked Barry Goldwater personally. At that time that’s who I would’ve probably voted for had I the opportunity. My father at that time was a Democrat running on—he was going against very strong. He was in the House Ways and Means Committee. Running against him—I had his name, just absolutely escapes me at the point, but anyway he was the representative for that 2nd congressional district at the time. He was running against him in his party and he didn’t get past the primary on that one. The next time he ran on the Republican ticket, but my father was very anti-war.

SM: He was?

WQ: Very anti-war.

SM: Based on what?

WQ: He thought the theory of isolation containment and what was going on there was basically a farce. I remember him thinking that he thought that maybe the Gulf of Tonkin was probably a setup. He just didn’t buy it outright. When actually it started and then when I went over he was very supportive, but he didn’t buy the basic premise that we should be over there in the first place. So he was not particularly vocal about it but, you know, under his personal views he didn’t buy it.

SM: How about your mom? What’s her political position in that respect?

WQ: I don’t think she had one. She was very much a homemaker and keeping the house clean. She didn’t look up very often to even have an opinion on a worldview.

SM: Well, when you went to basic training down there at Fort Ord, California, what did you find to be the most interesting aspect of the training, especially that transition from civilian life and the military life? How did that affect you?

WQ: Well, the transition had already started when I went in to the National Guard. So the basic drilling, the reception station, was, you know, the harassment was there. I thought it was all very humorous, but I knew enough not to smile at them. It was just part of the game. You got through it. Basic training itself we had a DI (drill instructor) that, actually I respected him very much. Moseley was his name. He was Korean War E-7. I felt him to be at the time a soldier. I thought he was more professional than anybody that I’d been around in the Guard unit. The Guard at that time wasn’t really all that professional. There were some people that made a stab at it, but it
really wasn’t. It wasn’t so much that he was a soldier’s soldier in terms of spit and
polish, it was that he had a good world view. We’re here to train. We’re here to learn.
We’re here to—and remember that even in ’65 it was just beginning to build up and he
had a full platoon of NGs (National Guard) and ERs, enlisted Reserves. So he didn’t
figure we were going anywhere, but he had a job to do it, he was going to do it. I thought
he did it very professionally. He had a couple of things that still are with me today and
he said, you know, “You’re in my platoon. I’m your platoon sergeant. You do what I tell
you to do because that’s your job and this is my job. Another one of the platoon
sergents tells you to do something you do it, even if you feel it’s wrong. Then you come
and tell me and I’ll take care of it because you have nothing to complain about if you
don’t do it. He does because you didn’t follow the order.” He was kind of protective in
that way and he said, “But if you screw up it’s you and me and it’s going to be mostly
Moseley.” You know? So that was his idea and that seemed to me to be a way a DI
should be. Basic training itself I thought was rather anemic. They had to be very careful.
They couldn’t work us too hard because of the spinal meningitis thing. They were kind
of—the Army was pairing back the basic training. I really anticipated something more
like Marine boot than what we received. I didn’t think the harassment was near enough.
I didn’t think the workload was near enough. I didn’t think the physical exertion was
near enough. I had some idea of what the potential was in basic training and where you
could go from there, not that I really thought it affected me. It just wasn’t enough. I
thought it was rather anemic.

SM: Okay. What was the most challenging part of it?

WQ: For me the most challenging part was doing a low crawl because I’d got
hurt early on in a confidence course. We were climbing the tour when a kid slipped and
started to fall and I grabbed him and he drug me off and I landed and hurt my leg. I had
what they call myositis, which is a torn muscle and internal bleeding and I hobbled
around on that. Doing a low crawl was just excruciating, but I got through it.

SM: How did that affect your final PT (physical training), your final APRT
(Army physical readiness test) readiness test?

WQ: It wasn’t easy. I basically finished up basic on light duty. I was on
crutches. I finally had to go to the hospital and they kept me in the hospital for a week
and drained leg and got out of there, begged to get out of there. I didn’t want to be
recycled for any reason. I mean recycling was like flunking, you know. That’s not what
I wanted. I was a National Guard so the emphasis on getting me through and completing
at one hundred percent wasn’t there, just get this NG in here and out of here. Send him
back. I fired—some of the things I just couldn’t do. I made a stab at it, like the low
crawl. I did finish it, but I was done that day. That’s the first thing I tried and I couldn’t
do it anymore. Still they just put in me a deuce and a half, sent me back. I did the
overhead bars, some of the things that you could do without your legs. When we fired
for qualification on the range I did it all standing up because I couldn’t kneel. I couldn’t
bend that leg at all. I couldn’t get down in the foxhole so I did it all offhand and still
qualified sharpshooter, which I thought was fairly well considering I did it all off hands.

SM: Absolutely. This was an M-14.

WQ: Mm-hmm.

SM: Wow. That’s a heavy weapon.

WQ: No. I’ve been shooting all my life. Shooting wasn’t anything that they
could teach me. They could teach me the military way, which I didn’t particularly agree
with and I shot my own way and did alright, but I already knew how to breathe, how to
control, trigger control. I knew all that.

SM: What was it about the military technique that you didn’t like?

WQ: Well, it’s not that I didn’t like it’s just I had my own way. I knew what
worked well and I could shoot well so I basically ignored them, you know. For someone
who had no idea it was a technique, a technique that works. If you were willing to apply
it and learn from it, it works very well, but I already had my own. What’s the point? I
just didn’t tell them that that was what I was doing. End results the same, the hole in the
paper where they wanted it.

SM: That’s right. Anything else that you remember from basic?

WQ: No. Not really. It’s just I thought it was a little anemic to sum it up and I
thought it should’ve been more difficult, more of a challenge, than it was. From there we
went home for a couple of weeks and I came back and went through infantry AIT
(advanced infantry training).

SM: At Ord again?
WQ: Yeah. It was an entirely different scenario. The harassment wasn’t there, you know, like Marine boot. We had a DI that was kind of from the old school, but he was also an alcoholic and was very out of shape so he couldn’t push us that hard. We did work a lot harder than we did in basic coming off of light duty after a leg injury. It was tough, the running and especially in the sand. One time, of course, being a big guy I was always in the front of the column and we were running. I ran until I couldn’t run anymore and I don’t remember anything else. I just blacked out. I took out the whole platoon. I went down and I took them all out.

SM: Oh no.

WQ: But I toughened up soon enough and then when we got through I went through it all and did the PT test and everything. I didn’t have a problem with it, but it was some serious toughening up real quick, I’ll tell you.

SM: Now, it was at this point that you chose or you were chosen to do heavy weapons, 11 Charlie?

WQ: I already had a 11-Charlie MOS. So the AIT was the heavy weapons AIT.

SM: What consistence did you focus on then?

WQ: The 81 mortar. We went through and did everything. You know, we trained on M-14s. We did the M-79, .50 cal, the M-60s, so we did all the infantry stuff as well as the 81 mortar. So we went to school for that. We did the actual firing of the mortar, the set up of the drill, FO, forward observer, and the FDC (fire direction control). At that time there was nothing computerized except for the M-2 plotting board which nothing more than a plastic disk on a—but we went through all that.

SM: Besides humping that base plate what was the hardest thing about working with the 81?

WQ: Humping the base plate. It was awkward. There was no way that you can carry it. It was a two-piece. You had the inner ring, which was steel, and you had the outer ring. You broke it down. You only carried one part when you actually carried it. When you were moving it and there was two of you then you put them together with the handle on each end, but the base plate—the tube wasn’t difficult. It balanced fairly well on your shoulder and you can pack that. The bipod wasn’t bad and of course the gunner
got to pack the sight and that was pretty easy. It was the extra rounds, the simulator rounds, that—

SM: Yeah. How many would you have to carry?

WQ: If you’re humping the base plate you usually carried four in a special pouch, two in the back, two in the front.

SM: Man. That’s still a lot of extra weight.

WQ: The gunner didn’t carry any. You usually carry four to six and that was kind of the World War II infantry in Korea mindset on how things were—later on when I got in the Cav it was very different but it’s just still Korean, World War II. At that point World War II hadn’t been over that long. We had more in common with the World War II vets than the Iraqi Freedom vets do with us now.

SM: Right. Right. Now, the instructors that you had for advanced infantry training, were they Korean War vets as well or these younger guys?

WQ: The older ones, the senior NCOs (non-commanding officer), were most of the younger ones, the corporals. You have the infantry guys have the CIB (combat infantryman badge) and then they have the expert infantryman’s badge, which doesn’t have the oak wreath around it. The combat infantryman has the blue. Most of those guys just had the expert infantryman. They didn’t have the CIB. The Korean vets all had the CIBs.

SM: When you did have training from a Korean War vet did they incorporate personal lessons from the battlefield into their training very much that you remember?

WQ: I don’t remember.

SM: How much did they talk about Vietnam? At all?

WQ: Very, very little. There wasn’t—when I went back in the Regular Army there was the big push on. My first duty station was Fort Polk and of course everything was Charlie. You know, Charlie’s going to do this. Charlie’s going to do that, but then it wasn’t. It was still like in the—I think the big push was already in the planning stage, but it hadn’t filtered down into like the training units and it wasn’t—I don’t remember much of a discussion about it at all. Really the experience wasn’t there for the military other than the advisors I suppose if I were, you know, going on from
infantry into Special Ops or something like that then those people would probably be an
experience as advisors but very little, middle ’65.

SM: What was the most challenging aspect of infantry, advanced infantry
training, in general?

WQ: Well, getting the drill down. It was just physical learning for the mortar and
you get qualified. It was a timed event, if you will. Qualified expert, you had to have it
set up, goal leveled, and on target in X amount of seconds. It was a lot of time drilling
that. Some of the night stuff was a little difficult. The survival, escape, and evasion was
probably had our attention more than anything because we understood that if they caught
you, that you know, they’d brutalize you a little bit and try to give you a hint of what was
happening. It was all probably pretty mild. They didn’t catch me. I stayed out there and
in fact I stayed out so long that they finally run a jeep around the perimeter hollering for
me by name because I wasn’t coming out. I’d spent most of my youth in the woods and I
could move in the woods and they weren’t going to catch me.

SM: Now, when you went back, when you finished your infantry training and
went back up to Oregon and spent some time with your National Guard unit, at what
point did you transition to active duty?

WQ: I went back home that fall, went elk hunting and finished the elk season.
When I got out I moved to Dallas, Oregon. My uncle was living there and he owns a
four-minute sawmill in Kings Valley and went to work at that saw mill. Between that
and going there I had made a decision to probably go regular. I was talking it over with a
friend of mine. Between us we discussed that—I didn’t have to do anything. I could just
stay in the Guard and be perfectly—the draft was of no consequence to me even though I
wasn’t going on to college and wasn’t married. He decided he wanted to enlist in the
Navy and become a corpsman. His father owned a dental laboratory and was a lab
technician. He was kind of interested in the medical aspect of it. We just discussed that
and I knew I was going to do something, not necessarily be a grunt, but to do something
to help. I still had the background from my father. It wasn’t necessarily that I objected to
the war. I felt if I was going to leave the Guard what I wanted to do to help the guys that
were over there—you started seeing the television news at night and you start seeing the
Medevacs. Two things struck me. One is you help them after they’re hit. I looked at the
aviation and looked at the helicopters coming in and I had never flown before. So I had no experience with it and that intrigued me too. I was kind of between talking with him and knowing that I was predisposed to at least one of those two fields that I would probably go with him and become a medic, which meant at the time and I wasn’t aware of that you end up as a Marine corpsman at some point in all likelihood. So we had a big party and we went up to Anthony Lakes, which is a big ski resort in that area, and had a big party. I got extremely drunk. Extremely drunk to the point I just passed out and they kind of poured me on the bus this morning and headed off and take my physical for the Navy at about nine o’clock the next morning. I was still drunk. I was hung over. I could hardly move. I didn’t pass the physical. So he went off and I went back home. So that ended that and I moved off to Dallas, Oregon, and went to work in the mill for a while. That just wasn’t working. It was just not what I wanted to do. I was bound and determined to enlist so I finally did. I looked at Air Force and on the flying end of it. They just really couldn’t at the time guarantee me that I would fly. So I was bound and determined. I gave up on the medical side and I was going to fly. I didn’t know anything about warrant officer candidate. I just was going to enlist. My mindset was all enlisted so I was just going to enlist. Air Force didn’t—in fact they had a waiting list and so did the Navy. I walked in to the Army recruiter, “Yes, sir.” You know? “You want to leave tomorrow?” So at the time I went through and I was guaranteed MOS training in aviation. That’s really as far as it went, some type of Army aviation. So I left. I didn’t have anything that I wanted to do so I just left. Ended up in Fort Polk, Louisiana, in a holding company waiting for orders and the cycles to go to Fort Rucker, Alabama. While I was in headquarters, headquarters of whatever the heck it was at Fort Polk, Louisiana, in the old World War II barracks, they were using the holding company as a source for all the dirty jobs. You’re pulling KP (kitchen police) everyday. Anything nasty that came along, that’s where they got the bodies. It was just a holding pen, if you will, for bodies. They had a couple things that were kind of interesting. One of them they had prisoner chase. We had deserters and AWOLs (absent without leave) and things going on. So if you volunteered for prisoner chase you were exempt from all this other garbage and our job was several fold. If they caught a guy off post and we had to go pick him up and bring him back. If the prisoner in the stockade had to go see his attorney or a doctor we’d
pick him up and actually do the transporting physically ourselves, anything that they had
to do outside of the stockade. The MPs (Military Police) didn’t do it. We did it. You
had to be qualified with a .45. I already was because as a mortar man you took the .45
and were qualified with it. So that’s what I did. It wasn’t too bad a duty, had some
interesting people that you had to deal with. I had one kid, kid’s name was Percy J. Saul.
He was built like a fullback. His mentality was like a fullback with, maybe not quite
everything, the bubble fully level, very difficult person to handle. Percy did not want to
be in the military. Of course with a name like Percy he had an attitude already and he
had the scars on his face. He was built like a fireplug and nobody liked dealing with him.
I drew Percy one day and they brought him out and I had to sign out for him and brought
him out in handcuffs and leg irons. “You will leave these all on.” “Yes, sir.” So I signed
out for him and took him. He was going to the doctor. He was always going someplace.
Always had dentists, doctors, attorneys, you know, whomever. So he came out and I
took him all the way to the hospital and we went in to the appointment with the doctor
and the doctor had an absolute fit. “You will take these off of him. I can’t examine this
man. You will.” He was a lieutenant colonel, as I remember, and, you know, “Yes, sir.
I’m not supposed to.” He said, “That’s an order.” So I took them all off and they
finished with the examination and they got done. Percy came back out and he said,
“You’re going to put all that back on me?” I said, “I’ll tell you what. I got to put the
handcuffs on you. I won’t put the leg irons on until we get back and I don’t want any
trouble.” I said, “I got your word?” He said, “You got my word.” So I took him back.
It wasn’t a problem. Before we got back I had a jeep and I handcuffed him to the jeep.
But anyway we got back and I put the leg irons on. We drove through the front gate of
the stockade and everything was fine. The next time I got him—I was always the one
that got Percy J. Saul because Percy J. Saul wanted me. So whenever he went out I was
the one that took him out. It got to the point that he—get him out I would take the
handcuffs off of him and he’d go about his business and I told him, I said, “I’ll do this.
You’ve been so far so good. You run and I’ll kill you.” I told him that and I had five
rounds. Anyway, so we got along just fine. So that’s what I did while I was waiting to
go to Fort Rucker. One night we had fourteen people come in and they couldn’t put them
in the stockade until they were processed. So I had fourteen people and I was the only
one there. It was an office building about the size of this and at one end they had
mattresses. I had fourteen of them in there, armed robbery, rape, and just AWOL and
desertion all in there lumped together and no lavatory. About two in the morning one of
them had to go and only place I could do is get them all up, march them all out single file,
take them in to a barracks full of sleeping GIs, let them go to the bathroom, and it was the
old barracks. You went up and then down into a hole in the latrine. I had them all in
there. I’d stand at the door, get them all in there when they’re all done. I’d bring them
all out. When I got out two of them jumped me and that wasn’t real pleasant. But
anyway, after that was all over, got that situated, went through the investigation and all
that. Moved on to Fort Rucker and waited there for about a week and went on to my
aviation school.

SM: That was to become a crew chief.
WQ: Mm-hmm. Well, Rucker is set up, at that time, was set up for general
aviation. So everybody went off to general, kind of like basic training for aviation. Just
the basic principles, lift, drag, you know, all that. Then completed that course and you
took a test and then you went on to your specialty. At that time they were needing a lot
of Huey crew chiefs so that’s where most of us went. Some went to, you know—and that
was fine by me. That’s where I wanted to be. So then you go to the Huey part. Then
once you graduated then you got your orders.

SM: Okay. What was the most challenging part of that training for you?
WQ: Most challenging part?
SM: Of your first or your initial aviation training and then crew chief training?
WQ: Initial aviation training wasn’t difficult. I thought, you know, they did the
basics well. They had a lot of time to figure it out. It’s one, two, three, four, five. The
basics are generally pretty easy that way. If you understand the principles of lift, drag,
thrust, and gravity, you have a pretty good handle on most of it and know what an
asymmetrical air flow is as opposed to a laminar flow wing. You understood that and it
was all right. It was just all general. It was both fixed wing and rotor wing and you got a
little bit of this, a little bit of that. It was interesting when you could stay awake. The
barracks was starting to get—the classrooms are hot. We’d always march as a class.

Probably the most interesting part about that is the class that maintained at the highest
class average was exempt from duty. Early on we decided that we were going to be the highest class average and we helped each other. Those that were doing well in the subject would tutor those that weren’t doing so well. We had study—instead of spit shining things we studied. It worked very well and we went through the first course the highest class and we went in to the second as a class. I can’t remember everybody, but for the most part we went in as a class and we maintained the highest average through that class. So there was only one time that we had to pull any duty and it was the squad leaders that actually said they wanted the KP and you guys have been exempt from duty, all this, and we’re going to, you know, we want some bodies out of you. It was the only time that they ever didn’t—and it followed an incident that they were punishing us for. So anyway we squad leaders decided that we’d take the KP because it was kind of our fault. We’re going to class. Class was like maybe half a mile, some of them, depending on where you were. You’d always march in formation and there was at the time they call them WACs barracks. We would have some cadence call that were less than desirable and they complained.

SM: So that’s why you guys got the KP. Okay.

WQ: Yeah. Anyway, so that’s—so the squad leaders and the class leaders did the penance for it. It wasn’t bad.

SM: What about the most challenging aspect of crew chief training?

WQ: Trying to—knowing that in all likelihood—I’d put in a 1049. I’d already decided that I wanted to go and I submitted the paperwork.

SM: To go to Vietnam.

WQ: Yeah. Knowing that that’s where you’re going, this is what you’re going to do, just trying to cram all that stuff in. There’s a lot to a Huey. In such a short time to be able to do your job and do it competently. You had some ideas that, you know, it wouldn’t be the most pleasant of circumstances sometimes. Just trying to get a handle on it and feel that in your own mind that you’d be competent when you got there, that was probably the hardest part. The basics, I’d done enough mechanicing as a kid that I understood what a power train did and how it did. We had shop classes. In some respects I learned more in high school with respect to how to weld, how to solder, and do all that. Not that we were going to do that, it’s just I had a better handle on it than a lot of
guys that had never worked on a car. You know, didn’t understand that you had to mix
the fuel with the gas and pump it into a cylinder even though it was a turbine. Still, you
had to mix the fuel with the air, the oxygen, then pump it in somewhere. So the
hydraulics wasn’t the big mystery. I’d worked on tractor hydraulics when I was a kid
working on farms and ranches. I understood that you couldn’t compress the liquid and
that’s what made it all work. So it wasn’t—you know, that part wasn’t daunting. It was
just trying to get it all in your mind and hold it there as they preached to you. You’re not
supposed to know how to do anything. You know how to read the manual. Well, that’s
all very nice, but you still like to know what you’re doing, next step. If you need to
reference the manual then you reference it. That was probably the hardest part, getting
the blockheads through.

SM: All right. We’re at a fairly logical stopping point, getting close to the two
o’clock hour. So why don’t we take a quick break and we can pick up on another day.

WQ: Okay.

SM: Thank you very much. This will end the first interview with Mr. Quigley.
Interview with William Quigley  
Date: May 16, 2003

SM: This is Steve Maxner continuing the interview with Mr. Quigley on the sixteenth of May 2003 at approximately 2:35 Lubbock time. I am in Lubbock, Texas, and Mr. Quigley is in Baker City, Oregon. Sir, thanks for consenting to continue the interview today. Why don’t we go ahead and pick up with a little more discussion about the details of your training when you went through flight crew training and crew chief, yeah, flight and crew chief training at Fort Rucker, Alabama. If you would, just what you remember, discuss what you remember about that training.

WQ: That training was actually in two separate parts. In the old part of the post we had general aviation training. So both the fixed wing and the rotor wing people went through the same training and that was very basic, the basic principles of lift, drag, thrust, and gravity. So it was very broad based. We got a little bit of rotor wing, a little bit of fixed wing. That part if I remember correctly lasted about six weeks. From there you took kind of an aptitude test and they selected you for a specific aircraft. Some guys went off to the fixed wing school. Some went off to the CH-47. Most of us went off to the UH-1, Iroquois, Huey, part of the program. Then you specialized specifically in the UH-1 Iroquois aircraft. A lot of classroom stuff. We had workshops and we went through the two primary inspections. The intermediate, which is the twenty-five hour inspection, and the PE (periodic evaluation), which was a hundred hour inspections and learned how to pull a short shaft, do the checks, do the fluid changes, you know, the basics. Learn how to safety wire, do all the inspections, and get it ready for the inspection to really fly it for a flight. We did our first flight in a Huey during that specific ground school. That was the first time—I guess my second time in a helicopter. My father took me up in a helicopter when I was a little tiny guy and we were still living in Portland, a county fair. We got a five minute ride. Went up, flew around the big circle, and we came back down, but I was impressed with that. So I was kind of pre-disposed because of that to flying in a helicopter. So we had just a real quick basic school for the UH-1. We had a quick introduction to aerial gunnery. In fact we didn’t even fly. We just kind of shot off a tower with an M-60. So we had the very minimal weapons training
and that was pretty much it. We got our orders while we were still in school. We knew where we were going when we went home on leave. Most of the class that I was in went to the 1st Cav. Some of the guys went to the same unit that I did, but they were interdispersed throughout the Cav. Some were just strictly maintenance and some actually do some—were in the flight crews. So the training was very, very basic. You had the rudiments of helicopter maintenance, not a whole lot more than that.

SM: What was the most challenging aspect of that training for you?

WQ: I didn’t find it particularly difficult. A lot of the things that—the technical data that was in the manuals, they didn’t want us to memorize. Essentially they would say always open your manual, go through the manual. Don’t try to memorize torques. Don’t try to memorize how to do these things. Go to your manual and go through it step by step. So that wasn’t that difficult. Some of the—I just didn’t find it terribly difficult. One of the things that we did in our class, they had a class competition. Those who scored highest, the class that scored highest in the weekly testing was an exempt class. We were ED (exempt from duty). We didn’t have to pull CQ (charge of quarters). We didn’t have to pull KP. You just were exempt from duty. We kind of pooled our resources and the people that were having some problems in areas were helped by the others that weren’t having. So we maintained the highest grade average for the class pretty much throughout both courses. So we didn’t have to pull KP. We didn’t have barracks inspections. So, you know, if you were having problems you were helped by our classmates. Instead of doing the GI party thing we were studying and we stayed at the highest class all the way through that course, but it was—I have a background in mechanics anyway growing up in rural Eastern Oregon. So I had an aptitude for that but it wasn’t all totally foreign to me. I understood some of the principles involved and I just didn’t have that difficult a time.

SM: Now, when you received your orders it was directly to Vietnam?

WQ: Directly to Vietnam. We were assigned to the 1st Cavalry Division. So there wasn’t any guess work about that.

SM: What did you hear about the Cav before you got there? Anything at Rucker?
WQ: I enlisted in the Army out of the National Guard. I had been in the National Guard for two years. So I wasn’t under any real pressure to do anything other than to attend my Guard meetings. I was single. I wasn’t going to college at that time, but the draft wasn’t an issue with me. I personally felt that there was something more to be doing than what the Guard offered and I wanted to be a part of it. That was about the time that they were picking up heavily on the television. The networks were running the nightly news. A lot of the emphasis was on aviation, you know, the helicopter. I was aware of the primary unit that was using helicopters. At that time it was 1st Cav. When I got to Fort Rucker we had some classes in ground control of aircraft and how to bring them in to hover and how to set them down from the ground control. I remember distinctly the pilot that was flying one of the demonstration aircraft sitting on the right seat side of the aircraft, this big yellow Cav patch showed through the window and that impressed me. I said that’s where I’m going, but then that’s where I ended up so you got to be careful what you wish for. Sometimes you get it. So I had no doubts that that’s where we were going to begin with. I was pleased that that was the unit that I was going to.

SM: How much time did you have between your graduation from crew chief training until you went and got on board the aircraft to fly over to Vietnam?

WQ: We had thirty days leave. I went and came back here to Eastern Oregon. Spent our thirty days and went, flew down to San Francisco. They had there in Oakland they had the depot replacement, the depot in Oakland and stayed there for a couple three days and then processed and then boarded the commercial airliner and headed to Hawaii. I think probably the one thing that— you were mixed up and so a lot of the people that I went to school didn’t necessarily end up through the same flight. So you went over there by yourself. Of course you’re going to be apprehensive about going over there, but you’re going alone. So you didn’t have anyone really to talk to other than strangers around you. You flew from San Francisco or Oakland to Hawaii, refueled there. Actually got out for about four hours. A couple of us ran around, grabbed a taxi, and ran around Honolulu for a little bit and came back and headed off and landed in Cam Ranh Bay that night.
SM: Well, what were your first—as far as the flight over what was the atmosphere like on the airplane itself with all these other guys going on?

WQ: It was pretty quiet. I don’t remember talking a lot with anyone else. You were pretty introspective. You were, of course, apprehensive and you knew you were going to war. You knew that there was fighting going on over there. You were going to be a part of it shortly. It really didn’t sink in to you for quite a bit further into your experience there that this was actually happening. There’s always a, I guess, part of human nature is just that you don’t believe that. It takes time to really sink in. The flight over there is just really uneventful. When we landed at Cam Ranh Bay, the first initial experience was that you knew you were going to a hot, humid country. We left here stateside in August so it was fairly warm here. But boy when they opened the hatch and you went out it really hit you in the face. Boy, this is hot and this is humid. That really struck you. They immediately, you know, you disembark the aircraft and you got on to buses. The first observation that you had is the buses that all the windows were caged. The bus driver immediately would tell you that’s not to keep you in. That’s from keeping grenades from coming, you know—keep grenades out. Oh boy, here it goes. But it really was all uneventful. You were processed in and they give you a brief orientation. It was fairly late when you got in. You could hear some firing on the perimeter. The comment was you got some mud Marines out there just shooting up things. So you’d hear just sporadic firing on the perimeter. That was pretty much it for Cam Ranh Bay, for just being there for a couple of days being processed.

SM: When you arrived in-country and you got there, what were your first impressions when they opened the door of the aircraft and you walk out?

WQ: Well, just the heat and the humidity of the Cam Ranh Base airbase. I mean it just hits you in the face. The humidity just kind of clung to your nostrils and your first breath of that real, moist humid air. You’re not going to make it. It’s different coming from a relatively cold, dry cabin to that hot humid atmosphere. It catches you. It’s really not that bad, but your first sensation is, “Boy, I can’t breathe this stuff.” For the most part I didn’t anticipate that we’d be landing in a jungle airstrip. I had stretched the imagination, but it was more built up than I anticipated. Cam Ranh Bay was a fully functioning airport and airbase with all the lights on and a lot of activity. I was impressed
by the fact that it was so bright. I didn’t think it would be quite that bright with the lights
on at night. Other than that it was all rather uneventful. After we finished the in-country
reassigning there at Cam Ranh Bay then we were flown out of Cam Ranh Bay to Camp
Radcliff, which was headquarters for the 1st Cav at An Khe. We went in to the
processing center there. The Central Highlands at that time of year was considerably
cooler, still quite hot, but it’s considerably cooler down in the south and Cam Ranh Bay.
There we did our in-country orientation. We had some classes. The infantry actually
spent a night outside the perimeter. If you weren’t infantry then you did some repelling
and did some in-country orientations. We got the VD (venereal disease) films and that
sort of thing and spent a couple days doing that. Then you were assigned to your
company. Bravo Company of 229th had their company area there at Camp Radcliff right
off the edge of the golf course. At the time it was the biggest heliport in the world. We
spent a day or two there. We got our equipment issued to us, our field gear, the clothing
that we had, our weapons were issued. We just waited to move out to the company.
Then they had a flight going to the company, which was in Bong Son, on the Bong Son
Plain right off the coast. Our first in-country helicopter flight was from An Khe to Bong
Son where we actually landed in the company area. It was interesting flight. You really
didn’t know what was going on. I sat on the left side on the crew chief’s side with an M-60—I barely knew how to load the thing—and flew there. I didn’t have a helmet so I
wasn’t connected any way. You had a lot of time to look down and think what you were
getting in to and look at the green down there, the country flying out of the Central
Highlands down onto the coastal plains. Flew in at about, oh, twenty-five hundred feet,
something like that. It was, it was a nice flight. It was smooth. Nothing happened. But
you had a lot of time to think about, damn, I’m really here. That’s it down there. It still
hadn’t fully sunk in that you were in combat because you hadn’t really experienced any
yet. The flight from An Khe to Bong Son is about twenty-five, thirty minutes as I
remember, not very long. Sat down in the company and got processed some more. Was
assigned to your unit. I was assigned to the 1st Section, 1st Flight Platoon. Our color was
red. We had five aircrafts and you came in as essentially a gunner. You flew on the right
side. You were issued your flight gear, your flight helmet, your gloves, your chest
protector, that sort of thing and just waited to be assigned a mission, got to pull KP. That
was actually the only time that I ever pulled KP over there was my brief stint as a gunner. The next morning in-country we flew on a mission and we did a relocation. It wasn’t really a combat assault. We were just moving some troops. We moved them somewhere on the Bong Son Plain and put them into—and actually at the time it was LZ (landing zone) X-Ray in the Ia Drang Valley. It was where We Were Soldiers Once, where that actually took place. I can remember the pilots talking about how what a nasty spot this was when the Cav first went over. They kind of did a real brief history of that. So I knew I was in some place important, but I really didn’t understand what was happening. I flew on maybe four, five, six missions as a door gunner, all rather uneventful. Then I was assigned an aircraft when a crew chief left, an old D model. The number was 866. That was my first ship. We were in the process of getting the new H models, which had more powerful engines. They were a brand new aircraft. So I had one of the last of the old D models. It’d been around for a little over twenty-three hundred hours. It had considerable battle damage. There was a lot of patches on it here and there and everywhere. You knew this aircraft had done its job and was still going.

SM: What about in-country briefings when you first arrived? Anything about your rules of engagement, your behaviors as an American soldier in a foreign land, that kind of stuff?

WQ: Well, essentially we—we were in an area in the Bong Son Plain. There was definitely some hot spots in the An Lo Valley and the 506 and the Crow’s Foot area and some places down on the plain too. But for the most part it was below five hundred feet. You’d deploy your weapon here you’re ready to go. If you received fire you returned it. In places like the An Lo it was a free fire zone. There were no indigenous people, civilians living there at all. They had all been moved out. So basically if anything moved you shot it. So it was totally free fire. If you were supporting your troops, obviously you had to be careful of where your people were, but other than that it was totally free fire. They didn’t keep troops overnight there a whole lot. They did some. There had been major unit actions in there. There’d been—I can remember them talking about I had one of the battalions moving on line through the An Lo River and they were ambushed by the NVA (North Vietnamese Army). The An Lo River ran kind of a pinkish for about two days cause of all the bodies that were in the river. So it was a place
not to be taken lightly. That’s for sure. We did receive some fire out of there, but for the most part most of those areas, even though there was some action there, had been I guess thoroughly gone through by the Cav. The NVA and the VC (Viet Cong) weren’t operating any large units in that area that I can remember. It was usually real small units. A couple times there were some company sized units engaged, but for the most part they were pretty much eliminated out of that area or if they were in the area they were not wanting to be engaged. They didn’t want to give away their positions so they left us alone. So I guess, from my perspective coming in to the country with no experience and very minimal training, it was an OJT (on-the-job training) period with just enough hostile activity to keep you focused, but I had some time to learn. The rest of us that had come in to country had some time to learn without—and make some mistakes that otherwise would have been fatal to us and anyone around us. So it was for about two months we had a good learning period. It made a big difference later on having at least that much behind us without more serious consequences than we had. So, everything was, while we were in combat, was a lot lower key than they were starting in October or November. So English, LZ English, was a pretty, relatively speaking, easy experience.

SM: When exactly did you arrive in Vietnam again sir?

WQ: August 5, of ’67. So by the time I got into company it was mid-August in 1967.

SM: What were your first impressions of the unit upon your arrival there?

WQ: I didn’t—I knew nothing of the history of the unit and what they had been under. Some comments made by some of the pilots when we were flying in some various locations, they seemed to understand what they were doing. Our job was primarily direct combat support. As an assault company we flew slicks, supported the infantry. We had two primary missions for them. It was the direct combat assault or the combat assault and the support missions work we called log, logistics supporting the units in the field. We had some other secondary missions. We would fly hunter-killer at night looking for, well, looking for trouble. You usually fly a Huey down low and nosing around we’d have a gunship up and high behind us and a flare ship, five thousand feet, and just trying to draw fire. We’d fly those kind of night missions. They were, for the most part, there just wasn’t a lot of hostile activity going on around there. They would rather leave you
alone. They didn’t want to draw the fire if they were around. The combat assaults, even
in places like the An Lo and the 506 and the Crow’s Foot, sometimes we’d draw some
sporadic fire. It was usually quickly suppressed. The system that we had for a combat
assault worked exceptionally well. The artillery prep was well coordinated. So when
you went in to an LZ if it was anticipated that there would be some enemy activity there
we’d have even the Air Force would go in and prep it, just put some Alpha Sierras, air
strikes, on it. We’d have the artillery prep, which would be sometimes as many as two or
three, maybe even four, batteries. They would put the barrage in there, sometimes as
much as five minutes. On final, on long final, we’d get the Willie Pete in the LZ that told
us that every battery that fired, the last gun in that battery would put in a Willie Pete, the
white smoke. So you’d know if you had a four battery prep that four smokes meant
they’re all clear. The ARAs (aerial rocket artillery) would go in and on our long final and
suppress the possible positions, the wood lines. If there was any bunker or complexes in
the area, what their 1.75 rockets, lay that in. Their door gunners would work over the
tree lines. On short final our gun company, the Smiling Tigers, the Tomcats, would lay
in the prep right along side us. Then we would be prepping it. So, when we put the
infantry in generally in those areas there was really no activity in the LZ or adjacent to it.
They’d pull out and leave. Then we would pull out and the infantry would do their job.
The—go ahead.

SM: No. Go ahead please.

WQ: So my first impression of the company to answer your question was all very
well coordinated from my perspective. They knew what they were doing and it was a job
and we did it. We did it very craftsman like. The artillery knew what they were doing.
The guns in the ARA knew what they were doing. Air Force knew what they were doing
and it all worked very well. It always impressed me how smooth that stuff went initially.
These guys got it all down. I guess I was lulled in this false sense of confidence that
there was nothing that was really going to touch us. Initially that was pretty much true.

SM: Well, what was the overall infantry strength of the unit?

WQ: The infantry?

SM: Yes, sir.
WQ: Each—the aviation unit obviously didn’t have any infantry. We were supporting a brigade of infantry. Most of the time I remember it was the 1st of the 12th Infantry Brigade and the different battalions and companies in that brigade. So we would be running about, oh, probably a thousand something if I remember, serves about a thousand twelve hundred troops in a brigade. On a CA (combat assault), a Charlie Alpha, when we put them in a Huey, an H model could carry seven fully loaded combat ready infantrymen, grunts we call them. We usually went into a flight of six. Yellow One would be the leader. It would Yellow One, Two, Three, Four. Then the last two birds would be White One and Two. Those were generally comprised of aircraft from Bravo and they would’ve called it the Ready Reaction Force. So those would be the six birds laid on that date to support the direct support of the infantry. We would have usually three or four log birds laid on to support the companies that were in the field, take out their C and Ds or donuts in the morning, coffee and donuts. We’d usually have three to four companies that we would be supporting on a log bird. We’d go out—first thing, we’d usually start about 3:00 to 3:30 in the morning. They’d wake up the crew chiefs. We’d get the ships ready, get the guns ready, do the first pre-flight inspection to get it ready for the pilot’s pre-flight and usually be cranking by 4:30 and lift off and go to the helipad of the infantry unit we were supporting. There the pilots would get the missions. They would get the map coordinates, and call signs of the units that we would be supporting. We’d load up supplies for the first company they would go out to. Generally we would go out to the first company, that would be a movement company that would be moving that day, and we would take them out just coffee and donuts and drop that off. We would pick up their extra ammo from the night, usually their mortar tubes. They didn’t pack those. We’d bring them back. All the extra ammunition, anybody going in on sick call, guys that were going on R&R (rest and recuperation) or leaving, we’d pick them up and take them back. Then we would drop off that and we would pick up the units. Let’s say that there was a unit that wasn’t moving at all, we would pick up usually breakfast and mermitite cans. They’d have bacon and eggs and the whole breakfast scenario in these mermitite cans. We’d take out extra ammunition, supplies, mail, whatever it is that they needed and drop that off to them and pick up their sick, lame, and lazy, and whatever they wanted to go back take that back. We’d go out to the moving
company and pick up all their extra stuff and bring it back. We’d fly as much as twelve
to fourteen hours a day just doing that. So we were assigned to that battalion and if they
needed something special and if we had the time then we would make different types of
runs for them. Sometimes we would just act as a scout for them if the battalion
commander didn’t have a Charlie Charlie, a command and control that bird that day, he
would grab the log bird, go out and make a quick flight, and do an aerial recon of
something. So we were just at the disposal of the battalion that day, very long days. If
the company was engaged a lot of times we would be the Medevac too. We would pick
up the wounded. We would pick up their KIAs (killed in action) if they were engaged.
So we did a lot of different things when we were on log, very long days and busy. We
would have—so usually half the aircrafts were deployed supporting the infantry. We’d
have, of course, the ships that were down for maintenance of one thing or another and
we’d have a couple that were just held back in reserve in case they were needed. We had
twenty aircraft. Usually half of them were flying, a couple were held in reserve, and
thirty percent were in some kind of maintenance.

SM: What was the logistics system like for your unit and was there ever shortage
of equipment to keep, especially the aircraft running, but in any way whatsoever?
WQ: Well, there were spot problems now and again. Some of it really was rather
frivolous. We had trouble getting flight gloves. Parts weren’t a real difficulty at that
time. I don’t remember having any problems. We’d generally get what we wanted.
We’d always have one aircraft that was available for the company to do parts runs and do
whatever was needed. So I don’t remember any real serious problems of any kind. I
mean sometimes you just didn’t have exactly what you wanted, but when we were in III
Corps, around An Khe and Bong Son, we didn’t have any real problem. Let’s see. In
like November we moved from Bong Son back to An Khe and were headquartered out of
An Khe. We went to support the 1st of the 12th out of the Dak To and Kontum. We
didn’t have a whole lot there. That was on kind of a shoestring. We didn’t even have a
perimeter. We just parked the ships out on the edge of the jungle and we guarded them
ourselves. That was kind of an interesting period. Didn’t have a whole lot there, but we
got by. I don’t remember not having enough ammunition or enough chow or anything
like that. We always had what we needed. So at that time there wasn’t a real problem
that I can remember. Some of the creature comforts weren’t always available, but that wasn’t that big of a deal.

SM: Okay. What was the state of the base itself, where you lived? If you would describe your living quarters, your typical chow that you would eat, stuff like that.

WQ: The flight line, which was the center as far from the flight platoons, was generally all pentaprime, which was a petroleum product that sealed them. It was thin asphalt if you will. That was the center of our focus. We had to revamp much for the aircraft and they were interdispersed about fifty to a hundred feet apart. The company area was kind of on a side hill above the flight line. Each flight platoon had an officer’s tent and an enlisted tent. So the crew chiefs and gunners that flew with the first section 1st Flight Platoon had their own tent and the second section 1st Flight Platoon had their tent. We had—it was a GP (general purpose) medium. We had I think as I remember about ten people in a tent, five on a side. We had plenty of room. You had an issue cot, an issue sleeping bag, an issue poncho liner, an issue mosquito net, and that was about it. Anything else that you wanted we made ourselves. We put—ammo boxes were plentiful. The artillery people generated a lot of empty ammo boxes. So you’d take those apart and they were just like one by threes and we’d use those. We’d make flooring in our tent were made out of ammo boxes and we’d make our chairs out of ammo boxes. You’d make shelves for your personal stuff. You made those out of ammo boxes. I made a desk once out of an ammo box with a folding lid so I could just close it up and seal it or fold it out and use it like a writing desk. So it was pretty—if you had any kind of carpentry skills at all. We had tools that we could get out of supply and nails and lots of ammo boxes. So we’d make whatever you wanted. So your imagination is what limited you. As far as we would go in together and buy a refrigerator out of the PX so we kept our beer and pop cold. Always had a generator running twenty-four hours a day so that we always had power. So relative to the infantry we had pretty plush surroundings. It was never anything fancy. The only time we lived in an actual building was in An Khe when we were in An Khe for about a little over a month. I was there for maybe two or three weeks when I wasn’t someplace else like Dak To or Kontum. That was metal roof, wooden walls, concrete floor. The rest of the time was all in camps. Drainage was a problem during the wet season. You had lots of ditches draining water here, there, and
everywhere. But it was—I look at the pictures of the guys who were in the Gulf this go
around and it’s very similar. We had sandbags around the tents for shrapnel protection. I
mean that’s the way armies have been living in the field for the last couple three hundred
years. Not a whole lot has changed when you’re in the field, but we did have a couple
light bulbs and refrigerators. So we did have some of the creature comforts. We really
didn’t lack for anything. I never felt like I was—I didn’t feel uncomfortable. Growing
up in eastern Oregon I spent a lot of time camping and living in the woods anyway so it
was just one big camping trip to me is what it was. I just didn’t mind it at all. In fact, in
a lot of ways for me it was better than living stateside because you didn’t have spit shine
stuff. You didn’t have to do a lot of the busy work that you do in the military when
you’re not in a combat area. So I thought it was just fine. I didn’t have a problem with it.

We would go to Bong Son. We had an airbase out on the plain. It was called Phu Cat.
Among other things it was an emergency runway for B-52s and they had a spider
squadron there. It always amazed me that you had the Air Force was living out there in
the middle of nowhere in Phu Cat with air conditioned barracks and all the creature
 comforts. These guys don’t know how to take it. They wouldn’t be able to even handle
where we were living and we were living pretty good compared to our infantry folks. I
didn’t have a problem with it. One big camping trip. Are you there? Seem to have lost
you.

SM: Let’s change gears real quick.

WQ: Oh, you are there. Okay.

SM: Oh, yes, sir. I’m sorry. I’m sorry. I was just gathering some notes real
quick. When you got in-country and you got to your unit did your unit provide you with
any kind of specialized training for the kind of operations you would be undertaking?

WQ: No. Not really. What little bit of training I got in company was when I was
assigned to a ship as a gunner. I would work with the crew chief. That only lasted ten
days, maybe two weeks at the most, and then I had my own ship. I was pretty much on
my own. I had the basics down. I had a manual. We had other crew chiefs. If you had
questions you’d ask them, but it was all on the job training. You learned as you went.
You paid attention and tried not to make mistakes. We had the luxury after we were
issued the H models that we had new ships. So they didn’t have any, you know, just a
few hours on them. So they weren’t fatigued. They didn’t have a lot of battle damage.
You didn’t have problems from the outset. Maintenance was there and if it was a little
more difficult the crew chiefs did the first second echelon maintenance. Our maintenance
platoon did the third and fourth and then of course the fifth echelon maintenance was
done by 15th TC (Transportation Corps), which was at An Khe. So the support was there,
but I don’t remember just having a good strong H model once I got one of those and
brand new. We didn’t have a lot of problems to begin with so you got to ease into it as
things developed. You had some experience behind you and you knew how to deal with
them. Of course if you ever had a doubt then you would call in the techs and let them
know what the problem was and let them deal with it. By and large we had a very gentle
break in period for the first couple three months, but as far as real training it just wasn’t
there in terms of as you would look, you know, like a classroom setting. There was none.
It was all on the job. So you had to pay attention.

SM: When you were out flying missions what kind of pre-flight briefings, pre-
mission briefings, did you receive as a crew chief? Anything?

WQ: Well, usually we knew if we were going to be on the Ready Reaction Force,
the RF. You knew that was your mission. You knew what your mission was. The
specific missions you really didn’t know not at the crewmember level. So you would set
up accordingly. If you were going to be on the RF you’d pack more ammunition, but
once you lifted off from the company it didn’t really make any difference what your
mission was. You were ready. When the pilots, usually the peter pilot, the guy flying in
the right seat, the new guy in-country would come down to the pre-flight. Of course
you’d be visiting with him and finding out what was being laid on. Then when the
aircraft commander or the AC got there then you’d get some more specifics. He was the
more experienced of the two pilots. He would brief you then on what you were going to
be doing, what to expect. So that was really the extent of your briefing. The AC had got
his briefings in the air ops and so he knew what he was going to do, where we’re going.
If you’re in the RF the flight leader had the most specific instructions and you just
followed him. If you were going on a log for that day then you got a lot of your
instructions. You knew who you were assigned to, where their pad was, and you’d go
over there and you would get what they wanted and where they wanted it. Essentially
you did what they wanted you to do. So the briefings and stuff weren’t real formal, not for the crew. I don’t think they were really—you conjure up the 8th Air Force during World War II going in to the briefing hall and real formalized stuff. We didn’t have any of that. There wasn’t need of it. Most of the pilots knew the area. The aircraft commanders had been to a lot of these LZs time and time again. You just tell them the name of the LZ and they knew everything that really you needed to know about it, the best approaches and the best altitude to come in. There wasn’t really the need for that. When you’re on the Ready Reaction Force you didn’t have any trouble finding the LZ because that was the place that was being blown to hell. So that was pretty easy too and you just set up on the short final. The aircraft commander already knew what the winds were. You could just see them from the artillery. You had an idea of what they were anticipating as far as enemy activity. You’d get the word whether it’d be suppress the fires from the slicks from us or not. Sometimes it was, sometimes it wasn’t. It just depended on what they anticipated. The proximity of other friendlies. You’d try to make it. You just don’t want a lot of ordinance flying around, depending on where the friendlies were. So the briefings weren’t real formal for us, but we knew where we were going and who we were supporting. We had, setting in the back there, we had full communications. We could bring up the UHF (ultra high frequency), the VHF (very high frequency), the FMs (frequency modulation), the intercoms. So as far as the chatter going back and forth between the flight, between the different aircraft, between our company area, between the ground, we knew what was going on. We weren’t just sitting back there in total silence. We knew what was going on and who was doing what and what was expected.

SM: Throughout your first five months in-country, say, from August to December ’67, typically what kind of enemy units were you encountering? Were they mostly Viet Cong, NVA, a combination?

WQ: Up where we were it was mostly NVA. I think the whole infrastructure of the VC had pretty much been dealt with. There was obviously VC activity. It was pretty sporadic. You probably had some main line VC units that were attached to the NVA that we were involved with. I can remember engaging some people that the fifty VC stereotype in the black pajamas. Most of the NVA were in uniform. So when you’re
engaging NVA you knew it when you had sight recognition. So primarily NVA. I didn’t.
really have a lot of engagements with VC that I can remember. Once in a while it’d be
pretty small. If they were main line VC units I wasn’t aware of it. It didn’t really make
much of a difference. A guy shooting at you is a guy shooting at you. It didn’t make
much difference what his uniform was.

SM: Absolutely. Well, what was the typical strength of the units you went up
against during that first five months?

WQ: Probably company and down. Probably the biggest engagements we
encountered was up at Dak To. There was some battalion movements over there, but
from my perspective if you were going to be dealing with heavier, larger units you’re
going to be getting more anti-aircraft type ordinance put on us, quad fifties, 37
millimeter, 40 millimeter anti-aircraft. We didn’t get a whole lot of that in those first
couple three months. We got a little bit of it up at Dak To. Some anti-aircraft stuff were
deployed on us. We just really didn’t see a whole lot of that until we moved up north in
to I Corps. Some fifties, there’s always fifty-ones scattered around. Once in a while you
knew you were being targeted by a fifty-one, but most of the part it was small units,
company sized, in that area. The area had been dealt with pretty well by the 1st Cav and
there just wasn’t a whole lot of activity. We had the 173rd Airborne Brigade was moving
in to take over that area. We worked some with them on the III Corps and on the Central
Plains. We worked a lot with—not a lot but some—with the ARVNs (Army of the
Republic of Vietnam). They were active throughout that area. The National Police, we
worked some with those, those people. The Americal Division was active in that area at
some point. I remember doing some combat assaults for the Americal Division. So
when our infantry units weren’t needing the support then we were loaned out to whoever
needed it. We worked with a lot of different units over there. I can remember a few of
the call signs, like the National Police were the Artful Stars. I wonder who came up with
that, but I didn’t particularly like working with them. I always thought that they were just
a little too Nazi, Nazi like, for me to be working with. Not that I had the choice in the
matter, but I didn’t care for those people. The ARVNs was always a problem. We knew
that the ARVNs had a lot of infiltrators in them. Sometimes you’d put them in a combat
assault and they’re small people. So we’d carry as many as eleven ARVN soldiers in an
H model. Sometimes you’d go in to the LZ and one of them would leave a grenade in the ship. You always had to be careful of that. The minute they start pouring out you start looking for the frags lying around. You just pitched the frag right out in the middle of them. I never felt good working with them because a lot of them, you know, most of them were conscripts. They weren’t, you know, the enemy, but far too many of them were infiltrators. They like nothing better to put maximum damage on you and it’s like jumping out and leaving a frag in the ship. The old Hueys didn’t handle that kind of explosion very well. So I preferred working with our own people. They understood what was happening. The Cav grunt knew what was happening. I was always interested. The 173rd Airborne Brigade, when we were working with them, they had some idea that the ship had to be setting on the ground before they could get out. I’m sure that’s what their orders were and we would come in to the LZ so we wouldn’t have to set down on possible punji stakes or trip booby traps. We would hover three feet off the ground and our Cav guys were out of the aircraft. They didn’t hang around. They were gone. 173rd, they just wouldn’t get out. We’d come to a hover two, three feet off the ground and I can remember one time I particularly impressed the pilots. I was throwing these guys out, just grabbing them and throwing them out, yelling, “Jump. You’re airborne.” I’m sure they didn’t see the humor in it, but I thought it was funny. It was a multitude of different things and none of it was really heavy action. There was a couple times it would get kind of hot for a little bit. You’d get some company, an NVA company, cornered in a ville’ and the artillery. You’d have them concentrated and put your fire in on them and just go in and clean it up. Not that there wasn’t, you know, a lot of rest particularly for the grunt, but they just didn’t have the, the NVA didn’t have their way in III Corps where we were. They just did not. A few incidents. We didn’t get hit a lot in our LZs. The built up ones I don’t—real sporadic, maybe two or three rounds in Bong Son. When we were at An Khe we got hit a few times. We had a mission called hunter-killer that was out in an area called Can Ac. It was a mountainous region I think to the north of An Khe where we’d get, you know, mortars and rockets from. All we did we just looked for trouble. We would track, hover into the trees, we’d be doing a lot of the jobs that the scouts were doing in heavier built up areas. We’d do sniffer missions. Just had a probe out on the
front that would gather the air and smell them. We did some psy war ops stuff in these free fire zones and if it moved you shot it. That’s where most of the problem was. I can remember initially we were getting some mortar fire out of An Khe. General Tolson said get any more mortar fire out of An Khe into Radcliff and we’re going to level the town.

That ended that and they knew we would do it. We didn’t have a lot of infiltrator problems in our LZs because we didn’t allow any civilians in after night. Very few worked inside our perimeters during the day. We just didn’t have them around. We had it controlled really. There was a very different mentality in ’67 and ’68. We actually felt like we were actually doing something. We were fighting. We were gaining ground, if you will. We were doing our job and doing it well and getting it done. I know that—if we’d have stayed at the level that we were and continued doing what we were doing the war would have been over in probably about ’69. There wouldn’t have been enough NVA left to deal with it, but from our perspective I know the guys that went back for second tours in ’70, ’71, it was a whole different attitude then. It hurt the people that were over there. It wasn’t the same war is what I’ve heard. At the reunion the guys say it wasn’t the same war. We were over there in ’68. It was a whole different war than even the latter part of ’69. But we were doing our job and we were doing it well.

SM: Well, would your base camps be mortared or rocketed at all?

WQ: Yeah. We did. A couple times in Bong Son and one or two times at An Khe. We did get hit a little bit, but we dealt with it. It just wasn’t a big event. I’m trying to remember for sure if we ever got hit at Bong Son. If we did it was nothing close to us. We had right next door to an artillery unit so they’re always banging away. There’s no doubt in your mind once you’ve been on the receiving end with the difference between outgoing and incoming, but we just didn’t. We didn’t get it. Not then. That would change when we got up north, but in the area that we had been for a couple years we just didn’t have that kind of problem.

SM: Okay. You mentioned earlier that every once in a while if when ARVN were carried on your aircraft they would leave behind frags. Would the pins be pulled?

WQ: Oh, yeah.

SM: I mean, these are pulled active grenades?
WQ: Yeah. Yeah. They would just all pile out and one of them would pull a pin and leave a frag laying there. So I mean you had to be quick. The only thing you could do is you just yell frag and throw it out. What happens is what happens. You had to watch it. I had two of them on one mission that they were taped together and they dropped it underneath the troop seat in front of me and I just laid over. We pulled up out of the LZ and I’d start scanning. The gunner and I would start looking for frags. I mean these two were taped together laying under the seat right next to—well, I had to lay out on the seat, unbuckle my seat belt and lay out on the seat and reach under to get it and throw it out. It happened. It’s not like we did a lot of missions with them. Like, you know, if I were to come up with a number maybe twenty or thirty missions and it happened maybe, oh, three, maybe four times.

SM: When you tossed these grenades out they’d go off?

WQ: Well, yeah.

SM: Wow. Did your unit ever lose any helicopters because of this?

WQ: I don’t think so. I mean, it was part of our procedure when we worked with the ARVN’s that you understood that was a very real possibility. I know that other crew chiefs and gunners had that happen. But I don’t think that we did. I’m reasonably sure that we never did, not that I’m aware of anyway. Later on we lost a ship and I don’t think it was from our company to a situation like that. I had nine days left in company and I was still flying. I was down on a maintenance hold. I wasn’t even supposed to fly that day and I replaced a ship that had been effectively blown out of the air. They weren’t real sure whether—they thought maybe it was an RPG (rocket propelled grenade). When we went in there we were moving out refugees. We’d gone in and got one group out. Then we went back to get another group out and—and I don’t know—you only have nine days left in-country so you’re just antsy as all hell and you’re busy saying, “I’m too short for this shit,” was the common expression. When you picked up refugees, these little people, you’d have twenty of them pile on there if not more. I just got a look, a movement, and mama san was sitting there pulling a pin on a frag. That’s probably what got the ship that we replaced was essentially a Vietnamese suicide bomber. I wouldn’t be a bit surprised if they had the frag given to them by the NV or VC. They really didn’t even know what they were doing. If you want your children safe then you’ll get on there
and pull this pin out and drop it on the floor. They probably didn’t even have any idea
what they were doing.

SM: Unbelievable. Well, for that first five months before ’68, how many aircraft
losses do you remember your unit suffering? Were there very many?

WQ: I don’t think we lost a single aircraft. We had, obviously, some battle
damage, pretty small stuff, but I don’t remember losing one at all.

SM: How about personnel losses?

WQ: We had some guys that were wounded. I don’t remember even—no KIAs
that I can remember. Some minor wounds, we had a couple leg wounds I think, nothing
real serious. So I mean it was a charm school, it really was in a lot of respects, because
given where we were the Cav had the area pacified if you will to the point that—although
it was dangerous obviously, it wasn’t near as it was going to be when we moved up north.
We were very fortunate that we had that period. Dac Tho was considerably more active
than An Khe. So that was probably for us, for those that came over in August, that group
came over in August, September that was the most hostile action most of us had seen.
We first went over there. I can’t remember who—I think there was some Marine activity
there, maybe not. I don’t remember. I know that we put in the 1st of the 12th, pretty
much a battalion size move, in on a ridge top. Either another unit—and I think it comes
to me as Marine recon—didn’t have the word that they’re going to have friendlies in
there and essentially they saw movement on this hilltop and called in air strikes on it. We
spent three days taking out the dead from the 1st of the 12th off of that ridge top there,
very affected. The body count was something like two hundred of our guys were killed
by our guys’ friendly fire, if you will. So that was probably, in terms of handling our
own KIAs, we would be supporting and have ground action and pull out wounded. We’d
have a couple wounded or a couple three wounded and maybe a couple KIAs. It was
very limited type actions, but this was the first time that we had load after load after load
of dead and wounded. It seemed like we pulled out—the first day we were just pulling
out wounded and the next two days we’re pulling out KIAs until we run out of body bags
and went downtown in Kontum and bought baskets. A lot of it was—towards the end it
was just body parts. Bodies turn black real quick and body parts do in that country.
You’re trying to get the different pieces of at least the same skin color in a bag. After
awhile it was even difficult to even tell that. That was our real first heavy, heavy
contact—not contact, but in dealing with a lot of casualties. There was a lot of—we got
hit a lot at night, not so much in Kontum, but down at Dak To and we were on some kind
of mission there. We were down on the flight land at Dak To and they started hitting us
pretty heavy with mortars. As a helicopter we were able to lift out of there and get out of
there. Both the C-130s, the ones we were setting between, both were hit and burnt. We
pulled up out of there and just started circling the area trying to find some muzzle flashes
from the mortar tubes. To then Dak Tho and Kontum were the heaviest action that we
saw. When we got through that right after Christmas we moved up north and everything
was livened up considerably once we went up north.

SM: When you—let’s see. By the end of ’67, bring you back just before you
moved to Kontum and Dak Tho.

WQ: That happened back November.

SM: Back in November then. How did you think the war was going? Did you
think you understood what the United States was trying to accomplish there in Vietnam?

WQ: Oh, no. Yeah. We spent a lot of time going in to the same hilltop that we
went in to last week and going last week and blow the hell out of it. We weren’t holding
anything. So even then you would be questioning why are we going in to the same place
that we were in last week. We’d take a couple casualties and then pull out and then go
back in and just stay there. Move them out. So a lot of us were, “What is this that we’re
doing? We’re not holding anything. We’re not cleaning them out and keeping them
out.” That was a very simplistic look at what we were doing, but you started asking
yourself why aren’t we just holding this stuff and going forward on a front if you will and
just taking everything that’s in the path. Of course that country doesn’t lend itself like it
does in the Middle East where you can see twenty miles off in the horizon and you can
move everything out. You’d have to walk hand in hand through that country to do that.
That’s kind of what they did with Operation Ranch Hand trying to deprive them of the
triple canopy by defoliating everything and let’s you, could get, see down to the ground.
That country doesn’t lend itself to just making a sweep and moving everything out
because they could be above you or under you, but we were starting to ask why aren’t we
just holding this and cleaning it out. It was just the question. The answer is it’s not a
country that lends itself to that and we knew that too, but we still didn’t feel like we were
going in a lot of the areas that we were working in and cleaning them out and holding it.
SM: Yes. Okay. Well, let’s take a quick break.
SM: Back from break. I wanted to go ahead and quickly cover the buildup of
Tet. If you would describe where you were I guess through the months of December and
January and what your expectations were as far as how the war is progressing where you
were.
WQ: Well, we were at An Khe for Christmas. Then shortly in January moved
back down to the Bong Son Plain to an LZ called Dog, which was just a little on the other
side of Bong Son from LZ English. We were there for it seems like a week, ten days.
We finally got the order to move up north. From what I knew personally it was we were
just going up north to help the Marines. That’s really all I knew at that time. I know that
there’s a lot more involved than that in retrospect and from reading history accounts and
stuff, but that’s what I knew. We loaded up. Primarily the ship, my ship, was full of my
possessions, personal possessions, and the two pilots’ personal possessions, my gunner’s
personal possessions, and as much other stuff we could cram on. We took off grossly
overloaded and headed north. Stopped I think probably once at Da Nang, refueled there
and put on a full load of fuel and had to do a sliding take off. We couldn’t even get off,
hover off the ground until we hit transitional and were able to take off. Went in to Phu
Bai, which was a Marine base just on the other side of Hue. Spent a day or two there.
Then we went up north and established what we called LZ Tombstone. It had a couple of
other names. Then finally the 101st took it over and called it Camp Eagle, which was
their headquarters for the 101st Air up in I Corps. Initially I had no sense of Tet from my
level. We had problems with water. At one point we were pretty much without water
other than what—you were allowed to drink all that you wanted out of a lister bag in a
company area. You got a canteen cup for personal hygiene and you got to fill your
canteen. Once you got that initial ration in the morning you could drink what you wanted
out of the lister bag, but you couldn’t take any away with you. We had water for
purification had been hit by I guess the VC and put out of action. So we were begging
water from the Marines and they weren’t real generous with it. Then from there we
moved to Camp Evans. Evans was a Marine base, pretty well built up. We established
our camp pretty much like we’d been establishing camps the whole time I was there.

That’s when the monsoons started, a lot of rain, cold. I’d never been so cold in my life as I was over there. You wouldn’t think that you get cold over there, but temperature gets down to around fifty degrees and a steady drizzle all the time and flying around a hundred miles an hour with the door open I got pretty cold back there. The day before Tet itself—we do a lot of we call it laggering. We would send ships. We dispersed the ships so they weren’t all in the company area. We would go to sometimes entirely different parts of the LZ that we were on or go to entirely different LZs so that if we were hit that we wouldn’t lose all the ships, all of our eggs in a basket if you will. The morning of Tet we cranked real early. Things started happening. We were at LZ Lane, which I was on. It was south of Hue on the coast. When we did that I usually just slept in my ship. The officers would go to the officer’s clubs and they would usually have officer’s barracks. Usually the crew just stayed, the enlisted crew, just stayed with their ship. Not always. Some of the officers would stay in the ship too. We cranked early, knew that something was different happening. We left LZ Lane and flew over Hue. In fact it was when they were trying to get in to the—I remember specifically going over the Perfume River to the little airport on the—what was it? What the heck was it? Anyway, it was across the river from Hue and they were being hit real hard. They were calling for help and we just flat couldn’t get in there. The ground fire was so intense that you could see the fire going both ways and the mortar rounds hitting. There wasn’t anything we could do. Couldn’t get into them. So we flew back on to our company area. Then it was just—and that first day of Tet was just a blur. Everywhere you went you were being shot at. We were moving troops frantically here, there, and everywhere. Fuel, rearm, move troops, shoot it out with them, come back and stick your finger in bullet holes and check them to make sure you can still fly with them then refuel, rearm, and move troops. I can remember at the end of that day we’d just put in some troops and it was starting to get dark. We were pulling out and receiving fire and returning it. I could see an ARA (aerial rocket artillery) bird. It crashed into a rice paddy and it was burning and I thought, geez, I’ll never forget this day. I had no idea that there was a major offensive. I mean, obviously I caught on pretty quick, but I mean it’s something coming up. I had no idea. Then one day melted into another and they all turned out to be like that day for about ten
days, two weeks. It was pretty interesting. We went from a team of twenty ships down
to four real quickly. Almost all of our ships were battle damaged the first day. We took
some minor casualties. We got through it fairly well all things considered. We’d get hit
at night. We’re getting hit almost every night, rockets and mortars. Some of the ships
were being damaged out in the flight line. Resupply became a real problem. I know that
for a while there at Camp Evans we were totally cut off from any ground travel. I mean
we could fly out of there all right, but they were resupplying us with C-130s. The C-130s
would—it was heavily overcast, a steady drizzle. You would wait around in the mud, a
real soupy thin mud, up to your, about halfway, mid-calve. Everything turns into mud.
The flight line was fairly solid. There was a lot of rock on the flight line so it was
holding together, but everything else was just soup. The C-130s would resupply us.
They’d drop down out of the cloud cover and the tracers would go up at them and they
would parachute all this stuff out and dive back into the clouds. It would be a running
gun battle to see who got it. It was an interesting couple weeks. We ran short of pretty
much everything. Ammunition got to be—we could fly out and get what we wanted and
refuel in some more secure areas. I remember once we got it seemed like a whole lot of
nothing but dehydrated eggs and bologna. The cooks got real creative with bologna. We
were having bologna and some powdered eggs for breakfast and bologna sandwiches for
lunch and baked bologna for dinner. We always had plenty to eat. That wasn’t ever a
problem, but there wasn’t a lot of variety there where I can remember a few times. A lot
of the food you were getting they would put the cans up. We would receive cans with the
shrapnel and bullet holes in them and be careful what you’re eating. You don’t know
what’s in it. The ships were taking a lot of damage. We started doing things that were
absolutely forbidden. Wiring, we were splicing together. You’re never supposed to
splice wire. If you had one wire and a whole harness damaged you take out the whole
harness and replace it. We were splicing wires. A bullet would go through all that stuff
and cut half a dozen wires. You just figure out where they went and splice them back
together. We were cannibalizing aircraft because if the aircraft got hit bad enough we
couldn’t get parts for it. It was down so we’d start taking parts off for the other ships that
were battle damaged. A couple of the aircrafts just flat disappeared. I mean, they just
disappeared. So we had a hard time keeping ships flyable. I think for a while the best we
could get up was twelve. So that was one time when parts was serious. It was just
difficult. Basic supply stuff was difficult. The Ready Reaction Force and the log ships
could go out and get fuel. About that time our ammo dump was hit. It set it off and it
was throwing live rounds everywhere. Some of them could go off and some of them
wouldn’t. That was kind of interesting. We were doing a lot of support of our Cav unit.

We started supporting the Marines some. We did some flights into Hue for the Marines,
mostly pulling out casualties and resupply. The Cav infantry had blocking forces. Hue
was supposed to be a Marine operation so it was left to that. The Cav did all the
blocking, make sure that the NVA couldn’t get out and no fresh resupplies or troops
could get in. Some of those blocking forces sometimes were very heavily engaged.

There was one—I can’t remember the action. I remember they called it the Battle of Titi
Wood, the little wood. One of our battalions became fully engaged and were hit hard
when they were going through online between two little villages about two hundred yards
of rice paddy between them. I did a lot of support there. That first night we couldn’t get
the wounded and the dead out of the rice paddy that were cut down when they went
through there. We were flying around at night with our search lights on trying to pick up
the wounded and dead out there in the rice paddies. Felt like a bullet magnet. Every time
you’d go in there you’d get fired on. It was like that. That would have been east of Hue.
The blocking forces around the Imperial Capitol were heavily engaged on both sides,
troops trying to get out of Hue. They’ll infiltrate back into Laos and Reserves trying to
get in. We used to fly along the Perfume River and shoot at the NVA that were up on the
Citadel walls. They’d shoot at us. We’d shoot back at them. It was a real hectic month
pretty much. About that time we started supporting the Special Forces in their studies
and observation group operations in Laos and the A Shau. So if you—kind of like going
out of the skillet into the fire. As bad as it was down in I Corps you get up into the A
Shau Valley and it was a lot worse. Mostly because there were a lot of them there and
they only had a couple helicopters to shoot at. So Hue was cold. It was wet. It was—at
the same time it was very hot in terms of contact. Everywhere you went you had to fight
your way in and fight your way back out. Had trouble keeping supplies into some of the
units, strung out and in some of their LZs, the firebases. We had some firebases get
overrun. Sometimes you could see the activity. You just couldn’t get to it. So a lot of it
is a lot of flying and a lot of fog, terrible weather to fly in. I remember once we couldn’t 
even find Camp Evans. We flew out on some kind of a mission. It was a single ship, and 
flying above the fog and trying to get down through it. We finally decided if we could 
get through the fog and find Highway One we’d hover along the highway to try to find 
our way back. Army Hueys didn’t have much in the way of avionics on it at all. What 
we did have was pretty elementary stuff. We found a hole in the fog and just kind of 
dove down through it. They went just right, just kind of a cylinder right straight to the 
ground. When we got to the ground and it was full of the NVA. They were just as happy 
to see us as we were them. He just pulled pitch and got the hell out of there. Just one 
event like that right after the other. It was popping all the time. I received some—I was 
shot down. In fact, Levering, Walt Levering. We were shot down in kind of the coastal 
plain between Phu Bai and Camp Evans. Just took a lot of hits, but one of them cut our 
fuel line and shut her fuel off. That was really the only time we ever was hit or was down 
by ground fire. Managed to get that ship back and had it back up flying the next day. I 
don’t know. But I kept telling you that we had an easy break in period in Bong Son and 
An Khe. When we got back up north we had at least that base to deal with some 
experience. We’d have been in sore trouble if we would have come into country right in 
the middle of that. In fact I can remember we started getting a lot of replacements then 
and were taking casualties. Two crew chiefs or future crew chiefs came into the 
company, into our section, in the middle of a mortar attack. These guys would come into 
Cam Ranh Bay and Cam Ranh Bay was under attack. Everywhere they went they were 
being hit with rockets and mortars. They came into Quang Tri and they were being hit. 
They finally got into the company and they come sliding into the first section or first 
platoon’s tent. We were under attack. By then we knew how close they were and they 
weren’t close enough to get us all excited and we’re just kind of sitting around in the 
hooch. You sat in close to your sandbags and wait it out. These poor guys come flying 
in the tent and just did a face plant right in the middle of the floor just gasping for breath 
and, “God, is it always like this?” “Nah, sometimes it gets bad.” These old guys, you 
know, laying it on the FNGs (fucking new guy). During all that we moved. We moved 
up from Evans to Quang Tri or Evans to, yeah, Quang Tri at LZ Sharon in preparation of 
going up north to Khe Sanh to help the Marines out at Khe Sanh. So the time we got
done with Tet we moved up to Khe Sanh, started supporting their operations. Did one of
the largest division assault ever done into Khe Sanh. We actually put in the 1st Cav
Division and the 1st I think it was the 1st ARVN Marine Division into Khe Sanh. When I
landed in Khe Sanh it was the first time that any aircraft had landed inside the Khe Sanh
perimeter in two weeks. In fact, they did 60 Minutes, or not 60 Minutes, but Twentieth
Century did a special on Khe Sanh at Con Thien. The first two or three seconds they
have a Huey setting down at Khe Sanh, happened to be an Army Huey and happened to
be my Huey. So I thought it was quite appropriate that they do this special on the
Marines. Tenacity at Khe Sanh and the first thing they show is an Army helicopter
relieving them there. Khe Sanh was interesting. It was one of those places that we’d fly
in there and they’d had every square inch of that LZ zeroed in with their artillery. So
you’d make all a display of landing in one area and about the time they started dropping
artillery in on you, you fly off to the other side of the LZ real quick and dump your load
to get the hell out of there before they could get their guns moved on you. So I spent a
little time at Khe Sanh. In between Tet and Khe Sanh and we’d go back and support the
Special Forces out of Phu Bai. They had their FOB-1 (forward operating base)—let’s
see—it was FOB-1 North, Phu Bai. It was like the 7th or 8th Special Forces Group. They
were doing a lot of the preliminary stuff for the future assault into the A Shau. So we
were putting in their lerp (LRRP, long-range reconnaissance patrols) teams and pulling
them out and letting the ARVN or the NVA use us for target practice. So the minute we
put the division in at Khe Sanh and when we got done at Khe Sanh we pulled the whole
division out, put the whole division into the A Shau. The A Shau was the place where we
took most of our casualties, lost most of our ships. Of course the reunion we had on
April nineteenth was because of that. By that time we were all pretty experienced. A lot
of us were getting short by then and your focus turned because you knew the day that you
were going to leave the country you’re—I know a lot of the guys, the enlisted, the crew
chief, quit flying after the A Shau. We had—some of them quit flying as early as ninety
days before they got out. They just went to maintenance and turned the ships over to the
young and dumb. I just never did want to go to maintenance. So I stayed in the flight
platoon and I flew my last mission nine days, my next to last. The last mission I flew
was taking my ship, 785, to Da Nang to 15th TC for its thousandth hour. It was one of the
newest H models in the company and it was the first one to break a thousand hours.
There at Da Nang I turned it over to a young kid that just got in-country. He didn’t even
get ten days of support from me. He just got in-country. They sent him down there and
said, “Here’s your ship. Goodbye.” He got a little less indoctrination or training than I
did. Came back to the company, signed out, went down to Cam Ranh Bay again waiting
to get out. That was an experience. But anyway do you have any questions on—?

SM: Yes, sir. I was wondering, in terms of what happened at the A Shau, what
took your unit into that valley and what did you expect to happen?
WQ: What took us into there?
SM: Yes, sir. I mean, were you going in for a specific, on a specific operation for
a specific mission?
WQ: Well, the A Shau Valley, we were supporting the studies and observation
groups, the Special Forces, in there and they were doing all the recon. They were trying
to locate the weapons and placements, the anti-aircraft. They had tanks. They had
everything in there. In fact, there were three old French airbases, airfields, in the A Shau
Valley, the A Luoi, the Ta Bat I think, and the A Shau. They were even landing light
aircraft on some of those runways. They considered the A Shau as a primary infiltration
route in I Corps out of Laos. They had a road down through there. They had CATs,
heavy road repair equipment in there. They were repairing mud holes with PSP (pierced
steel planking), the steel plates. Just bunkers everywhere. When we were flying in
support of the Special Forces they had the estimated two divisions of people in there with
everything, the quad 50s, the 37, 40 millimeters, the 80 millimeters, the 100 millimeter
anti-aircraft, their own artillery, their own armor. They were in their pretty heavy. Part
of what they wanted to do is cut that infiltration route. They figured that that was the
primary infiltration route prior to Tet. As they withdrew they would be withdrawing
through the A Shau. So a lot of us were flying support missions in the A-Shau before we
actually assaulted it. So we knew exactly what we were getting into. We knew it would
be bad because they had so much stuff in there. The idea was to go in and cut that supply
line, create as much damage as we could, and then get back out because the monsoon was
setting in. You just didn’t have that much time but it would—to disrupt their flow and
how long did they figure they were going to disrupt it I have no idea what division
thought they were going to do let alone MACV (Military Assistance Command Vietnam), Westmoreland, but that was the idea. Once we got in there we destroyed a lot of equipment and disrupted their flow. We got some tanks. Then we pulled out. It was kind of the same old story. You’d go in there, lose a lot of people, and pull out. The 101st when back in there, lost a lot of people then pulled out. The Marines tried it again. Marines had been trying again to the A Shau Valley in Operation Dewey Canyon and a couple and they didn’t have the resources to do it. So just a typical, go in, create a lot of havoc. Try to cut their supplies, pull out, let them rebuild it and they did. It’s like trying to sweep water up hill. The minute you quit sweeping it flows right back down. So, you know, the overall strategy to inflict maximum damages and then pull out and let them rebuild again so you can go back in another day I guess from my perspective that’s what we were doing. We did inflict a lot of casualties and they inflicted casualties on us. So I don’t know what the zero sum gain of it all was.

SM: In your operations there in the A Shau, you mentioned that this was when you lost a lot of aircraft, a lot of personnel. What were your aircraft losses? Were there any that were totally destroyed or was it just principally damaged?

WQ: No. I think we lost four. Four aircraft destroyed. One was just flat blown out of the air. Lost a couple in the LZs. I think almost all of us received some kind of battle damage.

SM: What was the heaviest weapon they were using up against the helicopters?

WQ: It’s hard to say. I mean, what they had, I know that they had a 100 millimeter. Probably the 37s were the most and the quad 50s were the most devastating to us. There isn’t any place that you can hit a Huey with a 37 mm. If you hit him you’re not going to knock him out of the air. They’re a small aircraft and it just won’t take that kind of punishment. There was a few service air missiles from SAMs (surface-to-air missiles). We had one SAM fired at us when we were supporting the Special Forces. It didn’t miss us by much. I could feel the heat off the motor and the only thing I can say is that either it didn’t have or the proximity fuse was defective because it didn’t blow up when it got close to us. It goes by close enough that you can see the gray body and the black writing on it, you know—

SM: That’s close.
WQ: Yeah. Come up from the right side underneath the skids. Somehow you have to feel that there might have been some divine intervention because quite literally we hit kind of an updraft and it just picked us straight up probably fifty feet and that sucker just went right underneath us. So we just hit that updraft, that pocket. But anyway, and the fifty tracers were flying around. It’s hard to say. There was so much coming at you and your mind starts shutting this stuff out. You focus on what you’re to be doing and you get tunnel vision. You don’t see this stuff going on around you.

SM: But they had the big guns and the SAMs. I mean, this isn’t just AK-47 firing now. This is big stuff.

WQ: Yeah. This is conventional warfare.
SM: Yes, sir.
WQ: Most people don’t even understand that that even existed up there. They think we was all chasing little guys in conical hats with beat up mausers.
SM: Black pajamas.
WQ: Yeah. Beating them up, you know, yeah.
SM: Well, what were your personnel losses in the A-Shau? An estimate.
WQ: What did we lose? That first day probably six if I remember correctly. We lost the one whole crew, Brannow, crew chief, I think six or seven, something like that. Four aircraft and some slight wounding and pretty much everyone else was battle damage. Then we put it all back together and went in the next day.
SM: Yes, sir. How long did that last, the campaign for the A Shau?
WQ: It wasn’t much more than two weeks. The weather was setting in. I know that we put them in the first couple days the weather was good enough that we could get in. Then the weather closed in and we couldn’t even get in. So the guys, the grunts that were in there, were isolated. I know that—was it LZ Stud or Stallion, one or the other—one of them was up at Khe Sanh and the other was in the A-Shau, Stud and Stallion. They had tanks try to penetrate the perimeter one night. They crippled one of the LAW (light antitank weapon) and the other one hooked on to it, took it away, and it was kind of the end of that, but it was scary for those guys. I mean, they’re totally cut off. The A Shau is a real narrow long valley. You just didn’t have any room to maneuver like bringing a C-130 in. They repaired the runway and started bringing them in when they
could, but when it socked in you just didn’t have any wiggle room. It was VFR (Visual Flight Rules) only approaching there. So we were kind of in and out. After we got out of the A Shau it was just kind of a lot of hit and miss stuff. After that I didn’t figure that they had a whole lot they could throw at me again that I hadn’t already seen and survived. I don’t remember a whole lot about the actions. Certainly nothing was at the level of Tet, Khe Sanh, or the A Shau. So it’s just kind of do your time and get through this and go back home.

SM: I forgot to ask you. When you were talking about Khe Sanh and going in and helping to relieve the Marines there, how did you interact with Marines? Was there very much interaction between you and other Army soldiers and the Marines?

WQ: It was interesting. It kind of started when we first went up there. There was a lot of reluctance, the Marines, to share any resource with us. I know the first night that we were up there we were at Phu Bai and they didn’t even want us inside the perimeter. In fact we had to shut the ships down outside the perimeter and they did finally supply the guards for them. We had a problem with water and they didn’t, as I remember, react real well and weren’t eager to share water with us. We set up on that hilltop for a couple weeks and we finally got them to come in and take showers. Hadn’t had any kind of other than out of a rag in a canteen cup, no kind of personal hygiene. Coming into the showers they had a big shower. It seemed like it was fifty feet long and about twenty-five feet wide with showers on both sides and a strip of showers in the middle. You could get about fifty guys in there and all the hot water you wanted. We never had that the whole time we were over there. The hottest water we had is how hot the sun would make a black barrel full of water. That was the only time that I took a hot shower over there. I mean, a real live hot shower. The rest of the time was just water out of a barrel. It’s kind of interesting. We flew a lot of support for them. We did things for them that they didn’t. Their aviation didn’t do for them. We were flying command and control. We’d loaned a ship out to one of the Marine battalions. Little Abner was their call sign. They never had a command and control ship at their disposal, if you will. The battalion commander and his first sergeant went out and kind of reviewed their area, did an area recon and it was like our pilots would go, “Well, don’t you want to do this?” “Well, yeah. Can we do that?” “Well, sure. Let’s go do that.” So they were, you know, “Well,
“Would you like to do this?” “Our battalion commanders do this. Would you like to do that?” It was an interesting experience. They just didn’t have the aviation. They had the aircrafts they just didn’t utilize them very well from our estimation. We put in a combat assault one day for the Marines and they put in their C Stallions and they started receiving a lot of fire. They had two gun ships that disappeared. I don’t know where they went. I never had a good experience with the Marine aviation to be honest with you. I was their rotor wing. Their gunships kept disappearing. In fact, on this one particular situation their people were pinned down in the LZ and they had no gun support. They were outside their artillery range. So we did what we used to do. We’d call a play on gunship. We just turn the crew guns forward. I had made a little pin that would position the gun just right at the right elevation all the way forward. The pilots would actually fly the gun. They’d just tell us to fire and both the gunner and I would squeeze our triggers and start feeding the ammo. He would just fly the tracers into where he wanted them to go. That was the only support these guys had. We ran into that a couple three times. We were supposed to have Marine guns support in the A Shau and they would refuse to crank. There was a couple of times that we went in there without any gun support at all because the Marines wouldn’t go. I don’t know what their problem was, but I was never impressed with Marine aviation, at least the rotor wing. I know that when we went into Khe Sanh they were refusing to go in there to even pull out their own wounded. They would pull the wounded outside the perimeter on the units that were doing the patrolling outside of Khe Sanh, but they weren’t landing. It was novel to have a helicopter land there. I can understand that it was hairy landing there, but you still got to get in to do the support and get out. I don’t know. So there was a certain amount of animosity between us and the Marines. Sometimes you felt it, sometimes you didn’t, depending on what you were doing. I know that the day that we were supporting this insertion and they didn’t have any support that they were happy to have us there. I mean, a slick flying just two 60s isn’t much of a gun ship, but that’s all they had. There was a couple times like that. Our experience with the joint ops that we had with the SOG (Special Operations Group) people wasn’t particularly warm with the Marines. They had kind of an attitude we didn’t care for and I guess they didn’t care for us. So it wasn’t real pleasant and I think that from what I see now that they’ve learned a lot from that and tried to cut back some of
this inter-service rivalries and with more joint operations and making it a little more dependent on each other, which I think is good. It’s no one unit has ever won anything. I was reading an after action report from a Marine Cobra pilot. Some of that’s still there. It’s like the Army wasn’t in Iraq at all. Marines won it all. Of course I passed that after action report on to the rest of the guys and there was a lot of boo-hoo about that. It’s just it’s still there. It’s like I said, I just did my little caption on these—I said I see the press is misleading us again. They’ve been telling us that the Army’s been involved over there, but that apparently isn’t the case or we just have a Marine being a Marine. So you just have to deal with that’s the way they are.

SM: Well, when you—let’s see. What kind of communication did you have going back and forth between yourself and your family back home?

WQ: Oh, I was writing letters back home. From the time we moved up north from An Khe to pretty much until I got out a lot of it—I didn’t have a lot of time to even sit down and try to think about it. When we were flying it was twelve, fourteen hours a day. We were getting hit sporadically throughout the night, and back up the next morning and try to go. I didn’t spend a lot of time writing home. I tried to get off a note now and again just to let them know I’m still there. There was but there wasn’t a lot of it. We had problems getting our mail and I’d have different comments from different people. “Well, did you get this?” or, “I wrote you last week. I didn’t hear from you,” and I just wouldn’t receive the letters. I don’t know how much—especially during Tet there were so many resources that we were losing you couldn’t keep track of that stuff. I’m sure that mail is a fairly high priority in the military, but then when you’re having a full fledged offensive going on it’s not the highest. So who knows where that stuff ended up. About that time when there’s Christmas presents that never got there. So there wasn’t a lot of communication.

SM: What about news, as far as magazines, radio, armed forces television? What sources did you have available to you?

WQ: Sure as hell didn’t have TV. I remember going down to Da Nang to Red Beach to our 15th TC to get some battle damage taken care of. There was a news report on armed forces television and it was rioting. I didn’t have a clue. I just flat, you know, “What the hell is all this about?” This is early ’68. There was a lot of the hoo-haw that
was going on in the States about the Tet Offensive. I didn’t have a clue. I didn’t have a clue where they were coming from. I was getting papers, local papers. They were pretty sporadic at best and a lot of them I wasn’t getting. The local paper here didn’t go into that stuff a whole lot. So I really wasn’t prepared for what I met when I came home. I really wasn’t. I had just that one quick piece of news that I watched and I didn’t even watch maybe five minutes of it. There was some conversations between the crews like when Martin Luther King was assassinated. We were all aware of that and, “What are we over here for when this kind of crap goes on at home?” But we weren’t prepared. We were very focused on what we were doing. We had just gone through the Tet Offensive. We essentially destroyed the VC main force. It didn’t exist anymore. Every NVA unit that we engaged we destroyed. So it’s the we won the battle, but we lost the war. In fact the only significant battles the Viet Minh or the Viet Cong or the NVA ever won was against the French so what does that tell you? But the point is that we were very focused. We had a job. We were doing our job. We were gaining. We were engaging the enemy and we were destroying them. So what’s all this other crap? Where are these people coming from? It just wasn’t in our psyche and we were very ill-prepared when we went back home for what we met. It’s just I had not the faintest clue. The hostility that we met initially when we came back stateside at the airports to the outright even when we got home in our own, back to our home. Our parents obviously and our family are glad to see us back, but the rest of the people or the people that you grew up with that you knew all your life, they weren’t the same people because we weren’t the same people. The absolute apathy that was met, not so much open hostility here at home but like, “So what?” We were doing our job. We were doing it well. A lot of us came back with decorations that went above and beyond. We were met like we hadn’t done anything. Then when we went to college we were—we had to deal with, “You’re baby killers,” and we weren’t prepared for that. The military did not prepare us, help us, in any way, shape, or form for that. Those of us that still had time to serve it was—you just hunkered down in the bases stateside and didn’t go off base much. It was—the military towns weren’t openly hostile, but there was an underlying hostility there, some of which is always in military towns, but it was more than that. Together with the racial problems that,
particularly the Army was having at that time, it wasn’t—the last year and a half in the
Army wasn’t pleasant at all.

SM: Well, what about in Vietnam itself? What was the ethnic makeup of your
unit?

WQ: Well, we were an aviation unit. We were pretty much all volunteer. We
were all Regular Army, for the most part. I don’t remember. We might have had some
draftees and like the mess section and the cooks and like the motor pool, but most of us
were all volunteers. I don’t think we had any pilots that weren’t white. I don’t
remember. We might have had one black pilot. I don’t remember him. He might have
come later. We had a black crew chief and a black gunner. We had two Hispanic crew
chiefs, Frank Gamavisqua and Ruben Ortiz, my best friends while I was over there. You
know, to us it didn’t matter. It made no difference at all when we were supporting the
grunts. It didn’t make a difference. We had a GI, an American grunt, in trouble we’d go
after them. That type of animosity didn’t, at least in our circle, in our unit, didn’t really
exist. We were all there doing the job and most of us were volunteers so it wasn’t a big
issue. It just wasn’t. People ask about drugs. Drugs wasn’t a big thing. There’s a few
maintenance people that did that stuff, but most of us in the flight platoon, we’re too
busy. We had to stay focused. We had to stay sharp. Just too busy to play any stupid
games. Had too much to do. We didn’t have time to—I went into one of the towns
maybe three times, four times, once in Da Nang, once in Nha Trang or Qui Nhon, once in
Bong Son. That was about it. I just didn’t have time to do any of that stuff. So that’s
probably a positive. I was too busy to get sidetracked.

SM: How about alcohol use?

WQ: Oh, we had plenty of beer. We had lots of beer. We had some whiskey
available to us, you know, hard drink. In the Army, you had to be an E6 and twenty-one
to buy alcohol. So most of us in the flight, you know, enlisted in the flight platoon, it
wasn’t available to us. It was however at Da Nang. The Seabees (Construction
Battalion, CBs) would sell us anything we wanted because we did a lot of favors for the
Seabees and ferried them around, but you’d have a couple three beers and then we had
some guys that drank too much and a couple pilots that drank too much, but for the most
part that wasn’t even a problem. You had too much to do. You had to stay focused.
From the people that I was interacting with on a very close basis it just was not a
problem. Not that I didn’t get drunk once in a while, but very seldom.

SM: What else would you do for any kind of recreation? Did you have access to
books or movies? (Quigley laughs) What about USO (United Service Organization)
shows or any kind of recreation that you engaged in whatsoever?

WQ: There was a radio playing. Tapes, guys would play tapes. Just didn’t have
the time. There was—in Bong Son I went to one USO function. It’s when they had Miss
America’s Courts there. It was pouring down rain and these poor gals in their evening
dresses standing out there getting soaked. That was the only thing I went to at all because
it was about a hundred yards from my hooch on the flight line and I went. Young
nineteen year old males had other diversions that they sought out, but there wasn’t a
whole lot of time even for that. We didn’t have—there was no USO. I made it to the PX
maybe two or three times. So I didn’t have a lot of—most of what I had like cigarettes
and writing stuff and shaving stuff were supplied to us in our sundries. I just didn’t have
time. The mail, the photos that I did were all prepaid. Mailers, you’d buy it that way and
they would mail it to you. So you’d send off a role of film and it would be processed and
sent back with a fresh roll of film. When you’d get that—I got most of that back. There
was some stuff I didn’t get back that I never saw again, but I got a lot of that back. There
wasn’t time. There just wasn’t. The only thing a crew chief did was fly and take care of
his ship. We didn’t have to do all the perimeter guard and anything else, but we had all
we could handle. We had a ship, our guns, and our personal equipment and we didn’t
have time for anything else. A movie—I think the one movie that I saw I went to when I
was at Da Nang for maintenance on the ship. I went to a movie out on Red Beach. It
was Clint Eastwood’s first movie, *Fist Full of Dollars* or something. Yeah. *Fist Full of
Dollars*. We watched it from a hot foxhole and they’d turn the projector on. The
projector room was all sand bag with a hole there. The minute you turn it on they’d lob a
few mortars at you. So you watched it from a foxhole. So the entertainment that we had
we provided for ourselves. We had a couple three company parties. Once in a while—
we didn’t even do this up north. Down in Bong Son were kinder gentler days. Have a
pizza party and they’d make pizzas and you’d have pizza and beer. But then we got up
north and we didn’t have time for that stuff. We didn’t. The enlisted flight crews didn’t.
The pilots were pretty pampered. They had time to piddle around and do other stuff. We didn’t. You’d go out in a mission, you’d get all shot up, you’d spend all night trying to put yourself back together again, go out fly the next day. There was a couple of times that I flew thirty-six hours without stopping, without getting any rest or be maintenance trying to get ready to go. When you finally did get shut down you’d fall asleep for twenty hours. So there wasn’t any time for that stuff.

SM: Anything else you’d like to talk about with regard to your time in-country before we talk about your trip home and all that?

WQ: Not really.

SM: How did you feel about leaving?

WQ: I was ready to leave when I left probably because I didn’t sign up to extend. Part of me—I’d done my share. I felt like I, you know, for someone who didn’t have to go in in the first place I felt like I’d done my share, but part of me wanted to go back. I told myself I’ll go back home and see. Get my bearings again and if I want to go back the form that you’d submit for that was a 1049. I was, you know, if I wanted to go back I’d 1049 right back to my same unit. They very seldom ever say no to volunteers. That situation was taken care of. I got home. Bought a brand new motorcycle and took it out and stacked it up and ended up in a hospital for two weeks. So I did myself more damage than the enemy ever did to me. I spent the rest of my time in the military on light duty. I tore up my leg pretty bad so it was a non-issue. I couldn’t go back. By the time that I was healed enough to go back if I wanted to I’d spend a year and a half stateside. The Army was such a deplorable mess that the attitude over in ‘Nam had changed by then and I just said I want out of this mess. So I just ETSed (expiration of term of service) and left.

SM: Well, when you left Vietnam did you feel like you had accomplished very much as a member of the unit?

WQ: Oh, yeah. There was no doubt in my mind. We had a job to do. We did it. We did it very well. I pulled my weight. Having met me, I had a lot of weight to pull. I was considerably smaller in those days, but I’m very proud of what I’d done.

SM: Yes, sir.
WQ: I’d done my job. So that was a non-issue to me. There’s a very different Army. There are armies within armies. The combat army is an entirely different army than even the support army even in ‘Nam. Then the stateside army is something entirely different. That’s a whole different critter. You have Vietnam veterans, but to me you’re not a Vietnam veteran until you’re a combat veteran. These guys who hung out in Tan Son Nhut and the most serious thing that they had to worry about was the clap. They might be Vietnam veterans, but they’re not combat veterans. That’s my distinction. They had a job to do and they did it. They made what we were doing possible and we did our job to make what the infantry, what they did, possible. But there is a difference. I think there should be more distinction made on that, but that’s just my personal opinion. Kind of like the infantry combat, you have an expert infantryman badge and then you have an oak wreath around and you’re a combat infantryman. There’s a very separate distinct even in the recognition that you wear. The armor guys today wear a combat armor badge, kind of like that. On my uniform I wore aviator wings or crew member wings. There’s no distinction between that and then a set of wings earned stateside. That would be nice, but what the heck. It takes everybody. It’s all a team doing it. So you have to have the guys in the rear doing the support stuff. They are necessary and I don’t diminish their job in that respect, but I always felt there should be a distinction.

SM: Yes, sir. This’ll be a good place to take a quick break. This’ll end the interview with Mr. Quigley on the sixteenth of May.
Steve Maxner: This is Steve Maxner continuing the interview with Mr. William Quigley on the twenty-third of May 2003 at 3:40 Lubbock time. I’m in Lubbock, Texas, and Mr. Quigley is in Baker City, Oregon. Sir, thank you again for consenting to this interview. Let me go ahead and let’s go ahead and start our interview today by looking at your trip home. If you would describe what it was like when you learned that, when you realized that you were at the end of your tour in Vietnam and it’s time to leave and come back to the world, as you gentlemen used to put it.

WQ: Well, we were always aware if we made it through everything the date that we would DEROS (date of estimated return from overseas) back to the world. So your last thirty days you were very much aware when you were going to be leaving country. A lot of guys started having some serious problems. The common term for a lot of guys that were still in combat support was, “I’m too short for this shit.” You started—you weren’t really a very good soldier at that point. You started being concerned about surviving. To back up a little bit your first couple months in-country you’re learning. You’re not aware of what’s happening and you aren’t a very good soldier. About the second to third month you start to grasp what’s happening. You’ve learned some of the very basic skills to survive. From that point on you’ve almost, to a certain extent, written yourself off. I’m going to do the best job I can. If I don’t make it home I don’t make it home. You focus in on your job, doing your job. You put a lot of the world out of your mind for the most part and you just do your job. You’re there. We were there to support the infantry troops, the grunts. We were, in many cases, their lifeline, their only lifeline, for supplies, for the basic combat supplies, for some of the creature benefits, and of course if they are wounded or needed to go, you know, go out on R&R, whatever. We were there source for that transportation. You focused on that and that’s what you did. Our days were extremely long. You didn’t have time to really pay attention to too much of anything else. You’d have a few moments sometimes in the evening between when you get off and you were done with what you needed to do and have a couple beers and enjoy the other people in your flight section and then go to sleep. If it wasn’t interrupted
you got five, six hours sleep and then you started all over again. So during that period, that eight months, you’re a fully functional military personnel and you did your job and you knew what it was and how to survive. The last couple months you started getting too short and your focus changes, going back to the world. A lot of guys quite flying, got out of the flight platoons, went to the maintenance, and hung out, if you will, took the easy road out to the end of their tour. I flew my last combat mission nine days in-country. I wasn’t really slated to do that, but there was a ship that was shot down and I replaced it. It was. I knew that would be my last mission. I was slated to take my ship to Da Nang for its thousand hour inspection. At that time the new crew chief on it would be sent down and I’d turn it over to him and I would start the sign out process. So extremely antsy but we got through it and signed out of company and headed south. Leaving the company, kind of mixed emotions. I felt like I was basically bugging out on the guys, but then I’d done my share. It was my time to leave and I was going to leave, but you still felt a little guilty on that. By the same token you were happy to get out of that mess and head home and see your family. So you left country with mixed emotions. I flew out of Quang Tri, flew in to An Khe. That was our headquarters and finished the signing out, and then flew on to Cam Ranh Bay. Cam Ranh Bay was an interesting experience. It was probably in many respects left the most distasteful aftertaste, if you will, in my mouth from the U.S. military. You had all these guys coming in out of brush, particularly the infantry guys. They came in to Cam Ranh Bay dressed in their khakis, ready to go home, put in to a holding company and all they did was screw with people. Had them filling sand bags, building bunkers, every trash and dirty detail they could come up with because they knew these guys were focused in on going home and certainly didn’t want to do anything to forestall that. Getting in trouble would just delay that, if not make things more difficult for them. So these poor guys took an immeasurable amount of crap from the cadre at Cam Ranh Bay. Quite frankly they left the worst taste in my mouth. Those people than the enemy I was supposedly fighting. I have more respect for the combat veterans, the NVA, than I do those people. Well, we got through that and essentially you went home alone. I was on the aircraft with one person that I went over with, Tony Holkum was his name. He went off to another company and we kind of bumped into each other at Cam Ranh Bay and went home. I think the most memorable

54
part of going home was you were in—most of us were fairly dirty from being messed
with. A lot of guys didn’t even have a change of clothes with them when they went down
there. You got on to this pressurized air conditioned aircraft, got up to whatever, forty
thousand feet, whatever we were flying at, at about seventy-five degrees and most guys
were painfully cold. You left Cam Ranh Bay at a hundred ten plus degrees at eighty-five
to ninety-five percent humidity and go in to one of those cabins at seventy-five. It was
probably the most miserable twenty-three hours I’ve ever spent in my life. Landing at
Guam to refuel was getting back out in the semi-tropical area like Guam, even in the
middle of the night, was a relief from that cabin. Most guys spent their time all wadded
up in a blanket hugging each other because they were painfully cold. Landing in the
States again was mixed emotions. In ’68, after the Tet Offensive, the demonstrations
were starting in earnest. Most of us didn’t really have any concept of how divided the
country was at that point. I had seen maybe five, maybe ten minutes, of TV my whole
tour. I wasn’t really aware of it. I quit reading stateside papers after a couple months in-
country and was focused on my job and I just didn’t have—I didn’t really want to know.
I had my job and that’s what I was going to do. Coming back to the world, landing at
Sea-Tac and being met with that was quite an experience. Most of us felt that we were
serving our country, we’re doing our job well, and to come back and to be met with total
disdain and hostility by our fellow Americans was quite a shock. We spent a lot of time
just kind of looking at each other, “What the hell is all this crap?” They pushed us
through the reception area. We went in and got showers. We got a meal. New class A
uniforms were issued to us and tailored rather quickly. Everything that we needed was,
any medals and insignias were all sewn on. So we were squared away when we left
there. We were kind of put out the door and find your way home. Then again we went in
to starting mixing with the civilians in uniform and how we were greeted was—I was
very taken back because I didn’t think that I’d done anything wrong. I thought I spent
my time over there and acquitted myself well. To be met with disdain—even the airport
personnel treated us not real rude, but they were pretty curt with us. Most of us were
flying on standby were shoved off in to corners and didn’t want to be out in the open.
They tried to herd us in to the USO, keep us out of the main part of the airport. Even
when we boarded the aircraft it was kind of like—there was no one that said thank you,
that’s for sure. No one wanted to sit by you. It was an interesting experience. I flew a short trip to Seattle, hit Portland, and then caught a puddle jumper out of Portland and went to Pendleton. I had to take a bus out of Pendleton to get home. It was kind of like that. By the time I got on the bus to Pendleton to get home I really didn’t give a rat’s ass what anybody thought. I was getting out of here. When I finally got home it really started over again. Of course my parents were very glad to see me and a lot of family members were there to meet me once I got home. Some of the people that I’d known were less than cordial. It was like if you told them where you had been, “Haven’t seen you around. Where you been?” “I was in the ‘Nam,” and then it was like, “Oh, yeah. Well, get away from me,” was their attitude. So you started shutting down all that. You started going in to denial. You spent—really, I spent the next nineteen years pretty much in denial and had to work my way back out of that to deal with all this. So by and large I don’t feel that anybody owes me anything for my tour in Vietnam, my service in the military, except an apology. A lot of it is coming back around. There are some people starting to say thank you and that’s fine. I’ve dealt with that and gotten past that. My goal now is that if I ever see a GI mistreated, anything, faintly, like we were he’s going to have support. He’s going to have it right now. So, in some ways we kind of paved the way to the attitude that our troops are receiving now. I’ll pay the price as long as they’re well treated. That’s really kind of where we are. From the gathering when you were there, we’re all brothers. To a certain extent, not even to a certain extent, I’ll rephrase that. To a great degree, the people that we fought, our enemies, are closer to me in some respects than the citizenry of this country from that period. They are our brothers in that they have tasted combat. They know what it’s like. I have a great deal of respect for them. I mean what we meted out to the NVA was horrendous. How they even got through some of the stuff we threw at them is truly amazing. I don’t know if I could have held up under that. That’s true and you get—as time goes on you understand the brotherhood. You can’t even begin to convey that to people that’s never experienced that sort of thing and that’s fine. I hope that it’s never to the point here in this country where the civilians have to experience that. We got a little tiny taste of it in 9/11 and I hope that’s as far as it ever goes, but the—I don’t know. You just deal with it and go on from
there and make sure that the people that are returning now aren’t treated that way. That’s really my goal.

SM: Well, when you came back did you find it difficult to talk with people that were close to you whether it be your parents or siblings or other friends, close friends? Did you find it difficult to talk about the Vietnam War and broach the subject? Did you find a general unease about the war?

WQ: Well, yeah. My father had gone through World War II. In many respects he did a great, very similar job to what I did. He was with the Navy. He was a crew chief gunner on a helldiver. So, he had experienced some of that. He never did see any combat really, but he had at least some of the appreciation of what it’s like to maintain an aircraft and fly with it and go out on combat patrol. I think what really brought it to my dad is the first night that we were home, and you know, with what I’d been through and I didn’t really write a whole lot about it. I did once in a while and of course he followed the news. We lived in a very rural part of the county up close to the mountains in the Timberlands. In our backyard, our backyard fence about fifty feet from the door the tree line started. We were sitting out in the picnic table in the backyard right at dark. I smoked at that time and we were both having a cigarette out there. Our closest neighbor was probably about a hundred yards away down the road. For whatever reason somebody down there just ripped off about four rounds with a 22 rifle and it was pow, pow, pow, pow. My immediate reaction was I just grabbed my dad around the chest and just below the neck and drug him off underneath the picnic table. Of course poor guy was hollering and was carrying on me, “What the hell was that?” You know, and I got him down under there and he was real quiet and he just said, “Okay. I understand.” That was all that was ever said about that. But the first night home I was laying in the bed after about an hour after that, it was dark. I could hear the owls hooting. There was no artillery. There were no sporadic weapons fired. There was nothing. It was absolutely quiet. The animal sounds that I’d grown up with and I remember just before I went to sleep said, “I don’t have to worry about anything tonight.” There’s no one going to come through the wire. We’re not going to get hit with mortars. I don’t have anything to worry about. That was just focused on that for a few minutes and then,
“Damn. I’m really back to the world.” That was probably at that point really accepted that you were home.

SM: In what ways did the Vietnam War affect you most personally and your experiences in Vietnam?

WQ: I don’t—you know, you’re always going to deal with it. To say that you go through something like that and then come home and it’s done, that’s not true. It’s like any experience that you’ve had. The people that were involved with 9/11 will never forget that. It’ll be part of their psyche and they’re forever changed by it. You have—my perspective on life is that the world, if you will, dealt me as worse, as bad, as an experience that it was going to. I got through that and everything after that is anti-climactical. What can you threaten me with that hasn’t already been tried? I survived that and I can survive anything else the world has to throw at me. So I guess in that respect there’s a certain confidence level from that. I think the only thing that I’ve ever encountered in my life since then that would put the adrenal jolt that you get when you’re in combat when the rounds start cracking around you and the artillery and the mortars come in is it was my seven year old daughter was—oh, about six or seven months ago and she had gone outside. I was outside and all of a sudden I couldn’t find her. When you have children you’re always worried about them being picked up or something. That sense of, the initial sense of panic that you feel when, oh my gosh, my child is gone and I don’t know where they are, the only thing that’s ever—that rivals that feeling. I was struck by the fact that I never thought that I could be, you know, as scared, if you will, as I was when the initial shock hits you, but your kids can do that to you. So if you’ve ever experienced that it’s much the same. It’s just a combination of dread, shock, and almost helplessness all at once. You have to just kind of suck it up and get past that and do your job. I found my daughter and everything was fine, but it’s the same shock that you get, that adrenal shock that you get, in both instances. That’s the only thing that’s ever come close to that sense is that. The fear that you experience for your family and in that situation it’s a fear for yourself really, but just a fear for your family like that is close if not even stronger. That’s the part that’s stayed with me. I think when you get to a gathering and meet the people that you served with there’s an immense amount of pride that I don’t think that you’re going to experience anywhere else, and a closeness that even
after thirty-five years you picked up where you left off on the people that you were close to. That doesn’t ever wane. It’s always there and I don’t think that—the only place that you could probably experience that to a greater degree is the brotherhood that infantrymen, grunts, that have lived in the dirt and the mud. Theirs is even a greater sense than the aviation personnel because they’re even closer. The things that I’ve experienced since then have been tempered somewhat by that, sometimes positive, sometimes negatively. You just deal with it and go on from there, but it’s something that is with you for the rest of your life and you’ll die with it. As the people since man started picking up rocks and throwing them at each other all combatants have experienced that, will experience it, and they’ll deal with it the same way in many respects that we do. Time hasn’t changed any of that nor will it ever. I don’t care if you’re involved in a Star Wars or you’re the first guy to pick up a rock and throw it at the guy, you know, across the creek. It’s much the same and it always will be. Nowhere else are you going to experience that except maybe something like 9/11, going through that scenario. Even that, that’s a one shot jolt. You multiply that by three hundred and sixty-five days and sometimes it is, some of these guys do have a hard time getting past it and dealing it with the rest of their life. If ultimately if they use it as a cop out as the reason they’re performing a serious disservice to themselves. That’s kind of where I am with it and it isn’t everything that you’ve ever done with and you deal with everyday. Most days aren’t that difficult, but once in a while it’ll hit you and it’ll come out of nowhere. It can be a sound, an image, a smell, and it’ll put you right back in the middle of that. Sometimes you have a tough day or two. So you’re never done with it.

SM: Have you had an opportunity yet to visit the Wall, the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington, D.C.?

WQ: No. There was the half scale wall that travels around.

SM: The moving wall.

WQ: Yeah. I went to that. I went to it with a couple of guys and I didn’t serve with them, but I served in the same unit. They were in the Cav. They were infantry guys and spent most of my time holding them up because they do feel it for the most respects a lot more sharply than the aviation people. They were even closer. Of course they’d see the names and some of the names, the hundreds of people that I encountered as we
moved out as casualties and KIAs, they’re still with me. I see a lot of them, but I didn’t
know them. These guys in many instances would see their buddy go down and try to
help them and be holding them when they died. It comes back and hits these guys real
hard. The grunts’ always going to have a tougher time with it because they had the
tougher job.

SM: How do you think—well, what do you think about the way the VA (Veteran’s Administration) has taken care of veterans from the Vietnam War?
WQ: Atrocious.
SM: Okay.
WQ: One word, atrocious.
SM: Have you had cause to use the VA system very much at all?
WQ: I’m registered with the VA as an Agent Orange veteran. I had some service
connected injuries so I’m involved in the system. I don’t use it but very rarely. I think I
got involved with the Agent Orange and just by accident. My dad was in the VA system
and the last ten years of his life I was his guardian. He wasn’t able to take care of himself
so I took him to the VA hospital in Boise, about a hundred and twenty-five miles away,
once a month and saw to his care. I had been in the system quite a bit and I just noticed
that they—back in ’84 I think I noticed a poster on the wall that if you’re in Vietnam that
you had until ’85, January of ’85 or something, to be registered as an Agent Orange
veteran. So I went through that and got the physical and got set up on that. I was already
in the system for some service connected injuries. That’s really been the extent of it. I
haven’t asked anything from them. I know that—I suppose, the system itself, the VA, is
doing the best with what the funds are allocated to them. I’m sure most of these people
would certainly do more if they had the funds and the personnel to do it. So if I’m going
to say atrocious it’s not the VA itself. It’s the government, the legislators that have
strangled it down and would much, as well—they don’t seem to have as much problem
funding the war, but they don’t want to deal with the casualties when they come home.
They don’t want to think about that. So the way the U.S. government has dealt with it is
atrocious.

SM: What do you think about government policy towards Vietnam, especially
the normalization of relations with Vietnam?
WQ: That’s fine. I don’t have a problem with that. Here in Iraq one of our allies was Spain and we fought a war with Spain a hundred year ago. I mean, you get past things. Like I said, I have a great deal of more respect for the men and women that I fought in Vietnam than I do a lot of American citizens in this country, then and now. So you get past that. You go on, deal with it. There are still some things that need to be cleaned up. We have some MIAs (missing in action) that we need to deal with and find and to get some closure for the families on those. Fine. In many respects Vietnam had a goal, Ho Chi Minh, and then later on the hierarchy of his party, they had a job to do. They wanted the country cleaned out and I don’t blame them for that. I think some of the tactics they used particularly with the Viet Cong were certainly less than admirable, but you can’t attach that to all of the NVA soldiers that served over there. They were just kids like we were. Their country said, “It’s time for you to serve,” and they went. They have certain bragging rights. I mean, they did get us out of there. If the United States Army and Marine Corps and Navy and Air Force had been told to win the war the war would’ve been won. The Vietnamese never won a major or significant battle. In fact, the only significant battle they did win through the history of that conflict was against the French. So that should be no surprise, but they never did win any major conflicts or engagements with the United States Army and the U.S. Marines. But they got us out by fair means or foul, by military or political, we left. They were left there to do as they pleased. So they have a certain amount of bragging rights there. So, I don’t have a problem with normalization at all.

SM: Do you think that the United States in general, the government in particular, policy makers, and the American people, do you think we’ve learned all the lessons we can from the Vietnam War?

WQ: Well, I’m not sure that you ever learn all the lessons that you can. We learned a great many of them. I think—well, in Desert Storm the way they went about Desert Storm I know that Schwarzkopf and Powell were field commanders during Vietnam. They did their tour or tours on the ground. They were both grunt officers. They served in the field. They’ve been there. Their primary goal was not to end up in a quagmire, essentially turn the military loose. If you want the military to fight a war you let the military fight the damn war. I think if my wish were granted with respect to the
government at the time that Vietnam was going on that quite possibly some of the
government leaders, including LBJ (Lyndon B. Johnson), should be at least scrutinized
for treason. I think some of the things that they did were down right treasonous. Of
course some of the celebrities I still think should be tried for treason. Should they be
hung? No. But I think they should stand trial for treason. I think there should be some
closure on that. I listened to the celebrities that voiced strong dissent with respect to Iraq
and a lot of them are paying and I’m glad to see that. Thirty-five years ago they wouldn’t
have had to pay anything or very little, but I’m glad to see that the American people have
at least awaken to that. I wouldn’t be opposed to a couple treason trials going on right
now. People have a right to speak their mind and I wouldn’t certainly interfere with that
and I would defend their right even if I didn’t like what they’re saying, but you don’t go
to the country that we are engaged with and shoot your mouth off. That’s treason. That’s
aid and comfort, sedition. I’ve seen some demonstrations where we support American
soldiers who shoot their officers. That again is sedition and inciting mutiny. They
should be tried accordingly at least. I think the money would be well spent. I don’t
particularly want to see any of them hung or shot, but I think that stigma should go with
them for the rest of their lives. I would certainly be happy to serve on any jury that heard
that trial.

SM: Well, when you came back from Vietnam were you surprised at the attitude
of the American people? I mean, you were there from ’67, ’68.

WQ: Correct.

SM: So you were there before Tet. You left before Tet. Although there was
some anti-war activity it really wasn’t all that geared up, but when you came home it
wasn’t too long after that the anti-war movement really picked up steam and a lot more
activity was going on. Were you surprised by the reaction of our nation to the war?

WQ: I didn’t have any defense for it. I was surprised is putting it mildly. I came
back home in August of ’68. That was roughly—what—six months after the Tet
Offensive. Things were boiling over. I still had fourteen months left in the military and I
served it at Fort Hood. Once I got there I didn’t engage with civilians. I essentially
isolated myself from Fort Hood, very seldom went off post. I didn’t even come home. I
had over almost forty-five days of leave when I got—about thirty-five days of leave when
I got out and I didn’t go anywhere. I shut it all down. I didn’t deal with it. What little bit of television I watched I watched a few sports and I watched the landing on the moon. Other than that I didn’t read papers. I totally shut it all out. When I got out of the Army I drove home. I don’t remember dealing with it at all. I think the first attempt that I did or had to deal with it is I thought that I probably would want to get in to law enforcement. So I interviewed with a local police department. I did a résumé. The chief of police told his second in command, I could hear him in his office, he said, “Well, get rid of that one. I don’t want one of those Vietnam killers in my police force.” I really slammed it shut after that. I didn’t talk about it. Nobody really that didn’t know me before wouldn’t even have been able to tell you that I ever served in the military at all. I went to college on the GI Bill. The first thing they did was—this was in ’70, ’71, yeah, the fall of ’71—is label you a GI Bill student. You were immediately ostracized by some of the faculty, certainly some of the younger students. I majored in psychology so part of what they were doing was the group therapy. As part of your class curriculum you had group therapy encounters. There was always some little mindless bimbo that wanted to call you a baby killer and try to make you atone for your sins right there and join the anti-war movement. You always had that to deal with. You shut it out. Unless somebody forced you to deal with it you shut it all out. You didn’t deal with it. I spent nineteen years like that and have a lot of nightmares. It’s going to manifest itself someway and I had a lot of nightmares. The reoccurring theme was—when we were over there supporting studies and observation groups. When you fly out you were so far from anything friendly that if you went down you were in serious trouble. We weren’t well equipped to take care of ourselves in that scenario. With what we had you put together your own survival kits. You had to take care of yourself. The military didn’t handle that very well for Army aviators. That was always my thought. The central theme was going down and getting captured. I wasn’t going to be an easy capture. That’s something that you was always aware of and in the back of your mind. I wasn’t going to go down easy. If they killed me then they killed me. I wasn’t about to be taken alive. So that was, in many respects, the central theme of the dreams. For nineteen years I didn’t deal with it other than when it would manifest itself, something of that nature. When I was in college I was a psychology major. So they thought that anybody was a psych major that was a GI Bill
veteran would be good counselors for the program they called Outreach and it was Vietnam veterans helping Vietnam veterans. You’d have group therapy. The psych students were expected to run it and counsel these guys. So I went in to that and started it. I was about three or four months into it. In rapid succession two guys that I was counseling committed suicide. One did it and then the other guy just said I can’t deal with it and he shot himself too. I had to leave that. I didn’t think either one of them had seen, as much as I had, or really had the potential to have as much problems. One guy was in Tan Son Nhut. They really never saw any real action anyway. Some of it was that he felt guilty ‘cause he hadn’t. So I got out of that program. I couldn’t deal with that and shut it down some more.

SM: Well, what was it that after nineteen years or so prompted you to be a little more open about your experiences and, I guess, accept them?

WQ: Well, one of the problems that I had, my first wife was convinced and she quite often would tell me that I was going to freak out and kill her. She wasn’t—with respect to dealing with that experience, was absolutely no help if not—well, she was no help. After we divorced, I had to take responsibility for some of that. Some of the responsibility lie in the fact that I wasn’t taking, I wasn’t dealing with it. I’d have these nightmares and I’d wake up and she’d be sitting in the corner of the bedroom just all in the fetal position shaking, afraid that I was going to wake up and beat her to death or something. I’m not quite sure what she thought I was going to do. So I had to look hard at why we didn’t survive as a couple. There were a lot of reasons. Are you there?

SM: Yes, sir.

WQ: Oh, okay. I heard some pop in here. A lot of reasons that we didn’t—certainly one of them was my experience in not dealing with it. So I had to look at it all and I had to decide if I was going to go on that I had to come out and deal with some of this stuff. I owed it not only to myself, but to my children. They had to have a father that was worthwhile. Even though their mother and their father were divorced they weren’t going to be the scapegoats and they were going to have somebody they could rely on. So I had to understand part of why the relationship didn’t make it and take responsibility for my part of it and make sure that wasn’t going to happen again. After that I had ten years before I married again. I just pulled it up and faced it and came to some decisions that I
had nothing to be ashamed of; that my performance was honorable. It sounds real easy to
say that. It took a couple years to come to that decision and that realization, but that’s
what it took. So you, instead of shutting it out, you dealt with a little bit of it everyday.
Sometimes it was pretty tough, but you have to if you’re going to go on. You have to get
some closure for yourself, and if you don’t then you’re not going on and you’ll be like a
lot of these guys that you see that are on full disability because they can’t deal with it and
they usually end up wasted away very shortly on drugs or alcohol. I just decided that I
was going to do a little better than that. So I dealt with it. Some of the things that I’ve
never dealt with well like crowds of people I dealt with that. Moved to San Francisco,
Berkeley, and kind of threw myself right in the middle of it. If I can survive this mess I
can survive anything. After seven months I felt I could deal with it and still don’t like
large population area. I’m very rural where I live and don’t like to be around a lot of
people. That’s fine. I can deal with it and I know I can if I have to. It’s just a matter of
trying to put a handle on it and deciding that you’re going to focus in on some of the
things that you had been suppressing and deal with them. Bring them out. Deal with
them. Then you can put them away at will and bring them out at will.

SM: Okay. Is there anything else that you want to discuss today?

WQ: Oh, not really. I’m doing well. My life is good. I have a good family. We
adopted a little girl. A lot of the reasons that we adopted partly goes back to Vietnam and
the Agent Orange exposure. I don’t have any real problems that I’m aware of. I know
that part of what you pass on to your children—there are some spine deformities, spina
bifida. Both of my kids have some spinal deformity, nothing major. Just it’s more
annoying at this point than anything. The reason that we decided to adopt is we didn’t
want to risk having another problem. There’s a lot of little lives in the world, in the
United States, that need help. Rather than produce another child why not take one that’s
already here and try to do the best you can by them so that’s what we did.

SM: How old is your adopted child?

WQ: Seven.

SM: Wow.

WQ: Part of the reason—the first thing they told me. We went through the State
system and the first thing the interviewer said was, “Well, you’re too old to adopt.” We
got to discussing why and I explained to them about Agent Orange exposure and the possibility of having a child with some serious problems. Come to find out he was a Vietnam veteran too and he said, “Well, we’re going to get this done.” So, that’s one place it paid off. I outlined to him what I wanted, what I anticipated, what I would like, if you will. He came up with an infant little girl that fit that specification exactly. So be careful what you ask for. You might get it. So, yeah, I wouldn’t change a minute of that. That’s worked out very well.

SM: Anything else sir?

WQ: Oh—that’s really all. We’re doing it. We’re getting by it. That’s the important thing.

SM: Yes, sir. Absolutely. Well, let’s go ahead and put an official ending on this and we can always add to it later.

WQ: Okay.

SM: All right. Well, thank you very much sir. This will end the first series of interview with Mr. William Quigley. Thank you.