

Interview with Ron Milam
Session 2 of 7
June 28, 2005

1 Richard Verrone: This is Dr. Richard Verrone. I'm conducting an oral history
2 interview with Ron Milam. We're continuing now. Today is June 28, 2005, and it is
3 1:06 pm Central Standard time. We are again together in the Vietnam Archive's Oral
4 History interview room. Ron, we were about to get to where you were going into the
5 Army, and I wanted to ask you a couple of overarching general questions, and we were
6 touching on this yesterday as we finished, but I wonder if you could—we talked about
7 you as a child of the '50s, and I wonder if you could make some comments on the overall
8 feeling from your perspective in the 1950s and '60s and especially going into the Army
9 in '68, when you're kind of finishing grad school and you've made these decisions, but
10 make some comments about the Cold War in general, and how you grew up with that,
11 what your mentality was, and then in '68 when you joined the Army, where you were
12 with that mentally.

13 Ron Milam: I don't remember really being a classic, what I would call a classic
14 cold warrior, in the sense of thinking of the Soviet Union and the Russians as being
15 particularly the bad people. I don't remember sitting around worrying about nuclear
16 holocaust, even though I paid, as I mentioned yesterday, I paid very close attention to the
17 Cuban Missile Crisis and understood the ramifications of that. So I don't recall that it
18 was on my mind a lot, that the United States had this great enemy that we always had to
19 be so vigilant against. In fact, I would argue that since I went to a fairly liberal
20 university, I participated a lot in things that would maybe be looked upon as on the left
21 side of politics, that is going to films that sort of made fun of America's Cold War
22 paranoia, films like *The Russians Are Coming, The Russians Are Coming*, in 1966. A
23 brilliant film, incidentally. So I don't remember that I was particularly worried that the
24 United States had to stop these guys somewhere. I think the Castro thing by that time had
25 sort of died down in the sense of what it was like, say in the early '60s with the missile
26 crisis. We were—Lyndon Johnson was sort of reaching out to the Soviet Union, and
27 there were—the SALT talks were just sort of... the linkage between SALT and anything
28 else we might do with the Soviet Union was sort of there. So it was during a period of

1 time when I think the powers that be- Johnson and then later Nixon- were looking to the
2 Soviet Union as somebody we could deal with, and if we could deal with them, then
3 perhaps it would ease the situation in Vietnam. But I really don't remember—I think I
4 probably bifurcated the Cold War from Vietnam.

5 RV: Interesting. Looking back, looking at it today, do you know why you did
6 that?

7 RM: Not really. I think it probably was a combination of being in graduate school
8 and being in the School of Business, so I was in—even it was a very liberal university—I
9 was in the most conservative part of that university. I was interviewing for jobs and was
10 offered—this was in '68—I was offered several really good entry level positions, one
11 particularly that I recall was with Chrysler Corporation in Market Research, which my
12 major, my MBA, my major was Marketing. And so I had a good job opportunity except
13 for the fact that they would not give me three years; they would give me two, but I had to
14 be drafted and give up that third year in the Army in order to take that job. They'd hold
15 the job for two years, but they wouldn't hold it for three. So I was sort of looking after
16 that side of my life. Been married for two years. I just don't recall that I particularly
17 thought that the war was real important in the global sense; it was just sort of important to
18 me in the personal sense. I remember watching television and being concerned after the
19 TET Offensive that things had really picked up, but I don't remember that I drew any
20 conclusions from that, the way that perhaps I would today being a scholar of it. I was a
21 spectator at that point.

22 RV: Today, again looking back, do you see any comparisons between the Cold
23 War and the War on Terrorism, kind of a global struggle?

24 RM: I think the War on Terrorism is a very, compared to the Cold War, I think
25 the War on Terrorism is a very parochial thing. I think that we need not fear a global
26 crisis with terrorism the way that we did the Cold War. Oh, yeah, we have to worry
27 about how people think of us and our responses to it, and we worry individually when we
28 travel and things like that, but the War on Terrorism, to me, is a very small thing
29 compared to what the Cold War was, small in the sense of its impact. On the other hand,
30 our response to it concerns me to the point where we have to figure out a way to solve
31 some of the underlying problems that create terrorism in some of these other parts of the

1 world, whether that's solving the fundamentalism issues in religion or our tolerance of it
2 in the Middle East, or whether it's poverty in the underdeveloped nations. Those things
3 have to be our concern in addition to just military action to make sure that we kill as
4 many terrorists as we can. So I think it's, in some ways, it's of less of a concern to us
5 than the other was because of the nuclear implications, but on the other hand, in terms of
6 people's attitudes in the world toward Americans and our ability to sort of reign free in
7 the world and to travel and do all those things is something that we have to deal with, but
8 there are some social implications that we haven't yet addressed in my opinion.

9 RV: Then, in the 1950s and 1960s before you went to Vietnam, what did you
10 think the world opinion of the United States was?

11 RM: I think in 1950, it was of them and us. There was them being the Russians
12 and there was us being the United States, and we were basically—every move that we
13 made was looking upon in light of our competition with the Soviet Union, and everybody
14 lined up on one side or the other. And so the proxy wars that we fought around the world
15 were really a matter of substitution for what we didn't want to do ourselves with the
16 Soviet Union, and our response to all of those things was usually one of thinking we were
17 halting the spread of communism and that the dominoes just couldn't continue to fall.
18 Even though a lot of smart people looked at the issue and said, 'Well maybe its—maybe
19 it's not as monolithic as we think it is,' in terms of communism. To me that was one of
20 the great errors of our involvement, is the assumption that we made that it was all part of
21 this great big worldly plot. I don't think we believe that anymore, as historians; we
22 certainly don't believe that China was necessarily always looking out after the best
23 interests of Vietnam, probably just the contrary. Certainly in Geneva that was the case,
24 and even the Soviet Union I think were more looking out for their interests, and as a
25 result of that, if we could continue to be tied up with Vietnam, that was a good thing for
26 them. But I think we made too many erroneous assumptions about the role of worldwide
27 communism.

28 RV: And this is Ron today talking, looking back or were you kind of in this line
29 of—

1 RM: That's me now looking back, but it's also, I think may have represented
2 some of my ambivalence that I had towards the war and everything else, other than
3 looking at it very personally in 1968.

4 RV: I would like to have you discuss and comment on why you thought the
5 United States did get involved in Southeast Asia, just touched on that, and as a historian
6 now, trained in the field, you have expertise in the theories and what's been put out there
7 as the reasons, plus what's in the documents and all that, you're aware of that. But back
8 then, were you seeing this, 'Okay this is a proxy war, this is part of the Cold War,' or did
9 you see it from the other camp or another camp, that said, 'You know this is a very
10 unique situation where we want, for lack of a better term, we want freedom on the march
11 in Southeast Asia.'

12 RM: I saw it in the context of the—I saw it in the context of the Cold War; I did
13 not see it in the context of we would go anywhere, John F. Kennedy's words 'We would
14 go anywhere to preserve freedom.' I didn't see it that way. I was a little bit—I think it
15 was very simple in my mind that there was an attempt on the part of north Vietnam to
16 control the country, and that was communism, and we'd decided not to do that. Now as a
17 historian now, I look back on it and say that maybe some of our assumptions were
18 incorrect, and we can question whether Ho Chi Minh was really a nationalist or a
19 communist and all those things. But at the time, I think I probably, like most Americans,
20 I just thought, 'Well, if this is what our country has chosen to do, if this is the place that
21 we have to draw the line in the sand, and my country's chosen to do that, then so be it.' I
22 don't remember really questioning it too much. I also don't remember, however, really
23 fearing that the next step was California. I don't remember thinking that they really were
24 going to—that the Viet Cong were going to invade Chicago; I don't recall ever thinking
25 that the future of the world rested on us winning in Vietnam. I think it was more a matter
26 of that the country had chosen to assist that country in their fight against communism,
27 and I would reluctantly become part of that, reluctantly just meaning that I don't know
28 that I would have been the first to sign up had there not been a draft. I was a reluctant
29 volunteer.

30 RV: Okay. I guess one of the obvious questions to ask now is, well what if there
31 were no draft, but I'm not really sure, hypothetical should enter into this.

1 RM: Well, no, but let me throw in my two cents worth as a historian here. That is
2 part of my dissertation, and the research that I conducted with the Army at least, was that
3 from the period of about '65 to '70, 65% of all the junior officers, second lieutenants,
4 first lieutenants, and even captains, 65% of them said that they would not have joined the
5 Army had it not been for the draft. Now you can understand that with the second and
6 first lieutenants, but that means that even some of those who chose to re-up would not
7 have gone in in the first place if it would not have been for the threat of draft. But that
8 has nothing to do with the fact that two-thirds of all people served in Vietnam were
9 volunteers. I don't think those are mutually exclusive points. It's just that you have other
10 things to do with your life. You don't go to college—most people don't go to college
11 hoping that they can then, when they're done, go into the service; some do today, and
12 thank goodness, but in those days we all had our own lives to live. And all of a sudden
13 there was this barrier placed in front of us that said that when you come out of college,
14 you'll have a decision to make, and part of that decision process has got to be what are
15 you doing to do about your obligation to your country, for foreign military service? That
16 has to be factored in. If it had not been there, if that had not been part of the decision
17 process, then what those studies show is that 65% of the people would have gone ahead
18 and gotten a job and stayed in private industry or done whatever they were going to do,
19 not said, 'I want to go join the military.' So I can't hide that fact; I mean, it's nice to
20 think back and say, 'Oh, I enlisted' and all this kind of stuff, but why did I enlist? That's
21 the reason.

22 RV: You had to make a decision.

23 RM: Had to make a decision.

24 RV: And it's interesting, we could talk about- or you could comment on- the long
25 term repercussions of the tens of thousands who had to make that decision, literally
26 millions, and who chose to go into the military in that sense and go, versus trying to
27 evade or try to get some kind of homeland job—what the long term repercussions were
28 for the United States, as far as brain power drain and potential drain. And again, that's
29 more hypothetical, but this is along what you've been looking into.

30 RM: I think it had an immediate effect on the officer corps...

31 RV: In what way?

1 RM: Well, in some ways it may have even been positive because it meant that we
2 had the most highly educated officer corps in the history of American warfare, we did.
3 We also had the most, even though it's not something to be necessarily very proud of in
4 terms of numbers, but it was the most racially and ethnically diverse officer corps that
5 we've ever had, up until that time. It was the most socioeconomically diverse because it
6 forced everyone that was a college graduate to make that decision because you ran out of
7 time. Now when they put the lottery in, in '70 I believe it was, March of '70, is that
8 about right? When they put the lottery in, that changed things because then you could...
9 once your birthday was passed, you could go ahead and do whatever you wanted to do
10 with your life and not have to worry about going in. But at the time that I had to make
11 my decision, it forced us to make that as part of our decision process.

12 RV: Do you resent that today? Do you resent that barrier in place there? I mean,
13 you're growing up—

14 RM: No, as a matter of fact, I don't. In fact, I'll take it one step further and say
15 that I am probably, at this point in my life, I am probably more a believer in universal
16 service. Not conscription, but I am a believer in universal service. I would never be for
17 conscription again because I think it produced the kind of military that doesn't serve our
18 nation best. But I am in favor of universal service, either by requirement or by incentive,
19 which ever way it would make the most sense, and I think men and women should have
20 the obligation to serve at least one but maybe even two years of time doing something for
21 their country, whether it's a Peace Corps, whether it's hospitals, whether it's EMS,
22 whatever it is that is different than just going out and making as much money as you can
23 and getting along with your life. In my world, you know you'd choose any time between
24 18 and 30, and you'd take your two years, and you'd do it. So I do believe in universal
25 service; I don't resent it. What I think I resented more was that, looking back on it, is that
26 so few of us did it. There was others that figured out ways to not do it. I mean, 2.7
27 million served and the pool was about 24.8 or something, and you can take out a lot of
28 those that could never have, but it was still a very small percentage. The chance and
29 circumstance look is very clear on the numbers, and you get down to it, and your chances
30 of going were about 1 in 10 or something like that, and yet I did. And so those other 9, if
31 there's any resentment, it's about that more than it is that I did.

1 RV: With your permission, of course, I would like you to comment on what you
2 think today. You've talked about this as who you were then, but today—on why you
3 think the United States was in Vietnam. But maybe we should wait until right before
4 you're deployed,

5 RM: Okay, that's fine.

6 RV: And we'll talk about where you were and your thinking at that point.

7 RM: Okay, because it may have changed when you get me through my basic and
8 everything.

9 RV: Exactly, I wanted to see. So you mentioned that your—that Maxine's family
10 was pretty much anti-war—

11 RM: Yes, yes.

12 RV: They let you know this but not directly to your face.

13 RM: Her parents, her immediate family—her parents really didn't take an active
14 role in anything, but her two sisters and their and her brother-in-law were incredibly
15 active as I said and actually bankrolled some of the trips and things.

16 RV: Right, right. In your parents, your mother was a mother you said, and your
17 father was, having served, he understood to a point.

18 RM: He understood, but I think he was, at that point by 1968, summer of '68, I
19 think he was quite disappointed in the conduct of the war. I don't know, being a Navy
20 man, I don't know if he paid as much attention to it as he would have if he were an
21 Army—a former Army officer, but I think he was beginning to question the conduct of
22 the war and when it would end and those kinds of things.

23 RV: Based on what you've told me about him, he did keep up with all—

24 RM: Absolutely.

25 RV: And you did, too. Would you all discuss by telephone?

26 RM: I don't recall that we did. We lived in the same town, so we saw each other
27 on Sundays, every Sunday when we would go to church and then go to their house after
28 church. I don't remember having long discussions about the war. We had long
29 discussions about politics, but it was almost as if we accepted our country's decision to
30 be there, and I know this- we never sat around and talked about whether we should have.
31 We were both, and maybe we're like that today, too, we're both more practical than that,

1 and that's an exercise in futility. The better question is what are we going to do about the
2 fact that we're here, and that's always the way we approached things. So we probably
3 didn't talk too much about those aspects of it, but I do remember that as it got closer to
4 my time to go in, I think that perhaps part of the reason we didn't talk about it was kind
5 of what I touched on yesterday, and that is that I figured that if I was going in in July of
6 '68 with a three year commitment, but the time I really had to go, it'd be over. I think we
7 believed that. I mean, why not? The talks were starting.

8 RV: Exactly. Things are heading in that direction. Before we get you to basic,
9 tell me what your thoughts were of Lyndon Johnson as a president. You touched on him
10 already a little bit before, describing him as being a Democrat from Texas, maybe a little
11 bit different, and the way your father saw him and the way you saw him, but tell me what
12 you thought then as LBJ as a president and then as a wartime president.

13 RM: Well, let's talk a little bit about 1968, that's probably because there are some
14 personal issues here that probably need to be addressed because they may have impacted
15 on our thinking. In February of 1968, I was kind of seeing my light at the end of the
16 tunnel, in terms of my degree; I was going to graduate in June, and I could see that
17 getting close, and I talked yesterday a little bit about my having to go through the
18 enlistment process and choosing the Army and getting out of the non-combat arms and all
19 that kind of stuff. But in March of '68, just a couple of weeks before Lyndon Johnson
20 decided not to run, my little brother who was 16 years old at the time was stricken with
21 testicular cancer, and he was just a sophomore, I believe—maybe he was a junior, I guess
22 he was a junior in high school, and it was absolutely devastating to us because at that
23 time, testicular cancer had an 80% death rate. It was one of the worst that you could get
24 for a young man; we didn't have the conditions to cure it or even to arrest it. And so my
25 brother was stricken with cancer, and on the night that LBJ decided not to run, we found
26 out about that. And I can remember being on the telephone with my father telling me that
27 Mike had been diagnosed with this cancer, and my father called me during the election—
28 I mean during the speech. He didn't call to talk about Lyndon's speech; he called to talk
29 about my brother. I wasn't living at home, of course, I was living up in with my wife,
30 and I remember my father saying, as he's talking to me—first of all, it was highly
31 irregular that my father would not be watching this speech of something this important.

1 RV: He called during the middle of it.

2 RM: He called during the middle of the speech, and he said to me, ‘Did Johnson
3 just say he’s not running?’ He said that to my mother or to me both, and I had it on, and I
4 said, ‘Yeah, I think he just said that.’ And then we went right back talking about my
5 brother. So this very significant event that would have been the talk of our family any
6 other time was no longer very important because of our own personal situation. So over
7 the next three or four days, Mike was taken into the hospital, and they had to do some
8 preliminary testing to decide what the process would be because no one knew for sure
9 how to handle this particular problem. And then of course, the very next weekend, while
10 my brother is in the hospital, Martin Luther King is assassinated, and it was the same
11 kind of thing. I can remember sitting in my brother’s room on the day after the
12 assassination. The assassination, as I recall, was on Thursday night, and this would have
13 been on a Friday, and while my brother is in the hospital there, and I’m dealing with him,
14 I’m watching all of this on television. And again, one of the most significant events in
15 American history, and yet at that moment in time, it was less important to me than my
16 brother’s illness. Well, that story has a happy ending in that my brother survived that
17 bout with cancer, survived another bout with cancer and bouts with a whole lot of other
18 major problems in his life and is still alive today. So it has a happy ending in that sense,
19 so when you ask me what was my opinion of Lyndon Johnson, it’s a little bit clouded by
20 those events.

21 RV: Did you think of that event first when I asked you that question? Did you go
22 to that phone call?

23 RM: Well I’ve been teaching that, of course as you know, these last few days, and
24 so that’s all kind of been fresh on my mind, but I can’t ever teach the Johnson speech and
25 the Martin Luther King and the whole issue of 1968 without remembering my brother.
26 It’s just there, and I always ask myself, ‘Would I have reacted differently to what are the
27 three of the most significant events in our history- the Johnson decision, the King
28 assassination and then other Kennedy assassination, all within just a few months of each
29 other?’ Would I have reacted differently to them, and would I have reacted differently to
30 everything had it not been for my brother’s illness because it may have been that because
31 of that and because he was younger than I was and everything, it may very likely have

1 been that what I was about to be asked to do didn't seem necessarily so significant. Oh
2 yeah, dangerous and everything, but gee whiz, my brother's got cancer, and he's
3 probably not going to make it at 80%.

4 RV: That makes a lot of sense; it makes a lot more sense of what you've said up
5 to this point. That's an incredibly personal thing that happens right on the eve of you
6 kind of coming to this end of your—one stage of your life and starting this other,
7 however brief, but very significant stage of your life. How long did it take your brother
8 to recover from this cancer?

9 RM: Well, he recovered, I mean they did all kinds of really aggressive treatments,
10 including—there was no chemotherapy for it in those days. They took out all of his
11 lymph system and everything, and so then I went in the Army, and I saw him again a year
12 later. He came down for my graduation from OCS, and then I kind of paid attention a
13 little bit during his... as he would get his check-ups and everything; my father would
14 always send me that information while I was in Vietnam. But he survived, and I don't
15 even remember, back in those days we had such little knowledge, not only that cancer but
16 of all cancers, but I don't recall whether we ever knew for sure when he was in remission
17 or when he was out of trouble. I don't even recall whether they did a whole lot of tests
18 and everything to follow-up. I do know that he was stricken again by the exact same kind
19 of cancer 13 years...15, let's see...13 years later in 1981, and it was a totally unrelated
20 cancer, and as a side light, he happened to have, in 1981 he had it again, and the doctor's
21 that cured him did an experimental process out of the University of Indiana, and it was
22 the doctors who cured Lance Armstrong. My brother was one of their first test cases.

23 RV: Interesting.

24 RM: So we kind of had that connection. So I don't know for sure. I just know
25 that every time my dad had called me or sent me an e-mail or—(laughs) e-mail—sent me
26 a letter, he'd say my brother was doing well, and that always made me feel good.

27 RV: Okay, back to Lyndon. That books Lyndon Johnson in your mind, in
28 context. Tell me what your opinion was of him as a president—

29 RM: I don't recall thinking that—I knew that certain kinds of things that I knew
30 he was doing sort of bothered me. When I would hear him talk about how aggressively
31 he was involved in the military process, that bothered me.

1 RV: Why?

2 RM: Well I just didn't think that—I thought that he should have allowed the
3 military to take more of an active role in bombing targets and things like that, but I also—

4 RV: This is pre-'60—

5 RM: Well, I was going to say that what I don't remember is how much of that I
6 knew at the time as opposed to what I know now. I don't remember whether he bragged
7 about, you know, 'You can't bomb a shithouse without me knowing it,' I don't know
8 whether we knew that at the time, so that might be a little bit of backward thinking. But I
9 think I respected him as a commander-in-chief. The election was coming up; we knew he
10 wasn't going to be in it. I do recall that I was not a supporter of Robert Kennedy.

11 RV: Why not?

12 RM: I saw him as truly the anti-war candidate, and I didn't think that at this
13 moment in time, giving a signal to our enemy that we were going to change parties was
14 one thing, but if we were going to change in such a way that the guy coming in is going
15 to have a completely opposite position of where we ought to be on the war than the last
16 guy, I didn't think that was good. I remember feeling that way during the conventions of
17 1968, I mean, prior to Kennedy's death, as he was going through the primary process.

18 RV: What did you think on that night in the summer of '68 when he was killed?
19 What was your—

20 RM: Again, I have vivid memories of it. I have vivid memories of it because I
21 was such a political animal; I followed all the elections, and I remember watching the
22 California primary to its end and then going to bed and then waking up, let's see, I'm
23 trying to think... it was about June, it was what, the second week of June, I believe, and I
24 was out of school, but I was about ready to graduate, and my wife was working, so I
25 guess we must have had the clock set for you know 5:30 or 6 or something like that, and
26 we woke up to the news. And then it was a matter of turning on the television and trying
27 to absorb as much of that as I could. So I remember it vividly. And gee whiz, now for
28 me—my brother was a little better by that time, so now this was maybe even more
29 impactful on me than the other incident. But I also then, being the practical political
30 mind that I am, the next question—because I really didn't think he'd get the
31 nomination—

1 RV: You didn't?

2 RM: I thought he would be able to take it from Humphrey, even though—and it
3 was on to California, was that the way he said it? It was on to California; I think the
4 California primary had not been held, or had it just been held?

5 RV: It had just been held, and he had won it.

6 RM: Okay, so he did win, so what was the next? There was another primary
7 coming up.

8 RV: I don't remember. It was on to, and on to something was his last words at the
9 podium.

10 RM: Exactly.

11 RV: At the hotel.

12 RM: Or maybe it was just on to Chicago because Chicago would have been in late
13 July. But whatever it was, I thought that very likely he would get the nomination, and so
14 I was already prepared to not support him. I think we still didn't know for sure who the
15 other one was going to be, as I recall. I don't think we knew that it was going to be
16 Richard Nixon because the Republicans were still playing around between Nelson
17 Rockefeller and George Romney, who I had supported. I actually had worked for George
18 Romney, or I had worked on his campaign for governor in '66 and supported him for
19 president. He was the governor of Michigan, and I liked him a lot. He had just recently
20 taken a contrary position on the war that was a little bit different, but I was prepared,
21 probably, to support the Republican if it was going to be Robert Kennedy on the other
22 side. And so Nixon was—and I do recall that Nixon wasn't my first choice. I was for
23 Rockefeller or Romney, whichever one of those guys because they represented more of
24 the liberal wing of the Republican Party. They called it the eastern-wing, but I thought it
25 was the Midwest-wing as well; I thought it was the Michigan-wing.

26 RV: Right.

27 RM: And so I was prepared to support those people, rather than the Democratic
28 candidate if it was going to be Robert Kennedy, and as it turned out, it was Hubert
29 Humphrey. So I do recall that.

30 RV: What do you think Kennedy would have done against Nixon, just as a
31 hypothetical?

1 RM: I think he would have still lost because I think that the Democratic Party at
2 that time had to get support from the south, and the Wallace candidacy would have take
3 the same amount of votes from Kennedy, more so maybe even. I think he would have
4 performed even less than Hubert Humphrey because I think Humphrey may have still
5 gotten some of the southern, some of the Democratic votes. Now I don't remember
6 Electoral College-wise.

7 RV: Humphrey was trounced, and he did not get very much in the south. I don't
8 remember the number of states, but it was not—he was not successful in the south.

9 RM: Because the election of '68 is a... not a vivid memory as was these others
10 fascinations because I was pulling guard duty the night of the Democratic National
11 Convention, and I watched that television. We were two on and two off, so in my two off
12 we had the television set going, and we saw all that stuff that was going on in Chicago at
13 the convention, the daily thing. So I saw that, and then the election of '68 I was at Ft.
14 Polk, Louisiana, and so I remember—I don't remember much about that because I think I
15 may have even been in Tigerland at that time, that week, so those are not as clear in my
16 mind as the events of early '68.

17 RV: Do you want to talk about just briefly what you think as a historian, and
18 personally because you lived it, of how important and how impactful 1968 was for the
19 United States and especially the history of the country in the 20th century.

20 RM: It was an amazing year, just an amazing year. I teach it as one of the most
21 important years in American history.

22 RV: As do I.

23 RM: It's just... on so many fronts. It's not just the political front, it's the war
24 front with the TET Offensive, it's the political front with Johnson, it's social issues with
25 the King assassination, and then I'll even take it further than that- it's even the summer of
26 '68 in terms of we lived in Detroit, Michigan, and we had just come out of the 1967 race
27 riot. And in 1968 we were prepared to have it happen again, and most historians believe
28 that the only thing that kept another riot from happening in Detroit because the conditions
29 hadn't changed any, the only thing that kept another riot from happening in 1968 was the
30 Detroit Tigers won the pennant. They had become close the year before.

31 RV: Do you believe that?

1 RM: Yes, I do, I do. I think it really made a difference. The city really did come
2 together around the team, and the team was really—and unlike baseball teams today—the
3 team was incredibly integrated. The team had five or six starting black players, and you
4 could literally go to a baseball game in Detroit, Michigan, and sit almost anywhere and
5 rub shoulders with African Americans. So I think it had a big effect on keeping Detroit
6 quiet that year because nothing else positive had happened, the changes in terms of the
7 government, global government and other issues hadn't been solved. So I think it did
8 make a difference, and then the Chicago convention and then the rise from the ashes of
9 Richard Nixon—

10 RV: (laughs)

11 RM: The Wallace candidacy, I mean all of those things are just unbelievable
12 events that if those events had happened over a decade, they would be powerful.
13 Happening over a period of months is just unbelievable.

14 RV: It's all within eight, nine months of each other.

15 RM: Right, exactly. And then, you know so that's the year that I enter the United
16 States Army, and it's just entering the Army, but it's becoming—disrupting your
17 household. Now all of a sudden, your wife of two and a half years is—you're going to be
18 separated physically, so there's all that going on, too, and then personally with me, in
19 addition to my brother's situation. It's just an unbelievable year.

20 RV: I have heard 1968 described, and I tend, when I'm teaching this, to look at
21 1968 in the same way that you just described it, this transitional, totally impactful year
22 that had impacts for decades, even up to today. But looking at '68, I've heard it
23 described this way, that it became this flood of events and flood of major things
24 happening, and individuals like yourself and others were kind of swept into it. Through
25 the military, you getting into the military, and then you kind of join that process. Now
26 you'd been this observer, you had been a side participant in attending the events on
27 campus and being involved politically, but you now are part of—you mentioned one of
28 the things in 1968 as significant is the war, and so you've now joined into this fray, for
29 better, for worse. Would you—do you kind of see '68 in that sense, that it starts and then
30 it just widens as this flood, and then—

1 RM: Yeah, yeah I think so. I just... you're right, I became part of the system at
2 that point, and then what happened, what happened to me as a result of the decisions that
3 I made regarding 1968, I was in some ways no longer in control of them. I was in control
4 of day-to-day activities that may keep me alive, but the bigger issue of am I employed by
5 the Chrysler corporation, or am I just the husband to Maxine? Bottom line is I'm not
6 employed by Chrysler, and I'm hardly a husband; I'm being swept through this current,
7 this chain of events, and I'd better just hang on and do the best I can. So there was
8 probably a reluctance on my part in that sense, but there's no point in looking back.

9 RV: Tell me about your induction in that process of getting into the Army.

10 RM: I remember going down to the AFEES station.

11 RV: Can you spell that for the transcriber?

12 RM: A-F-E-E-S, it stands for Armed Forces Examining and Entrance Station, and
13 this one happened to be at Ft. Wayne... in Ft. Wayne in Michigan. It was down, what we
14 call down river Detroit, and I remember going into the building. I remember Maxine
15 taking me down there, dropping me off in front of the building, and I remember
16 listening—the music that we were listening to at the time.

17 RV: Really?

18 RM: The last song that I heard was *And Here's to You, Mrs. Robinson*, Jesus
19 loves you more than you can know, from *The Graduate*, Simon and Garfunkel. A song
20 that is supposed to be a happy song, at that moment it wasn't, so when I hear that song
21 today, I don't think happy thoughts, I think sad thoughts.

22 RV: Do you think of that day at the—

23 RM: Yeah, it's just as vivid as it can be. She drove me down in our 1968
24 Camaro, and then I walked away, and you know, they said, 'Don't bring anything, bring
25 what you're wearing, and it will all be shipped home in the bag that you're carrying,' so I
26 didn't carry much. I had only been on an airplane once in my life; this was '68, June of
27 '68, and I had been on an airplane in 1956; I was on one of the first jet airplanes, jet
28 commercial aircraft, a 707 or a DC8, or whatever it was at the time. But that's the only
29 flight I'd ever been on.

30 RV: Ron, why did you fly earlier?

1 RM: Vacation. My dad traveled a lot, and he'd been flying a lot, so we flew the
2 whole family down to Missouri to see my grandparents. So that was a big deal, and I was
3 you know 12 years old. So now all of a sudden, I'm 20—I guess I was 23, or I'd just
4 turned, I guess I was 22, not quite 23, I would be 23 in November.

5 RV: Is this in Detroit?

6 RM: In Detroit, yeah. So we flew, I remember after laying around all day long, I
7 remember taking the oath, and I remember just sort of laying around waiting for us to be
8 put on a bus to take us out to the airport. And that was kind of exciting, thinking of
9 flying on this airplane that I'd only done one time in my life, and we were going to fly to
10 Ft. Dix, New Jersey. But before all that happened, we were upstairs in this like balcony I
11 remember, in this gymnasium thing, and the guy came up and said, 'Wanted to let you
12 know'—and a lot of these people were draftees, most everyone was draftees. There was
13 a handful of us that were on this College Option plan to go into OCS, but most everyone
14 was a draftee, and they came upstairs, and they said... they said, 'Hey, we just got a call
15 that the Marines need 25 men. Anybody want to go down and join the Marines?' What
16 they said was you can hold your same two-year commitment. So that was unusual
17 because the Marines were able to get all the men they needed by requiring a third year,
18 but they did that off and on in '68, I believe. They would go to certain places and say, 'If
19 you've got draftees that were willing to sign up to be a Marine, we'll only hold them to
20 two years.' I wasn't interested in that.

21 RV: Why not?

22 RM: I don't know for sure why; I think I still was thinking that this MBA was
23 going to end up in the Finance Corps, and I don't believe I thought the Marines would
24 give me the same opportunity to use my education.

25 RV: Let me ask you a question, Ron. Don't answer it if you don't want to. What
26 did you say to Maxine when you walked away? Do you remember what you—

27 RM: 'See you soon.' We've never believed in goodbyes; we've always been
28 people that know that goodbye's kind of a silly term, that you never really say goodbye,
29 so we just don't. So I said, 'I'll see you soon,' and I did. It was only 12 weeks—I think I
30 finally saw her in 12 weeks. But we didn't—we truly thought that this was just the next
31 step in our lives and that we'd get through it. You know, I was an older guy, I was

1 almost 23; I'd had a lot of education, I had a graduate degree, and most everyone that was
2 sitting around me was 18, so I felt like the old man, even though I was fairly young, but
3 compared to them, I was older.

4 RV: When was this in '68?

5 RM: It was in July. I think I actually went in July 7th or something like that. I
6 know it was a week before the All-Star game; I do remember that.

7 RV: (laughs).

8 RM: And that was Detroit's big year, so Detroit had all these guys on the All-Star
9 team.

10 RV: Were you a Tigers fan?

11 RM: Yeah. Big Tigers fan. Absolutely.

12 RV: Still?

13 RM: Yeah, yes, we're not around there anymore, but I still follow them. Yeah, in
14 fact, I missed the '68 World Series because of being in the Army.

15 RV: Something I'm sure you'll never forgive Army for (laughs). Because it
16 hasn't happened—well, it happen when--

17 RM: (laughs) Well, it happened in '84—

18 RV: '84, right.

19 RM: And I was there in '84, but yeah, it'd been a long time.

20 RV: So you are—everything is a green light here. You've made your decisions,
21 you have followed your kind of prescribed plan. You've researched all your options,
22 you've chosen the one that would benefit you and Maxine the most, and you still serve
23 your country and meet your obligation, and you go forward with your life, and perhaps
24 you don't have to go to Southeast Asia. Tell me about the plane flight, and I want you to
25 keep in mind, if you would, when's the first time that it hit you that, 'I'm going to
26 Southeast Asia?' That's going to be all the way down the line.

27 RM: Oh, it's way down the line, yeah, way down the line. Even I can
28 remember—well, we flew there, Dix was, you know we got there at two in the morning
29 or something by the time they flew to Philadelphia, and they bussed us into Dix, and it
30 was one of those deals where they kept us up all night long filling out forms, and then we
31 had to go get our uniforms. And the very worst part, the very worst part of the entire

1 experience, including everything that happened after that- OCS and everything else, there
2 was nothing lower in my life than having my head shaved.

3 RV: Really?

4 RM: As I had really long, shoulder-length—not shoulder-length, but below my
5 collar. I was a hippie; I was a hippie looking guy. Even though I was in the School of
6 Business, I loved long hair, and I loved the style, and I can remember that those barbers
7 just loved every minute of guys like me. And when they started shaving my head, and
8 that first run right down the middle, which they just loved, it just bothered me to no end.
9 I think that may be about the only time I cried in the whole three years.

10 RV: Really?

11 RM: I mean, it was just terrible because it was such a—hair has always been
12 really important to me, and I'd had all these fights with my father, growing up, about
13 long hair, and I respected so much those who had the individuality to wear their hair long,
14 like Elvis Presley and later the Beatles. I thought that was really neat, and it wasn't just
15 that it was neat that people had long hair, and they were willing to do it, but it was neat
16 that adults didn't like it. And so I really respected people—so I was that person, and so I
17 carried that right into the Army, but when they did that, then they had me. I'd lost my
18 individuality. I also, I'm a person that I'd also felt like didn't look very good in short hair
19 because my ears, I have big ears, and they stick out from my head, and when you take the
20 hair away from the ears, it makes it even more so. So I don't think that aesthetically it
21 was something that I wanted to show. But it bothered me a lot, and then when they said,
22 'And that'll be 75 cents,' then that was even worse; you had to pay for that. So it really
23 bothered me, and then going through the uniforms and all that kind of stuff. But I
24 remember trying to make some friends; I was never—I've always been kind of a loner
25 when it comes to that sort of thing, so making new friends—I mean, it wasn't that it was
26 hard to do, but I wasn't very trustworthy. My whole company, most of the company was
27 made up of boys off the street of Newark, New Jersey, a lot of guys that were in there
28 that were given the option by the judge of going to jail or going in the Army. We had, in
29 our battalion, we had Emerson Booser that played for the New York Jets, was in our unit,
30 and Cazzie Russell that had played for University of Michigan, so that was kind of cool.
31 And I had the satisfaction—I was horrible, I was just horrible in basic training, in terms

1 of physical preparedness, but one thing I felt good about is I didn't get recycled, but I did
2 get put into a special PT group to get me up to where I could pass the test, and in my
3 group was Cazzie Russell.

4 RV: (laughs) Really?

5 RM: And this guy was you know 6 foot 8, but he was a poor—not a poor athlete,
6 he was just in poor shape because of his size. I was also in poor shape because of my
7 size, and I was too small, and he was too big, so I always thought that was kind of neat.
8 But I remember all of that yelling and screaming at us and everything was really, really
9 hard on me. I'm just not that—I started questioning whether I was really cut out for it.

10 RV: So you didn't react very well to that military discipline?

11 RM: No, no, I didn't, I didn't at all. Not the first two or three weeks, and the
12 physical part was really hard for me because I think I was out of shape, I weighed 125
13 pounds.

14 RV: Were you a smoker?

15 RM: No. No, I'd never smoked, and I'd been a cross-country runner, but between
16 the time of high school, when I was a runner, and five years later I guess, after graduate
17 school, I hadn't done anything physical. And I literally had no chest; I had no pectoral
18 muscles whatsoever. I was skinny in all respects, and the Army's physical training test
19 didn't have anything on it that I was good at. I wasn't good in the low crawl, I wasn't
20 good in the overhead bars; I didn't have any arm. I wasn't good at—we didn't do the
21 grenade throw, they did the 75-yard man carry, had to carry a guy in my weight. First of
22 all, there wasn't anybody in my weight; I was so small. So you had to carry a guy bigger
23 than you, running with him 75 yards. And then you had to do the run, dodge and jump;
24 that was not too bad. Then you had to do this—you had to do a one-mile run in combat
25 boots, and I'd been a runner; I was a good runner in high school, but I was just totally out
26 of shape, and you had to run this thing, and you had to do it in like 8:30 or something like
27 that. And I think my first time I did it in 9:30 or something. I can run faster than that
28 now. I mean, I was really in bad shape. And the Army knew it, and so the threat was to
29 recycle you, and if you get recycled, you know you push back at least four weeks, in
30 basic training, you go back four weeks, start over. And the fear of that is that then it
31 follows you all the way through, and I'd had an OCS class that would be after basic then

1 after AIT that I would need to be ready for, and if I wasn't there then my fear was that I
2 wouldn't make the—that the next one they may not let me in, and then that upsets
3 everything.

4 RV: Sure.

5 RM: So the Army had a very good plan, I mean even back then they did a great
6 job with if you were small, they would make you big, and if you were big, they would
7 make you small through diet and exercise and everything else. And so I give them a lot
8 of credit for building me up because I went from not passing the first PT test to almost
9 maxing it eight weeks later, and I went from 125 pounds to 148 pounds—

10 RV: Wow.

11 RM: In eight weeks, and it was all muscle. Even after eight weeks I was in really
12 good shape, better shape than I'd ever been in my life. Lots of pork chops and mashed
13 potatoes for lunch, and chicken and mashed potatoes for supper. I don't even remember
14 thinking the food was bad. I actually developed an appetite, and I think once I got over
15 the hump of realizing that I could do this, and it took about a month, I'm going to say a
16 month. I'm not sure I ever bought into all the pomp and everything that went on, and the
17 drill ceremony was not my best thing. I didn't really buy into that as much, but I started
18 paying attention a little bit, and then I started really recognizing the quality of the
19 pedagogical skills, I guess we would call them today, of the training staff. And I can
20 even to this day, I can remember the faces, if not the names, of so many of my drill—
21 either the drill instructors or those that instructed us in certain phases. And I was firing a
22 gun for the first time in my life. I wasn't a gun person; my family didn't have guns. I'd
23 never been hunting or anything like that, so this was all new to me.

24 RV: How were you with the rifle?

25 RM: I was not real good with the M14—the M14 bothered me a lot because it had
26 such a powerful recoil, and I was so small as I was learning it that I flinched a lot. So I
27 think I scored in the—I was probably sharp shooter on the M14, maybe the second rung.
28 And then at the very end of basic training, they introduced us to the M16, and then we
29 had the M16 all through Ft. Polk, and I was much better with the M16. When we got to
30 OCS, we went back to the M14, and so I had to relearn the M14, and I ultimately got to

1 where I could handle that weapon pretty well too. But in the beginning, it was all very
2 strange to me.

3 RV: Did you try to stay under the radar, or as the oldest, did you stick out?

4 RM: I think I did stick out a little bit, and I was given the opportunity to lead. I
5 was given the opportunity before I even had a uniform to be a squad leader.

6 RV: Really? Because of your age?

7 RM: I think because of my age.

8 RV: And your degrees perhaps.

9 RM: Well, the degrees were interesting. The degrees were always—about the
10 second day of every place I ever was, whether it was at Ft. Benning or I mean, whether it
11 was at Polk, Layron [Dix] or then at Benning or even later on than that, I would always
12 about the second day someone would come through and say, ‘Hey, find me that guy with
13 the MBA. Let’s make him a clerk.’ And they always wanted me to come in and do the
14 typing, and I couldn’t type. I was married, I didn’t have to type. I had a wife that was a
15 professional secretary; she did all that stuff for me. So I was horrible at all the things that
16 just because it’s the typical military way that anybody that has a degree probably can do
17 things I can’t do, and one of the things they can do is type. And I was not a clerical type
18 person in any way. But on the other hand, sometimes that’s an opportunity to avoid a
19 drill or avoid a five mile force march or something. But I remember basic training being
20 a struggle for the first month, and then about the last four weeks I started kind of figuring
21 it out.

22 RV: What about the leadership position, did you take it?

23 RM: I took it, but I never became a—I don’t think I ever felt like I became a great
24 leader. I don’t think I ever felt like, oh boy I’m good at this, and I’ll just keep doing it. I
25 think I just—you were asking about being under the radar, I did believe that—I bought
26 into the concept that we had all sort of talked about and never volunteer for anything.
27 And so I never volunteered for anything in that sense.

28 RV: Why weren’t you—or why did you think you were not such a good leader or
29 that you did not—

30 RM: I don’t know, maybe it’s my own expectations. I think it probably was
31 because of the physical issues, that I wasn’t a good physical specimen. I got better as

1 time would go on. My confidence level went from practically nothing in basic training to
2 sky high before I went to OCS because I got into good shape, and I think that had a lot to
3 do with it. But I looked at people around me and recognized that they were in better
4 shape than I was... a lot of football players. Even in tactics, small unit tactics and things
5 like that when we'd have training exercises, the guys that had played football tended to
6 be better at all that stuff than I was. They'd start drawing the X's and the O's movements
7 and stuff, and I was kind of trying to learn it, but I didn't really feel that I was that
8 confident with it. That would come later, but in the beginning it wasn't there.

9 RV: Why don't we take a break?

10 RM: Okay.

11 RV: Okay Ron, so I wanted to ask you about your drill instructors; you said you
12 remember them very well. In basic, were they Vietnam veterans? Had they been in-
13 country?

14 RM: We had a little bit of both. I remember the drill instructors being very good.
15 I remember a couple of them, Sergeant Shirliff sticks in my mind, I can't remember the
16 other—

17 RV: Sergeant who?

18 RM: Sergeant Shirliff. S-H-I-R-T-L-I-F-F. And he was not a Vietnam veteran;
19 he was a draftee, he admitted to us but after some time. He was just a good guy after the
20 first few days when you have to act tough.

21 RV: What made him good? What was a good drill instructor?

22 RM: For one thing, you could tell he'd gone to college. He had—at least to me he
23 was good, now maybe some of the people that weren't college graduates—smart for one
24 thing. He had a good sense of what was important about humanity, and he could sort of
25 cut through the bullshit and sort of get to our level of what we were trying to do and what
26 we were trying to learn. He didn't give the rah-rah pep talks about 'I'm going to try to
27 keep you alive' and stuff because he had never been to Vietnam. He was just like
28 everybody else, only he was—somebody saw something in him, rightly so, where he
29 could lead. He was real good. Then we had a couple of others that I recall were Vietnam
30 veterans. The best ones were the older guys, my gosh they must have been as old as 35
31 or 36 or something--

1 RV: (laughs)

2 RM: Who had Vietnam experience, maybe one tour were over there and could
3 sort of now and then talk about things that were really important. But again, we're in
4 basic training, and for me, there was no fear whatsoever that I was going to Vietnam any
5 time soon. I had this guaranteed option of going to OCS and all that stuff, so for me I
6 looked at it just kind of, I was kind of set aside to look at the whole process. But I don't
7 remember that I hated it necessarily, after I got through the first four weeks. I hated the
8 first four weeks, and after I got my physical—a hold of myself physically, then I was
9 pretty confident about everything. Got to see my wife after, I think after seven weeks, for
10 some reason or other, our unit had performed real well doing something, I don't
11 remember what it was, and we got a weekend pass from Saturday morning to Sunday
12 night, and so I called Maxine and had her meet me in Philadelphia. I took the bus to
13 Philadelphia, spent one night and a couple of days together, and that really helped me get
14 through the rest of it. So it's not an unpleasant memory that I have about basic training.
15 I kind of, in a silly sort of way, maybe enjoyed it a little bit.

16 RV: What do you see, in your mind's eye, when you think of basic? Besides your
17 hair falling on the floor.

18 RM: Yeah, that was the worst part. Once I got through the hair and the physical
19 part, I think I was fine with basic training.

20 RV: What did Maxine think about your new look?

21 RM: (laughs) She didn't like it. I mean, she didn't say that, but I could tell. And
22 I said, 'Well, I get to grow it out in AIT.' And they let you grow—you have white
23 sidewalls, but you get to grow it back on top, so I was able to do that.

24 RV: Do you remember—this might be kind of a silly question, do you remember
25 what Philly was like there in the summer of '68 during that weekend?

26 RM: Not really because we didn't spend a lot of time outside (laughs).

27 RV: Yeah, I figured this much, okay.

28 RM: Yeah, I don't remember too much about Philadelphia, just I remember we
29 had a good time. I do remember we ate at Alfredo's. At that time there was only two
30 Alfredo's in the world; one was in Rome, the man that you know, fettuccini alfredo? One
31 in Rome and one in Philadelphia. There's one now in Disney World, I guess. But at the

1 time there was only two, I think that was kind of neat. We did have a nice meal, I do
2 remember that and to not eat Army food was kind of neat.

3 RV: Were you in uniform?

4 RM: No, I didn't wear my uniform. I wore it to meet her; she met me at the bus
5 station, and then I changed. I was not, I can tell you this, I was never proud to wear my
6 uniform, all the time I was in the Army.

7 RV: Why?

8 RM: I don't remember feeling good. I don't remember feeling that anyone in
9 society, other than myself, my family, my wife, wanted to see me in uniform. I don't
10 remember ever being—the only time I ever remember being proud was when I came
11 home from airborne training, before I went to OCS, and I was able to wear my jump
12 boots with my dress greens, my Class A's, and only airborne guys could do that and
13 being so proud of that and noticing that nobody cared in the airport, just nobody cared.
14 So no, it wasn't something that I was proud of.

15 RV: Is that a product of the time?

16 RM: Yes, it sure is. It sure was.

17 RV: What do you think now?

18 RM: Well, I feel bad that I felt that way. We went to Europe a month ago, and we
19 were in the Dallas airport, and I haven't traveled a lot through airports since I've been in
20 academe, and I haven't done a lot since I've been the last couple years of the war in Iraq.
21 But it was so interesting to see all these soldiers either going or coming back from Iraq
22 and wearing fatigues, wearing their camos. And first of all, we were never allowed to
23 wear anything except Class A's, summer or winter, in public places. You could wear
24 fatigues on-post in the commissary and things, but you couldn't even, even in Ft. Bragg,
25 North Carolina, when I was with the 82nd Airborne Division, I could only wear my
26 fatigues—you couldn't stop anywhere. I used to ride my motorcycle back and forth, and
27 you couldn't even stop other than for gas between Ft. Bragg and your home. You
28 couldn't stop at a civilian grocery store if you were wearing fatigues; that was the rule.
29 You had to either be in a dress uniform or in civilian clothes, and I saw all these guys in
30 their camos, you know, and I was so proud of them, and we spent so much time going up
31 to guys, I'd say, 'Going or coming?' And I'd either say, 'Thank you' or 'Good luck.'

1 And it was really neat seeing them travel, but we didn't do that; we didn't feel that way
2 during the Vietnam era... at all.

3 RV: We can touch on that when we get to present day stuff, talk about post-
4 Vietnam. Anything else about basic that you want comment upon?

5 RM: No, I think it was—I remember it was in the summer, and it was hot, and the
6 Army had that great—one of the really dumb things that they did because we didn't know
7 any better was that you had to take these salt tablets.

8 RV: Right.

9 RM: And we would scarf those salt tablets, and you know your green fatigues
10 would turn white from all the sweat, all that salt sweating out of your body, it's a wonder
11 it didn't kill us. And every once in awhile, somebody'd die in training, and they'd have
12 these rules that if it was a certain temperature, then they would lower the flags to certain
13 levels, and if it was all the way—if it was just a little bit from the top, that meant that—it
14 was the post flag, not the United States flags—but if it was a certain level, then that
15 meant the uniform would be full—you'd roll your sleeves to here, if the flag—

16 RV: And you're indicating at your wrist.

17 RM: Yeah, depending, well, yes. Whatever the temperature and the heat index—
18 they didn't call it that then—was, it would determine what uniform you wore for that day.
19 And every once in awhile, then they'd say, 'Okay, we were supposed to go on a five mile
20 march today, but instead you're going to go to your barracks and read a book.' And it
21 would be because somebody died.

22 RV: (laughs) Were you like, 'All right!'?

23 RM: (laughs) Yeah, oh yeah. Screw him! Thank goodness for him when we get a
24 day off. And I say it happened a lot, it probably happened once. My memory is that it
25 happened a lot, but I doubt that it did. But I do know that it did happen at least once
26 during my eight weeks over there. And it was always—the rumor was that you know,
27 well this drill sergeant just made him do too many push-ups and all that stuff; the rumor
28 mill was so terrific in the military. But I don't remember, other than that, I think basic
29 was well done. I think the Army did a pretty good in that eight weeks of preparing—not
30 preparing people for Vietnam, that comes with the advance training, but just preparing
31 people to get used to the military society and that sort of thing.

1 RV: What'd you do in between basic and AIT?

2 RM: Nothing. We had no time off at all. We literally graduated at nine o' clock
3 in the morning, and my family didn't come to graduation.

4 RV: Why not?

5 RM: Well, because I knew I was going to AIT, and we were going to take off that
6 afternoon; there would have been no time to see her at all. I think I saw her the weekend
7 before. And so we graduated in the morning, and we got on an airplane, and they flew us
8 to Ft. Polk, Louisiana. Now when you got your orders for Ft. Polk, if you were at Ft.
9 Dix, with the exception of those of us going on to OCS, if you got your orders for Polk,
10 you knew where you were going next. Ft. Polk was Tigerland, and that meant Vietnam.
11 And so you have this... all these guys that their next stop is going to be Vietnam, on their
12 way to Ft. Polk.

13 RV: Is this when it first—

14 RM: Morale was really low for them. Wasn't bad for me because again, I knew I
15 was at least a year away from anything, and I knew, I was reasonably certain that I would
16 get good training because all through basic training they'd say, 'If you get orders for
17 Polk, you know you're going to Nam, and if you get orders for Polk, you'll get really
18 good training. It's tough, man. Tigerland—next to Vietnam, Tigerland's the worst thing
19 you'll ever go through.' And so you get this feeling that, wow, I'm really going
20 someplace that's important, and it has this incredible reputation. So... and I'd never been
21 to Louisiana, I don't believe, at that time. No, I'd never been to Louisiana, and so it was
22 kind of exciting. And like I say, I had the safety net of OCS and everything, so I didn't
23 have to worry about anything. So we went down to Ft. Polk... Leesville, Louisiana.

24 RV: Right. Tell me about what that experience was, getting off the plane and
25 going—

26 RM: Ft. Polk was... hot, and even though it was fall, it was hot. It was
27 September, and it really was, you could tell it was all about Vietnam. At our
28 introduction, as they talked to us about it, in orientation, they told us, 'It wasn't a matter
29 of [if] you might go to Vietnam; you will go to Vietnam.' Everybody that goes to Ft.
30 Polk goes to Vietnam, so they were telling all of us that, and of course we're all
31 snickering because there was about 50 of us that were going to OCS, and we knew that.

1 So we felt pretty good about ourselves because we were going to get to experience what
2 it was like to be prepared to go someplace where, once you get—or, without having to
3 worry about going there. And of course, Leesville, Louisiana was known as just one of
4 the wildest places in the country. You could get anything you wanted; you could get any
5 drug, you could get any kind of liquor, you could get any kind woman. Whatever you
6 wanted, it would be there in Leesville. So those of us that were going to OCS, we had a
7 good time there. The Army's attitude in AIT seemed to be, you give us a good Monday
8 through Friday and maybe a Saturday morning, and if your unit performs well during the
9 week, then you're off at noon on Saturday, and you don't have to come home until
10 Sunday, Sunday night. And they did a good job of motivating people that way. Now the
11 problem was for the guys that were going to Vietnam, they had to—knowing they were
12 going, there were a lot of real head cases there, the guys that were trying to figure out
13 ways to avoid going. So their incentive to not have... you know, to not go AWOL and
14 stuff was not as high as ours. But we left every weekend. There was a bunch of us, and
15 we had one guy that lived up in Greenville, Mississippi, so we'd go up to his place. We
16 had some other friends that lived in Alexandria, Louisiana; we'd go to his place. Maxine
17 came down twice from Detroit, and we were able to spend some time together. In fact,
18 we watched the World Series, I remember, from bed in Alexandria one weekend. So for
19 me, Ft. Polk was great.

20 RV: Do you want to talk about off-post activities, and what you—

21 RM: Yeah, we would go in and observe all those crazy things, and they were
22 crazy things. Golly. Prostitutes everywhere. Selling it on the streets, selling it
23 everywhere. And again, you're talking about 18-year-old guys that haven't been away
24 from home very much. As an old, 23-year-old married man, it was a little different; it
25 was fun to watch. It was... it was really good training. Ft. Polk was good training, in all
26 respects, for Vietnam.

27 RV: Can you describe that, elaborate on that?

28 RM: Well, the famous part is Tigerland. The last week they take you through
29 Tigerland, and we got to go through that. We spent that week of bivouac and the search
30 and invade, search and destroy and all those things and trying to escape from a prison of

1 war camp. The one thing I do remember on that particular exercise is that there was two
2 of us, my buddy and I, groups of two. I remember we had the first—

3 RV: This is Tigerland?

4 RM: This is Tigerland. And you know, this is where it gets a little murky with
5 me. What I'm going to describe is either Tigerland, or it's the same thing in OCS
6 because we did something that was similar to this, and I may have part of my stories
7 mixed up. But, the one thing I do remember is we had to kill a chicken. And so we had
8 all these guys from Detroit and cities, and they'd never been around chickens, and you
9 had to kill a chicken, and then you had to... you had to clean it and put it in a number 10
10 can and cook it. And you had to do that in like 10 minutes or something, you know, the
11 idea was to be able to eat quickly off the forage, off the land. And I remember I was the
12 only one in my unit that had ever killed a chicken. My grandma was a chicken farmer up
13 in Missouri, and I hadn't killed a chicken since I was six, but I didn't forget how. And all
14 these guys were so squeamish about killing the chicken, so I do remember the killing of
15 the chicken.

16 RV: How'd you kill a chicken? You did?

17 RM: Wring its neck (cracking noise).

18 RV: You did?

19 RM: Yeah I did it, shoot.

20 RV: So you just wring its neck?

21 RM: Yeah, you just (imitates gun noise) like that, and of course the body goes
22 that way, and you got the head in your hand. And everybody thought that was so gross,
23 and I didn't even know why everybody that it was so gross; it just was no big deal. And I
24 know they tell you all these other ways that you can do it, with your bayonet and all those
25 kinds of stuff, but I did it they way grandma taught me. I do remember that, and then I
26 remember that we were supposed to, you know, evade these pursuers all night long, and
27 my buddy and I got either lost—I don't know whether we were lost or what happened,
28 but we were totally—we got off-post.

29 RV: Now were you moving in pairs?

1 RM: We were a pair, yes. The evade was a pair, and the idea was they would
2 catch you, and they would take you to a POW camp, and they would interrogate you, put
3 you through all these ropes and everything.

4 RV: What kind of ammo were you using, blanks, what was it a—

5 RM: Well, we normally used blank, but we didn't have weapons. We were
6 weaponless on this particular exercise, but I remember we got lost, and we got off-post,
7 and we had to hitchhike.

8 RV: (laughs)

9 RM: And so we did. We literally hitchhiked back, and the guys—

10 RV: Were you all painted up?

11 RM: Yeah, we were painted with some stuff. We went through that whole thing
12 with painting our faces up. I remember we weren't wearing steel pots, we were wearing
13 you know, just our fatigue caps. And they took us—so we ended up, maybe we were
14 hitchhiking two or three in the morning, exercises were supposed to end at four or five,
15 and we're off-post. So we had—

16 RV: Let me ask you, when you get off-post, are you like, 'Oh, shit, we're off-
17 post' or are you—

18 RM: We sort of thought we were. We saw cars going by. You know, there's like
19 outside of an artillery range, way the hell out there somewhere.

20 RV: How did you get there?

21 RM: I have no idea. It was dark.

22 RV: (laughs)

23 RM: We were evading. We were real good.

24 RV: You did a real good job of evading.

25 RM: So now we're like out there, and this woman picked us up.

26 RV: That's brave of her.

27 RM: Oh, yes, it was. We said, 'Hey, we're lost, we don't know where we are, and
28 can you take us someplace?' Well, she took us to this bar, and it must have been before
29 two because a bar would have closed at two, I guess. And we went to this bar, and we
30 drank beer for a couple hours, and then she took us back to where we could at least know

1 where the camp was, that we could sort of come back in and act like we had been
2 successful in evading. And they gave us all this credit for having not gotten caught.

3 RV: You are kidding.

4 RM: Oh, yeah! Oh, yeah. It was terrific.

5 RV: You have a few beers and then—

6 RM: Oh, yeah, yeah! We had a great night. And see, that's the kind of thing that
7 we didn't worry about that because we weren't really trying to learn how to evade
8 because we were going to go to OCS for six months, and then we're going to do this
9 other stuff and become officers. So we were learning to do stuff that might help us
10 someday, but it didn't have an immediate need that we saw, so we just kind of had a good
11 time. And it was really an enjoyable eight weeks.

12 RV: What do you mean by that? And I'm hesitant—I'm trying to figure out how
13 to ask that question in a more sophisticated way, but I've heard so many stories of the
14 opposite, that Ft. Polk was so hard, and AIT was so hard, and I was in great shape, but...
15 and I thought I knew what I was doing, but... and the stories of Vietnam, my DIs and
16 AIT were vets, and they scared us, and they did this and that. Tell me what you mean by
17 enjoyable, and—

18 RM: What I mean by—I think it has to be understood in the context of the, 'I'm
19 not going to Vietnam anytime soon, so I'm an observer as much as anything. I'm a
20 participant, but I can have fun with this,' essentially. And I thought the training was
21 absolutely excellent; I thought the guys that were going were getting the very best
22 training. It was kind of neat training. I mean, it was real training. When the guy stood
23 up there and gave a lecture on the M79, you knew probably you were going to use that
24 M79 someday soon; the guys that were really doing it. And they knew, so it was
25 effective training in all respects. Our drill sergeant's name was Bobby Aaron; he was
26 Hank Aaron's cousin. At least, he said he was Hank Aaron's cousin, who knows, right?
27 But we called him the Drill Daddy; this African-American man, and he was just terrific.
28 He had two—

29 RV: Called him the Drill Daddy to his face?

30 RM: To his face. Drill Daddy. Yeah, 'You can call me the Drill Daddy.' And he
31 was just as cool as he could be in all respects, and he had had two tours in Vietnam, and

1 he didn't try to scare you. He'd just say, 'You know, I hope I can keep you alive' and
2 this kind of stuff. He was just terrific; everything about the man, I just loved him. And
3 so, one of the observations that I made in AIT, and later would see the same thing in
4 OCS, is so many of the drill sergeants and so many of the cadre teaching all of the
5 courses were African-American because they were the ones that were re-upping. They
6 were coming home from Vietnam and not getting out because, you remember, in the
7 1960s, for an African-American in the Army was the absolute—or the military—was the
8 absolute best thing they could do. Couldn't get a job in civilian life. They had respect;
9 they had respect because of the combat experiences, and it was a great life for them.

10 RV: Did you all have respect for Drill Daddy and the other African-American
11 officers?

12 RM: Absolutely, absolutely. I don't remember ever... I don't remember ever
13 having a racist feeling about that. Not even so much so with my buddies in the programs.

14 RV: Is that because you're from Detroit or from the north?

15 RM: I don't know, I don't know. I remember little things like, more so in the
16 OCS perhaps, but I remember little things like some of my friends from the south—I
17 didn't have a lot of the friends from the south until I went in the Army—and listening to
18 music, and my friends from the south were listening to Country music, Country Western
19 music, and my African-American friends were listening to Motown. And I understood
20 the Motown; I had more feeling for that than I did for the Country music, even though I'd
21 been raised in Oklahoma, and I liked the music. But it's just something about that
22 Motown sound. But the surprising thing was, these guys from the south... they didn't
23 know the Motown sound. It's like I'm thinking, 'Where the hell you've been?'

24 RV: Because it's on the radio.

25 RM: The Supremes, you don't know the Four Tops and the Temptations and
26 Smokey Robinson and the Miracles? You don't know any of these things? It was almost
27 like that music hadn't made it into Mississippi.

28 RV: Wow.

29 RM: I couldn't believe it.

30 RV: 1968, too. It's been on for a few years.

1 RM: Oh, yeah, yeah. But apparently where these guys lived, they'd never
2 listened to it. There was a feeling camaraderie because of the music that I think I had,
3 maybe with some of the African—the black guys more so than some of my other friends.
4 But even then, I don't remember a lot of racism in the training units. Even at this end.

5 RV: Even in basic?

6 RM: Even in—well, no. I don't remember it in basic, and I don't remember it in
7 AIT, I just don't. I don't remember it ever being a big deal even though I've studied
8 since that probably there was, but it didn't appear that way to me. But AIT was a—I was
9 very impressed with the way we were preparing people for what would follow. Good
10 M16 training, good M79 training. No helicopter training, we got no helicopter training at
11 all.

12 RV: Why not?

13 RM: I don't know. I don't know whether it was a matter of cost. I didn't get my
14 first helicopter training until OCS.

15 RV: Was that a mistake do you think?

16 RM: Yeah, probably. We were trucked out to Tigerland in Deuce and a halves.

17 RV: It would have made it that much more real—

18 RM: It would, it would. I don't remember—they must have just thought that in-
19 country training that first five days of orientation in a unit would probably suffice for
20 telling you how to get on and off a chopper. Or it may have been just a matter of the
21 chopper; they didn't have choppers in this country, other than what they had at McClellan
22 and some of the helicopter training areas that they could afford to it in AIT. But I don't
23 remember us ever doing anything with airborne assaults. But I do remember that
24 Tigerland was very effective, I mean it was a solid week of bivouac out there, with search
25 and evade, with all that stuff. It was pretty doggone good, pretty good realistic training.

26 RV: How did you do personally?

27 RM: I did much better than I did in basic training. I had gotten a hold of myself
28 physically, and I was starting to feel like a real soldier. I can't say I was loving it, if
29 you'd said, 'Would you rather do something else than this,' I probably would have been,
30 'Oh, fine.' But it was almost like a 8 to—not an 8 to 5, but it was like an 8 to 10 job, five
31 days a week, and then if you were good, you got Saturday afternoon and the rest of the

1 Sunday off. So we traveled, and we went places, and almost every weekend I went to
2 Alexandria or to Mississippi or like I said, I met my wife. We traveled a lot, every
3 weekend, and it was kind of neat. There's just something about it that was very positive,
4 again, I think because I knew I wasn't going to Vietnam anytime soon.

5 RV: Can you tell me some details of the training...the courses, the class?

6 RM: They were—we had the small unit training, fire-and-maneuver training. We
7 had training on all of the weapons; the M16 was the weapon. We weren't even issued an
8 M14, so we trained on the M16. So we had marksmanship training; I think we may have
9 even gotten a chance to shoot a 45. I think we trained on the 45 pistol, but I may have
10 that mixed up with OCS because there would have been no real reason to teach it, other
11 than M79 and M60 guys all carried 45s. So they may have taught us that. We had
12 grenade training; we did PT stuff. I can remember isometric exercises were coming into
13 vogue then, that was the brand new thing, and they were trying to teach that. And
14 nobody got that, nobody understood that.

15 RV: (laughs)

16 RM: It didn't make any sense, those little reflexive things, and it was almost like
17 those yoga things. Nobody bought into that. Had hand-to-hand combat training. We did
18 pugil sticks, that was really fun.

19 RV: Did you do well with them?

20 RM: No, not particularly. I'm not very aggressive when it comes that. I tried, I
21 put up a good show, but no. Some of the guys just absolutely loved getting in there and
22 beating the crap out of somebody like that. I didn't, I didn't. Hand-to-hand was kind of
23 neat because—I liked hand-to-hand combat because there were these great ways of
24 equalizing your size if you could do them correctly, so I tried to really learn how that all
25 works because I thought that would be a good equalizer if I ever needed that.

26 RV: Do you still remember it today?

27 RM: Yeah, but you know what I remember—a little bit—but you know what I
28 remember more than anything is bayonet training.

29 RV: Really?

30 RM: I absolutely can still do all that stuff, yeah, I mean amazing, just amazing all
31 the stuff.

1 RV: For example, what?

2 RM: Well, the whole—all of the butt stroke, yep, all the yelling, everything. I can
3 do it all.

4 RV: Just for the record, you're demonstrating it right now.

5 RM: (laughs) Yes. I can do it, I've done it. A few beers I do it even better. But it
6 stuck with me; it was amazing training. And the neat thing about AIT to me was there
7 was virtually no harassment of the kind that we had in basic, the policing up of cigarette
8 butts, the details, the shit details. They didn't do that. They acted like, at Ft. Polk, they
9 acted like they know what their mission is, and that's to in eight weeks get these guys
10 ready to go into combat.

11 RV: And they don't have time to screw around.

12 RM: And they're going to take it seriously. Exactly. And if we're not training
13 them, then let's give them some time off to enjoy life before they go.

14 RV: Before they go over.

15 RM: That was the attitude, and I thought it was extremely effective.

16 RV: What weapon did you enjoy the most, besides the bayonet, I guess. What did
17 you—

18 RM: I thought the M16 was a good weapon.

19 RV: And they had cleared up the jamming problems by then?

20 RM: Well, yeah. I thought the M16 was a pretty decent weapon. I liked it
21 because it seemed less like a weapon to me, you know being a non-gun person. It
22 seemed more like a toy. It was made out of plastic, it was light, it kind of looked cool,
23 rather than that long, big ol' M14. And when you looked down the barrel of it, it just
24 seemed to be... it just seemed to be a weapon that I personally could handle better. We
25 were being training in quick-kill techniques at that time, where they would tape a yard
26 stick, a piece of a yard stick across the top of the sights, and you were instructed on how
27 to sight with both eyes, not a single eye, down a target and to shoot very quickly in three
28 round bursts. And then we did that exercise, we'd do it late in the afternoon, and then at
29 night, when it got dark, we'd do it again at night. And the idea—and I thought that they
30 had learned something in Vietnam about that; they had learned that very seldom would a
31 soldier ever sight his weapon at an enemy that you're going to shoot from the hip or

1 you're going to shoot on the way up kind of thing. And they taught effective things like
2 make sure that you recognize that the M16 on fully automatic rock 'n' roll will rise and
3 go to the right. And so you want to make sure that you shoot low at the enemy, and we
4 know now, as a historian now having studied some of the Viet Cong stuff that we've got,
5 we knew that that's what the Sapper said, if they didn't get you on the first burst that
6 you'd be fine, just hug the ground and an American soldier would miss you because he'd
7 be firing this way. And so they did a good job with that. The quick kill techniques
8 worked. The M60, we trained on the M60, got good training on the M60 machine gun.

9 RV: Can you describe, Ron, I'm going to take advantage of you right now and
10 your articulation about this, what it's like to shoot an M60 machine gun? We hear about
11 this or read about, we see it in movies. What is that like?

12 RM: Well in training, they—your targets on an M60 are usually not people. They
13 don't have it—they used tanks because they—and you're using 4 to 1 ratio tracers, and so
14 every fifth round, you've got a tracer out there, and so you can sight in on something
15 that's large like a tank, and you can see the affected range of one of these things, and you
16 know, they'll have those things sitting out there at a thousand meters, so we're way down
17 there.

18 RV: And how far is a thousand meters, for those listening to this?

19 RM: Oh, a thousand meters is 1600 yards, is that right?

20 RV: I don't know.

21 RM: 1600 maybe. No! 1600 meters, it's—just a minute now—

22 RV: Oh, I didn't mean to make you—

23 RM: I'm thinking meters (laughs)—

24 RV: To make you do a conversion, I'm trying to think of just something to
25 compare it to, to show the power of a weapon.

26 RM: It would be the length—let's see, a thousand meters, a hundred meters—I've
27 misspoken. It's 400 meters because it's the length of four football fields. Now it has an
28 effective killing range of about two and a half miles, so you literally can lay, you know,
29 arc one there at a tank that would be that far away, but in training, it was about 400
30 meters.

31 RV: Why train shooting at tanks and not something smaller?

1 RM: I think so you can see the effect of your marksmanship; you wouldn't be
2 able to even see a target that far out, and they wanted to be able to see the affected range.
3 In a machine gun, you're trying to move it, you're trying to lay down a field of fire; that's
4 the idea behind the machine gun. It's not really to hit something and kill it; it's to
5 effectively lay down a wall of steel so that men can advance. That's what the fire-and-
6 maneuver technique would be using a machine gun. Now if you are trying to use it in
7 true combat situations, it's going to do what—you're going to use it for whatever need
8 you have at that moment, whether you're in total defense or if you're in offensive mode.
9 And in Vietnam, in the jungle atmosphere, you very seldom ever have an opportunity to
10 fire one 400 meters.

11 RV: Right.

12 RM: But at the time, you know I remember the training being very effective. The
13 big problem with the weapon is the heating up of the barrel.

14 RV: Right.

15 RM: Now we had, in Vietnam, we had when we went out on operation, we carried
16 the 60, or we always had 60s attached to our vehicles. We always carried an extra barrel,
17 and you can change barrel; that was the best way to not worry about a barrel overheating.
18 They were very quick change; it was very easy to change the barrel of one.

19 RV: Did they tell you, just out of curiosity, that the enemy in Vietnam would first
20 target that M60, try to take out the machine gun?

21 RM: Yeah. That was an issue of leadership, a problem with leadership. This is
22 something that I've learned more as a historian than when I was actually there because I
23 wasn't, didn't serve in an American unit. But I understand in a lot of the American units,
24 that was a real problem because M60 was the most important weapon in your squad, but
25 you had to get somebody that wanted to carry it, it was heavy. You had to have an ammo
26 bearer, and you had to deal with the ammo bearer not wanting to bear ammo for that guy
27 or that guy not wanting him as an ammo bearer and racial issues that come up with that
28 because a lot of... there's been some writings from a lot of the black soldiers saying that
29 they always felt like they were targeted to carry that weapon for racial issues. And I
30 think brothers Samuel Goff, I think talks about that a lot. But frankly, it was a
31 tremendous weapon; I think the M60 was a great weapon.

1 RV: How about the M79?

2 RM: The M79 was very effective. I didn't get a lot of training on the M79. I did
3 take the training course in it, but I don't remember my training too much. I remember it
4 more so when I went to Vietnam. It was a very effective weapon; we carried it all the
5 time. Any operation we went on, we carried them in our jeeps, everything. It was just a
6 great weapon, and you had so much versatility with them because of the opportunity to
7 use high explosive, to use a Willy Pete and to use CS. We even had tear gas and then
8 flares, so it was just—never had, they had that new round, I never got one, one of those
9 flechette round, the shotgun round. I never had one of those, so I don't know how
10 effective that was, but it was a way of convincing soldiers that had to carry the M79 on
11 an operation when they were going through the jungle, they didn't want to carry it
12 because if you're ambushed, you've only got one round. So they'd put that flechette
13 round in there, and they'd give you a pretty effective first round before you had to figure
14 out something else to do.

15 RV: Right.

16 RM: But it was a good weapon, a really good weapon.

17 RV: The tactics that were taught to you all- the maneuver, all that, was it pretty
18 accurate for what you did see later in Vietnam? Or how far off base, I guess I should ask.

19 RM: Yeah, I think I would put it this way: fire-and-maneuver, the ability to take a
20 fire team with fields of fire and cover and that sort of thing, it was taught that—I'm not
21 sure, since I didn't serve in an American unit once I was there, I don't know whether
22 American units used that or not. Now I taught the same courses when I was advisor to
23 the Montagnards, and we didn't teach it exactly the same way as it was taught in the
24 States because we weren't using the same kind of weapons with them; we were using old
25 World War II weapons more so, BARs and Garands and stuff like that. But actually, I
26 think the idea of laying down fields of fire and being able to fire and move the way that
27 you're supposed is probably about all you can do in that kind of training. I think they
28 were probably more effective on defensive items- setting up fields of fire and foxholes
29 and coverages and your CPs and working around that; I think maybe they did a better job.
30 I think that was maybe more apropos to Vietnam, in terms of units on the move and
31 setting up night encampments and that sort of thing.

1 RV: What did they tell you about defensive positions because I hear this so much
2 in interviews, veterans talking at length about their defensive positions- the night
3 defensive position, the ambush position, and it's of how important, vitally important it is
4 to have that thing right.

5 RM: It is important. Again, my experiences once I got to Vietnam were with
6 different—were not with American units, but I did operate and go out on a lot of night
7 ambush patrols and training situations. Now what I mean by training situations, they
8 were a lot of fire, and they were real deals, but part of our reasons for doing them were so
9 they'd be able to do it when we left, and they'd know how to do it with our logistical
10 support. Very important, particularly the LPs, the listening postage you would put out
11 there and making sure that you have an exit and a way back into your own location,
12 knowing which way to lay out your claymores, knowing how to effectively booby trap
13 those claymores, so that if the enemy picked them up out there, he couldn't turn them on
14 you, which they've been known to do. Knowing how to maintain radio silence, having
15 signals for not speaking but only clicking your handset, all of those things were very
16 critical and very important to learn. But I'm not sure—you can only teach the basics of
17 something like that in a garrison situation or in a training situation like you would have in
18 the States. Human nature being what it is, you can learn how to do it there, but you don't
19 understand the need for it until you're in-country, in the combat situation, and that's why
20 most units tried very hard to have a five day training exercise, at least, for new
21 replacements when they first came in-country because you take it a lot more seriously
22 once you're there. But I think they laid down the basics of it pretty much. Very
23 important defensive positions. Now, there seems to be some controversy, and I don't
24 know that much about it since I didn't serve in American units, about the digging in and
25 how it's very important that you dig in, but I also know a lot of units that just didn't have
26 the time to get much more than about a, you know a shallow sleep position thing, that
27 they couldn't really—didn't have really a lot of time to get down into a foxhole situation
28 every single night. That's what any good field-grade officer would always want his
29 battalion to be able to dig in every night and to get your men below, so that the only
30 danger that a man has of being killed is if there's a direct mortar hit on his foxhole, other
31 than that he's able to fight from a recess position. But the Army, they tried. I think fire

1 maneuver hasn't changed that much from, probably from World War II in open ground
2 warfare. But I think they did a good job with it.

3 RV: Ron, tell me about how you saw your relationship and how you developed
4 the relationship with the people in your unit, through your training, basic and then in AIT,
5 and the dynamics of that.

6 RM: I did have a lot of friends in AIT, and they were all people that were going
7 on with me to OCS. We had really strong—you know, we pledged to each other that
8 we'd stay friends through OCS, and that was because we knew that was going to be
9 pretty tough. Some of that didn't happen, but I did have a pretty good bunch of friends.
10 We even made—I even had a couple of friends who I made arrangements with that when
11 we went to OCS, we would bring our wives to OCS, and they would live together, which
12 they did.

13 RV: How many in your AIT were going to go to OCS with you?

14 RM: In my company of 150 odd, let's say, I don't remember the exact number,
15 but let's say a company of 150, there was about 70 of us that were going to OCS; they put
16 us all in this one company, and so when we got to OCS, our 150, it was at least half of us
17 knew each other from AIT. Excuse me. And then there was another group that came
18 from, I believe, where else was it? Maybe it was Polk, maybe it was just another
19 company at Polk, so that when we got to Benning, there was—and this was at
20 Thanksgiving of 1968—we were scheduled to—we had to be there on Friday morning
21 after Thanksgiving is how they scheduled us to start OCS at Ft. Benning. So we all show
22 up, and the night before—we'd all come in on Wednesday night of Thanksgiving, most
23 of us, and then we went to the Howard Johnson there at Ft. Benning in Columbus,
24 Georgia and got drunk and watched football, watched the Texas A&M/Texas football
25 game. I do remember that. And then we were to go to camp—to go to Benning the next
26 morning and report in at 0700. Well, we got there, and they said to us—

27 RV: At the Howard Johnson or...?

28 RM: No, this was on-post; we went to Ft. Benning. We'd spent the night at the
29 Howard Johnson, on our own.

30 RV: Okay, so you're out of Louisiana, you're gone from Ft. Polk.

31 RM: Right. I actually had gone from for two weeks—no, for probably a week.

1 RV: Back up to Detroit?

2 RM: Back to Detroit, went back to Detroit, yeah.

3 RV: What was your family like when you came back up there?

4 RM: They noticed a big change in me. I was bigger, I was stronger, I cussed a lot.

5 RV: Oh, yeah?

6 RM: Yeah, yeah. This, this MBA from Wayne State University had forgotten

7 how to talk.

8 RV: (laughs) Did they tell you that then or have they since?

9 RM: Oh, they told me that then. My poor mother.

10 RV: Did she say, 'Ron, stop, watch your language'?

11 RM: Yeah, yeah, yeah, absolutely. I was a changed man. I had really become a

12 soldier.

13 RV: Were you in uniform?

14 RM: I came home in uniform, and that may have been—I don't remember that I

15 wore my uniform anywhere other than coming in. I remember a neat thing though. I was

16 flying home from Ft. Polk, and I remember being on the airplane; I went through Atlanta

17 as I recall, and a man was flying up from the Bahamas, and I remember sitting next to

18 him on the plane. And he was very nice, and I remember him saying to me, 'Son, would

19 you like my roll?' You know, you have those little meals, and I was just so hungry, and I

20 had scarfed mine in no time, and he was saying, 'Son, would you like my roll?' And I

21 said, 'I sure would.' And so I ate his roll, and I thought to myself, 'You know, six

22 months ago, I wouldn't have cared to eat his roll,' but I was a soldier now, and I was

23 hungry all the time. But I don't remember that—I think on that particular trip, I had

24 really good experiences. Met Maxine at the airport, went home and all that. Spent a

25 week back there and getting ready to go to OCS because we were only going to get a

26 week between because that's when our school started, and the plan was that when we got

27 out of—we go to OCS, and we'd have about four weeks there, or three or four weeks

28 there, and then we'd be given about a 10 day leave for Christmas. So that's why we

29 didn't get a very long leave. Now guys that were going to Vietnam got either two weeks

30 or a full 30 days before they went to Vietnam, as they left Ft. Polk. But we were

31 scheduled, and we had a duty station to go to. So we reported in there at Benning, at that

1 0700, and we were all standing in line there, and we had heard so many bad things about
2 OCS, infantry OCS, and it was going to be so tough, and no matter what we thought we
3 had gone through that was hard, this was going to be so much harder.

4 RV: Harder than Tigerland?

5 RM: Physically, oh yeah. Well, Tigerland was stressful because it was supposed
6 to be like Vietnam, but this was going to be six months. I mean, we'd been through—we
7 had been only four months in the Army, and now we're going to be six months in
8 addition to what we had just done. And so, OCS, Benning OCS was known to be really
9 tough. So we were prepared for tough, and we were prepared for a lot of harassment
10 starting in that morning. Because there was harassment at basic, but there was no
11 harassment at AIT, and we were ready to start over, so we were pretty much prepared for
12 that. So the very first morning they came out, and they said, 'Gentlemen, we have some
13 good news and some bad news. The bad news is your OCS class is not going to start
14 today. The Pentagon has made a mistake in putting your unit together, putting your
15 group together, and we will not be able to start your OCS until January the 7th.'

16 RV: And that's the bad news?

17 RM: That's the bad news. 'The good news is, since you're here at Ft. Benning,
18 home of the airborne, you all have the opportunity to go to airborne training before you
19 go to OCS.'

20 RV: Wow.

21 RM: No way in my mind was I planning on jumping out of an airplane; it wasn't
22 even anywhere on the radar screen that I would jump out of an airplane. I'd only ridden
23 on one three times (laughs)! What's this all about?

24 RV: (laughs)

25 RM: So they said, 'Now you don't have to make that decision this morning, but
26 you do have to make the decision tomorrow, and your choices are these: if you choose to
27 go to airborne school, you will have three weeks of airborne training, after which you
28 will go back to your homes, and you will be given'—I think it was like three weeks or
29 almost a month—'of leave. While you are in airborne training, we will promote you to
30 E5'—which would be the rank you would have in OCS, but our rank is only E2 or E3; I
31 was an E3. I was a PFC; I'd been promoted for some reason. So they said, 'So you will

1 make more money while you're jumping out of airplanes, and you will be given this
2 longer leave. If you choose not'—because they can't... airborne is one of the few things
3 in the Army they can't force you to do; they can't force you to be a tunnel rat, they can't
4 force you to jump out of airplane—'If you choose to not jump out of airplanes, not
5 become airborne qualified, you will be assigned to casual company. You will pull KP for
6 the OCS classes for the next five weeks, in which case you will get one week for
7 Christmas.'

8 RV: And you're thinking the airplanes are sounding better (laughs)?

9 RM: Oh, yeah. It's still something about jumping out of airplanes, a little scary.
10 'Now today, we will take you down to the airborne training place, and colonels, head of
11 the airborne brigade will talk to you, and we'll show you films. We'll do all these things
12 to show you what airborne is all about.' So we went to this whole thing, all day long,
13 going to all these different stations to learn how to do all these things and rate films of the
14 combat jumps in World War II and everything, you know? Well, that night we all talked
15 about it because we all knew each other, the 70 of us all knew each other.

16 RV: How does 70 of you sit and talk about this? Do you just—

17 RM: Oh, well no, 70 of us won't, but we went to the bar. We went to the bar, and
18 you know, different tables of people, different cliques of groups. My good friends were
19 probably seven or eight of us.

20 RV: Do you remember their names? I mean, who—

21 RM: Oh yeah, oh yeah. Bob Turner, George Cunningham, Tex Latimer. Don't
22 know Tex's first name, but his name was Tex. I knew he was from Nacogdoches.

23 RV: Tex... Tex Latimer?

24 RM: Latimer. Tex Latimer. David Snell from Greenville, Mississippi... Bob
25 L'Clair, Bob McDonald, Stuchell—Gary Stuchell, golly, these names are coming to me.
26 Yeah, terrific people, just terrific people. And all of us had the same problem: why the
27 hell would we want to do this? Every single one of us was a college graduate. We were
28 all older than the average person, and they were telling us that we were going to—they
29 were going to give us the chance to go jump out of airplanes or pull KP. And we really
30 couldn't decide what we wanted to do. So my buddy Bob Turner, who was kind of the
31 big athlete guy of the group, Bob was from Oregon, Eugene, Oregon, and he was a great

1 athlete; he may have even played some college ball. He was just—he was really a good
2 friend, kind of my idol, you might say. In fact, our wives ended up living together there
3 at Ft. Benning. Bob said, ‘I’m going. I’m doing it. I’m going to jump about of
4 airplanes.’ He said, ‘Why not?’ He said, ‘Just think of what that would give—you know,
5 what a morale boost that would be.’ And then we got to thinking, ‘Hey... if we all went,
6 how cool would that be? To be an airborne qualified, OCS company, the whole
7 company, or virtually the whole company be airborne qualified.’ None of our TAC
8 Officers probably will be airborne qualified. We would be something they aren’t, so that
9 would really be neat. So we kind of were all pretty close to making that decision that we
10 were going to go ahead and do it, and go take that long leave back home and be able to
11 get those shiny Corcoran’s and wear them home and everything. That was going to be
12 really neat. So the next morning, they called the formation, and the colonel from the
13 airborne brigade came down, and he had already talked to us the day before, and he stood
14 out there in the formation and told us all how important it was that we make the right
15 decision and everything. And then he said, ‘All right, everyone, everyone who is too
16 chicken shit to jump out of airplanes, take one step forward.’ And you look up and down
17 the line to see because he’s not asking for volunteers, he’s asking for who’s too chicken
18 shit to do.

19 RV: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

20 RM: And we look up and down the line, and out of this company of about 150, I
21 believe 10 took one step forward, and 140 of us committed to jump out of airplanes.

22 RV: Wow.

23 RM: Yeah.

24 RV: Good decision?

25 RM: Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. I just enjoyed every minute of it. I mean, not
26 every minute of it, but I really did like jumping out of airplanes, absolutely. Because it
27 was the right decision for a whole lot of reasons that followed. One is after OCS, I got
28 assigned to the 82nd Airborne Division, which I would not have been able to do had I not
29 been airborne qualified. It was a great first assignment. It was also good physically for
30 preparing us for OCS because the physical training in OCS—or in airborne—every
31 morning was to go out and do the airborne shuffle for five miles, and it’d build up our

1 legs very well. The only down side of it was airborne was very popular at that time of the
2 cycle because enlisted men were going to get 65 dollars a month more, and officers get
3 110 dollars much more, which on an officer's salary at that time, it was 25 percent more
4 because we're making 400 and you're getting 110 in addition to that for jumping out of
5 airplanes. 65 is an enlisted man against a salary probably of about, I don't know 150 or
6 something; I don't recall exactly. And then we're going to get our promotion to E5, so
7 we're going to make that money for that period of time, so that was kind of good.

8 RV: Did you talk to Maxine about this at all?

9 RM: Oh, yeah. Yeah, what happened was I called home the night that I was
10 going to make the decision the next morning, and I talked to her, and I said, 'Honey,' I
11 said, 'I'm going to—you know, sit down, you're going to be surprised at this,' but I said,
12 'I'm volunteering to jump out of airplanes.' And she said, 'Oh, no, what're you doing
13 that for? Why are you going—'. So I explained it to her, and she was fine with it. Then
14 I called my father... and told my dad... and my dad said, 'Are you sure that's wise?' He
15 said, 'You know,' he said, 'I remember when you were a boy, how you used to faint all
16 the time when you'd hit your knee,' and he said, 'You know, that's the reason that we
17 never let you play football, and that's the reason that you didn't do a lot of those rough
18 things that other boys did, is you had this sensitive knee.' And I remember one or two
19 times passing out when you hit a knee, you know, it's like a funny bone thing or
20 something. So he'd tell all these reasons why I shouldn't do it, and he said, 'You know if
21 you hit your knee going out of that plane or something, that could be really bad.'

22 RV: (laughs) I'm sorry, I don't mean to laugh.

23 RM: (laughs) This is one of several discussions my father and I would have about
24 dangerous things in life, followed by one about riding motorcycles. But anyway, we
25 talked about it, and I said, 'Well Dad, I'm going to do it anyway.' I said, 'My theory on
26 this thing is that if I end up going to Vietnam, I want to have all the training that I can
27 possibly have, and this is just one more step in that, so I'm going to do it.' So he was fine
28 with that; he wanted to point out to me that maybe there were some things that I didn't
29 know about what it was like when I was growing up or something. So... so we jumped,
30 and—

31 RV: You gotta describe the first time, what that was like mentally, emotionally—

1 RM: We were jumping, first of all because of there being so much of a need—I
2 mean, not a need, argue if there was ever a need because we don't use that as a delivery
3 system in combat very much, but there were so many men wanting to go to airborne
4 training that they were jumping every kind of plane that they could, and we jumped
5 C119s. Yeah, think about that. This is 1968, and we made four jumps out of a C119 and
6 one out of a C130.

7 RV: Why the 119?

8 RM: I don't know for sure; I assume it was because they couldn't either get
9 anything else, everything else was committed, or it may have been because of weather. I
10 don't know for sure. No one really told us, but we got—the weather got real bad. It got
11 cold, it got windy, and it was a real problem, and our jumps kept being put off in our final
12 week. You're supposed to make five jumps the last week, one each day. We ended up
13 making three on Wednesday, two on Thursday and one on Friday, and only the Friday
14 jump was a C130. The other four were all C119s.

15 RV: Explain the difference to those listening.

16 RM: Okay, a C119 is a really old aircraft; I don't even know the vintage of it, but
17 it even—it looked old then. And it was loud and noisy, and it's not—well, let's put it like
18 this: a C47 would be a luxury liner compared to a C119. A C47 is the same as a DC3
19 commercial plane. A C119, I don't even know it has an equivalent. It would be, I think
20 it's two engine, maybe four engine, and it has two pipes coming back to a tail, and it's
21 small. The stick, I'm going to guess it was the stick—that's what they called the units to
22 jumping—was probably no more than 30 men. Oh, it was noisy and loud.

23 RV: They call it the flying boxcar.

24 RM: The flying boxcar, that's a good description, yeah. And I can remember, we
25 had this one—on the fourth jump, which would be the first jump of the second day
26 because we'd done three in one day, one of the guys that I was sitting next to on the plane
27 going up said to me, 'This will be my fourth time in an airplane.' He was from
28 Kentucky, and he'd ridden to basic training on a bus, and he'd ridden to AIT on a bus.
29 He said, 'This will be my fourth time on an airplane, and I've never landed' (laughs).

30 RV: (laughs)

1 RM: Yeah, 'Fourth time I've taken off, and I've never landed,' I thought, 'Oh,
2 that's pretty cool, pretty cool.' So we made our jumps, and then we had this graduation
3 ceremony, and we were awarded our wings. We went out the night before and bought
4 these—you can only wear Corcoran boots; you're supposed to only be able to wear
5 Corcoran jump boots if you are airborne qualified. And so we got our wings, and so then
6 they said, 'Okay now,'—so we graduated, perhaps I have my days off by one or two here,
7 and it was in the week, but anyway, they said, 'Now tomorrow, you report to OCS, and
8 we will admit you, and then you'll go on leave for your long period.' So we all checked
9 in, and we all had our—we put our greens on, and we put our shiny Corcoran boots on,
10 and we had our wings, and we went and reported in, and it was terrible. OCS, first day of
11 OCS, even though it was our first and our last day because we were just going to be
12 sworn in, the TAC Officers and the military establishment there, the company
13 commander, there wasn't one airborne qualified. Company commander had never
14 jumped, none of the TAC Officers had jumped; they were all legs. And here they had
15 this company of 140 of us, 90 percent of us were airborne qualified, and we were
16 standing there looking so good in our greens and our Corcoran's and our wings. And
17 they made us take them—they sent us back to the barracks and made us take off our
18 wings, made us take off our jump boots and put on our low quarters because they said,
19 'You may be airborne qualified, but you will not be able to wear any of that while in
20 OCS.'

21 RV: Oh, wow.

22 RM: Oh, it bothered us so much, really bothered us a lot. So that's what we did,
23 and they told that we—and then you have to put your candidate stuff on because we go
24 from being, you know, just being E5s to being OCS bars and the very lowest level that
25 you can be as a first week. And so they said, 'You will not ever be able to wear this stuff
26 until you are commissioned for six months.'

27 RV: Why do you think they did that?

28 RM: I think they wanted to knock us down a peg. You're not supposed to walk
29 into OCS feeling good about yourself; you're supposed to be scared shitless. We
30 weren't. We had just done something that none of us had planned to do, and we had done
31 stuff that none of the TAC Officers had done. None of the TAC Officers had been to

1 Vietnam; the company commander was Vietnam experienced, but none of the TAC
2 Officers were. And so, they didn't have anything on us; that's the way we took it. We
3 had so much confidence going into OCS, and they didn't like that. They knew it was
4 going to be like that, and I imagine there was a battalion meeting at which they said,
5 'Hey, you know this company, this 66 OC company that's coming in here? These boys
6 think they're really hot stuff because they just went to airborne. We gotta knock them
7 down a few pegs before they go home for Christmas.' So they did; they knocked us
8 down a few pegs.

9 RV: Were you—you were pissed off?

10 RM: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah, but you know, you can't show it. So afterwards, we all
11 got—and you know, once we were dismissed for the holidays, we all went—we had our
12 duffel bags, we couldn't get out, we had to go through the orderly there, and you couldn't
13 get out dressed anyway but the way they would allow us to. And then we all took our
14 Corcoran's in our bags, and when we got to the airport, we changed back into our
15 Corcoran's because man, I was going to wear those jump boot homes. And that is the
16 one time that I remember coming home from the Army and really feeling good about
17 myself, really feeling proud because I had done something, and it made me even feel
18 maybe better about the fact that my father had said, 'Maybe you shouldn't do this.' He
19 hadn't said, 'Don't do it,' because he knew I was an adult, but I think it was my way of
20 showing him that I could do something that maybe he didn't ever expect me to. And I
21 would do a whole lot of other things in my military career that he would have never
22 expected me to, but this was one of the first. And I was proud of it; I really was.

23 RV: It sounds like that was deserved, that you all went out on this limb and did
24 this. I want to ask you two questions before we wrap up today, and this is something that
25 I'd wanted to ask you a little while back. It has to do with Tigerland, very quickly. Have
26 you seen the movie Tigerland?

27 RM: Yes, excellent movie.

28 RV: Okay, how does it compare?

29 RM: I think it's a great movie. I show it in my classes. I think the metamorphous
30 at the end of the movie, with Colin Farrell's character that's been this kind of smartass
31 for the whole film, figuring out a way to avoid service in Vietnam, you know he's

1 smarter than all of the people training him and everything. And then all of a sudden at
2 Tigerland, we see the cadre that has served in Vietnam saying to him, 'All I'm trying to
3 do is keep you alive, and you don't get it. All this action, all these things you're doing
4 that are funny and make you feel good about yourself, none of that's going to be
5 important in a few weeks when you're in Vietnam. You better start paying attention.'
6 And you see—and there's no political statement, the guys aren't arguing whether we
7 should be there or not. He's questioned some of the atrocious behavior that he seems
8 them trying to teach and all that, and the guy says, 'You can forget all of that. That's not
9 important once you're there. What's important once you're there is staying alive and
10 keeping your men alive.' And you see this, almost this little look on Colin Farrell's,
11 'Yeah, I guess I may have hadn't been paying attention for seven weeks.' And he has
12 this change. I think that's a very good statement about what it was like for soldiers going
13 to Vietnam, that no matter what your political beliefs were, no matter whether you
14 thought the war was a good idea or a bad idea. At this point, it's survival; at this point,
15 it's about figuring out ways to learn in this next week of Tigerland training, learn enough
16 to where that will help you when you get there. So I thought they did a good job with
17 that. I thought the other thing that's good about the film is it really does hammer home
18 what I was saying earlier about the role of the African-American NCO in the training. A
19 lot of white guys owe their survival to being trained by African-American NCOs in basic
20 and AIT. I still believe that, and I always try to put that into my lectures, in addition to
21 you get through that whole thing about racism, and everybody knows that early in the
22 war, a lot of black guys died, a greater percentage of the population than should they
23 should have and all that stuff. But I said, 'I don't want you to forget this, that a lot of
24 black guys saved a lot of white guys lives because they were so effective when they re-
25 upped, and they stayed in to teach the skills that they had learned because as a
26 percentage, that was higher than the white percentage also.'

27 RV: Okay. I would like for you to describe your first jump out of an airplane, and
28 the reason why I want you to kind of think back what you were feeling, what you saw
29 literally and that whole process is because I think often times when those of us who are
30 on this side are asking these questions about jump school and learning, you know
31 airborne training to be describe, 9 times out of 10, those narrating almost skip through

1 that part like it's second nature. It's no big deal because you've done it, you've mastered
2 it, and you've gone forward, and plus it's been quite a long time ago.

3 RM: Right.

4 RV: But those listening to this and including myself, to personalize this, it's hard
5 to imagine what that might be like and how you deal with that individually. And I know
6 that probably is personality dependent, but I think it's relevant to have on record some
7 description of what that's like, and especially for people listening to this in the near future
8 who might be going through the exact same thing, but also those listening in the distant
9 future who want to know what it was like. How were American soldiers trained in
10 airborne tactics, and what was the mentality in the 1960s in the middle of the 20th century
11 in America's longest war? What happened? So, if you don't mind, could you kind of
12 think back about that day and what happened to you and what you went through?

13 RM: Well, as I mentioned, we kept getting our jump put off by weather. The
14 training up to the jump itself consisted of jumping out of 34-foot stationary towers. And
15 then we made either one or two jumps off of what they call the 250-foot tower. You can
16 see pictures at Ft. Benning, a lot of us see these towers. That in some ways was the
17 scariest thing we ever did because they haul you up as you're hanging, you've got your
18 chute on, and they haul you up. And then they drop you, and there's a very significant
19 feeling of dropping because you're hauled up and then you come straight down; there's
20 no prop blast or anything, it's just a straight fall. And there's this NCO screaming at you
21 to make sure that you handle your risers correctly to keep from blowing into the tower.
22 You actually have a fear that if you don't do it right, you will be blown back into the
23 tower. So this NCO is screaming obscenities at you—

24 RV: From the ground?

25 RM: From the—well, no, he's actually about halfway up.

26 RV: Okay.

27 RM: He's probably at the hundred foot level, so he's sort of midway where you're
28 going to fall and where you have been taken from.

29 RV: Isn't he—didn't they tell you—

30 RM: It was on a loudspeaker.

31 RV: Oh, okay. Did they tell you that beforehand?

1 RM: Oh, absolutely, but it's more fun to scream at you when you're in the air.
2 And they scream at you, and the one thing I did know is I went back to Ft. Benning a
3 couple years ago to—when I was doing my dissertation research, and I was on my
4 motorcycle, and I parked underneath the tower, and I watched and listened, and boy have
5 they cleaned it up. Of course now 50 percent of the classes are women, and they've got a
6 whole different attitude. I didn't hear one cuss word, not one cuss word.

7 RV: Really?

8 RM: Course it's being broadcast over the whole, over the whole fort, you could
9 hear it.

10 RV: But was it the same thing?

11 RM: Oh, yeah, exact same thing. Nothing's change, even the parachute's no
12 different. It's still a T10 parachute, yeah.

13 RV: What were they saying to you all?

14 RM: Well, they tell you as they bring you up, you know, 'Remember that when
15 you're dropped, you've got to remember that your rear risers, your front risers, your right,
16 your left. You've got to remember where the wind's coming from; right now we have a
17 windsock up there, and you'll see that the windsock is blowing this direction. Make sure
18 that if you're being pulled into the tower, that you use your left'—you know, just that
19 kind of stuff. But then when they drop you, it's just scream, scream, scream, and I
20 remember it just being scary as it could be. That part, really scary. Almost to the point
21 of I thought, 'Jumping out of an airplane'll be easier than this because there's no tower to
22 blow into.' So when I went into the aircraft when I was going to make my first jump, I
23 had bad memories of the tower.

24 RV: You did okay with the tower jumps?

25 RM: Yeah, I did okay, but it was scary. It really was. They screamed and yelled
26 at me, I remember that. I don't remember exactly how personal that got, but I know it
27 was. I think we had a couple of the guys blow into the tower. Nobody got hurt but got a
28 little close to it, you know? So—

29 RV: Did you pack your own chute?

30 RM: No, no, you have someone pack it. There is a parachute packing MOS.

31 RV: Right.

1 RM: So I remember going to the first jump and being scared but not all that
2 scared because it kept getting put off. Finally, they said, 'Today's the today; we're going
3 to make the jump, nine o' clock in the morning make the first jump.' And the company's
4 were so big in OCS, that they had to start feeding us—we would start our training at
5 seven in the morning, and the first chow line was at three (laughs).

6 RV: Wow.

7 RM: You could literally go eat and go home and go back to sleep for three hours.
8 Didn't have anything else to do until seven, but you eat at three. It was just wild. But it
9 was also kind of relaxed—that was the neat thing about airborne training, I remember is
10 that there was no rank in airborne training. If you were a major, you slept in the barracks
11 with the privates, and if you were—and they would drop down and give me ten if you
12 were a major or if you were a private, it was the same thing. And there was a lot of—
13 there were several field-grade officers, we had I remember in my unit, we had a chaplain,
14 he was a captain. He was a chaplain; he was a pretty neat guy. So you got older men,
15 you know guys that were way up in their 40s and stuff like that you know, that were in
16 the thing with us. But I do remember that, eating at really early in the morning, and then
17 being hungry all day and having to go eat Honey Buns whenever you could get them and
18 all that kind of stuff. So I do remember, though, I do remember the first jump, and I was
19 not in the front of the stick; I was probably somewhere in the middle of the stick. As
20 opposed to later jumps that I would make because when I was in the 82nd Airborne
21 Division, I was pathfinder platoon leader for our overseas exercises, so I always got to be
22 the first one out of the plane. And I made two other jumps with the 82nd where I was the
23 first one out of the plane, which is just as cool as it can get because you get to stand in the
24 door. Long time until the green light goes on. So, but I do remember that... I do
25 remember that I was in the middle of the stick, and it was matter of—and the funny thing
26 is, I've watched *Band of Brothers*, and it hadn't changed from World War II. Check
27 equipment, you know, stand up, hook up, check equipment, and you check the man's
28 equipment in front of you, and the man behind you checks your equipment, make sure
29 nothing's tangled, make sure that your static line comes out and that it's hooked properly
30 at the top and that you've put your cotter pin through it, so that everything is proper that
31 way. Then sound off, and you count off, '1, 2, 3, 4,' so everybody's saying that you have

1 checked all your stuff and that you're ready to jump. And like I say, it's the same
2 instructions that they're doing—they were doing them at least in '68—or '69—'68, yeah.
3 I assume they're still doing it the same way today when they jump. I mean, I'm sure
4 they're not jumping 119 anymore. And then the command goes out, 'Stand in the door,'
5 and the first person in the stick will literally walk—shuffle—to the edge, and you don't
6 walk, you shuffle, and place your hands on the side of the aircraft and stand there and
7 look at the green light and wait for the red light to turn green.

8 RV: And the light's down by your hand level?

9 RM: It's right here.

10 RV: And you're pointing kind of to your watch, on your left wrist.

11 RM: Yes, yes, you're looking out, and it's right there, and you're watching. And
12 then there's a Jumpmaster standing right behind you, and as soon as the green light goes
13 on, he'll slam ya on the helmet, and that's your signal to go, even though the green light
14 is also the signal.

15 RV: What if you hesitate?

16 RM: Wow, I have no idea if you're the first guy out. If you hesitate and you're in
17 the rear, the Jumpmaster will pull you back, so I would assume if you were to hesitate as
18 the first man out the door, they would pull you off. Because you have to keep the jump
19 going because you have only a limited amount of time over that drop zone.

20 RV: Right, right.

21 RM: So I would assume that—I never took Jumpmaster training. A lot of my
22 friends did, but I never became Jumpmaster qualified, but I assume there's an instruction
23 on what you would do, whether it's to cut the static cord and pull you back or exactly
24 what it is, I don't know. And then it's just a matter of going out as fast as you can, and
25 you are immediately hit as you go out the door. On every plane except a jet—now when
26 you jump a jet, like a C141, which is what we jumped when we went to my NATO
27 exercises, on every a plane except a jet, you feel tremendous prop blast. You don't even
28 have a sense of falling. You come out of the aircraft, you push off, and you come out,
29 and this wind (makes wind noise), just like that, and it blows your body sideways.

30 RV: Is it a circular wind or like just a gust—

1 RM: It's a gust of wind. It's like, I don't even know how you would describe.
2 Maybe like opening the door of a car at 90 miles an hour or something, you know (makes
3 wind noise), just like that. And your body goes like this, it goes sideways from the wind.
4 And you're blown in that direction, and you never have a sense of falling until your chute
5 opens because of that wind.

6 RV: Really?

7 RM: Yeah, there's no sense of falling... except when you jump a 141. On a 141,
8 because of the speed of the plane, you have a wind shield that stands out like this if
9 you're going in this direction, and it's blocking the wind. So when you jump out of a jet,
10 a C141—I've never jumped a C5A, but I'm sure it's the same kind of thing—when you
11 jump out, you do have a sense of falling because there is sort of a vacuum that's created,
12 and you come out, and you fall. In a sense, the adrenaline rush is greater that way. And I
13 also jumped Huey's, and the Huey is the greatest jump of all. Now you were jumping the
14 C119, we're jumping them at probably 13, 12 to 1300 feet; it's a low level thing. When
15 you jump a C141, I think you're jumping 1500. When you jump a helicopter, you jump
16 2000. When you jump a helicopter, you're sitting down, just like I'm sitting exactly like
17 now, and you have your feet like this. This Jumpmaster is standing behind you, and the
18 chopper takes you out over the drop zone, and you're sitting with your hands like this,
19 and there's no green light or anything.

20 RV: And your hands are, just to describe you, you're on the edge of the couch and
21 your hands are just on the edge of the couch as well, beside your legs.

22 RM: You've hooked up to the static line overhead. The drop zone—I mean the
23 Jumpmaster's standing behind you, and when he gets words from the chopper pilot there
24 over the drop zone—I don't recall that there was even a light on the choppers. I made a
25 bunch of drops on a chopper with the 82nd, but I don't remember the light situation.
26 Anyway, he will slam you on the helmet, and you push yourself right off, just like this.
27 And what a sensation of falling because you're hovering (makes wind noise). Straight
28 down. It's the neatest. It's the best jump that you'll do. Now I never got a chance to
29 freefall. I never did that; I tried to do it one time, and it didn't work out in a sport
30 situation. So I don't know that feeling of freefalling, which I still want to do someday.
31 I'm young enough to still want to do that, I guess; I will do that someday. But I loved it,

1 loved everything about it. Jumping was—after the first jump, I couldn't wait until the
2 second jump.

3 RV: Really?

4 RM: Yeah.

5 RV: Now when that prop wash first hit you, what were you feeling that first time?
6 Were you like, 'Oh, my God, this is not what they were describing,' or 'This is
7 exactly'—

8 RM: No, I'll tell you what I remember is once the prop wash was gone, was
9 over—and that lasted about two seconds—the idea, what happens is you jump, and then
10 you start counting, '1000, 2000, 3000, 4000,' and at 5000, you look up, check, make sure
11 your chute is open, that there's not a Mae West situation where you have a riser going
12 over your canopy.

13 RV: Why do they call it a Mae West situation?

14 RM: Because it looks like a brassiere.

15 RV: Okay.

16 RM: And so you—and if it's open, then you're fine. If it's not, if you have a Mae
17 West or if your chute hasn't opened somehow, then you reach down and pull your
18 reserve, and you only have four more seconds to get your reserve deployed without
19 having to worry about, you know, a malfunction and a disaster.

20 RV: Did you ever have anybody in your—

21 RM: Saw one, saw one. That was later though, that was with the 82nd Airborne
22 Division, the St. Mere Eglise drop zone at Ft. Bragg, we had a guy's shoot never open,
23 and he crashed and burned as we say.

24 RV: He died?

25 RM: Yeah, yeah, oh, yeah. It was a pretty bad situation. That's the only time I
26 ever I saw a real bad—saw lots of guys break legs and stuff when we jumped into Turkey
27 one time; that comes later with the 82nd. Anyway, it's a... what I noticed the most on the
28 jump was the tremendous peace and quiet. The plane's gone, and you are all by yourself.

29 RV: How spread out are you?

30 RM: Well, the C119s, as I recall had really small sticks, either 30 or 60, I don't
31 remember as opposed to like 90, 120 in the larger planes. So you're spread out, because

1 you know, the time and everything getting out. So you see guys over here and over here,
2 and people are making noise and stuff, but not much. And as you get more experienced,
3 you just enjoy the solitude, the quietness so much. Same thing, later in the 82nd I would
4 make night jumps, and they were just the neatness thing in the world, to jump at night
5 because not only is it quiet, but you can see out over the horizon—I say night, we jumped
6 at like eight o'clock, nine o'clock, right after, and you'd just look out, and it'd be so
7 peaceful and quiet. That's what I noticed—for about five minutes, you are in your own
8 world, you're in charge of your own destiny, you can move whichever direction you feel
9 that you want to do with your risers. And it's so peaceful and quiet, just really, really a
10 neat feeling. I loved, I just absolutely loved it.

11 RV: And you took to it?

12 RM: Oh, yeah, yeah. So when I got my orders for 82nd lay around, I was like,
13 'Whoa, I get to do this again.' And I wouldn't make any more jumps between the time I
14 made my fifth jump and the time that I was sent to the 82nd was all OCS, and we didn't
15 jump at all. So when I got my orders for the 82nd, I didn't even look beyond like—I
16 mean, I knew Ft. Bragg, but I thought, 'Whoa, I'm going to get to do this again,' and I
17 did, a lot. It was really neat. I loved it, loved every minute of it.

18 RV: Okay. So we've got you going to OCS is where we are. You're going to go
19 home for five weeks and go through, I guess December of '68?

20 RM: I think our class started about January 7th of '69, and I could go home, get
21 my wife and a U-Haul trailer and haul a bunch of stuff down there and set her up at the
22 Camellia Apartments.

23 RV: And this is at Benning?

24 RM: At Ft. Benning. It's in Columbus, Georgia, the Camellia Apartments, off-
25 post. And become a member of the 4th platoon of the 66 OCS Company.

26 RV: Okay, why don't we stop today and pick up there next time?