Stephen Maxner: This is Steve Maxner conducting an interview with Mr. Earl Hobbs accompanied by Kim Sawyer. We are in the Preston Smith room in the Special Collection Library on the 16th of January 2000 [actually 2001] at approximately five minutes until 2:00. This interview is part of the Lubbock area Vietnam Veterans Oral History Project. Mr. Hobbs, why don’t you begin by telling us where you were born, when and where you were born and where you grew up.

Earl Hobbs: My birth date is the first day of June 1941 and I’d start with a joke, but I’m not sure whether I was born in Fort Worth or whether it was in Dallas. My parents adopted me as baby, a very small baby and we understand from the birth certificate that I was born in Dallas, but the adoption apparently took place in Fort Worth and so there were some confusion there at one point. We’re not sure. I think it was Dallas. What was the rest of the question?

SM: Where did you grow up?

EH: I grew up in Lubbock. My mother and dad moved from Littlefield to New Deal where he bought a cotton gin. And we lived there. We moved from Littlefield to New Deal and then in 1946 we moved into Lubbock, 3305 24th Street, which at that time was the last paved street south.

SM: What did your mother do?
EH: My mother, she was a homemaker. That’s the old fashioned term. She was a schoolteacher before she got married and she was pretty well educated. She had a degree from Texas Tech and studied at – gosh, I’ve forgotten- some place in Chicago. I can’t think of the name of it. Moody Institute, I believe, in Chicago if I’m not mistaken. Then she taught school, but she was basically a homemaker all of her [married] life.

SM: Did you father go to school at all, to college?

EH: My father graduated from Tech at about the same time as my mother. I’m not sure what year. Roughly, 1934, ’35, in that time frame.

SM: What did your parents major in? Do you recall?

EH: My mother was liberal arts of some kind and my father had a Bachelor of Science in I don’t know. I just don’t know .

SM: When you moved to Lubbock, did he stay in the same profession or what did he do here?

EH: Yeah. He was a cotton ginner. Well, he was the Principal of schools in Littlefield and then they got married. He was managing a cotton gin and also running a meat locker plant in Littlefield, I guess in addition to working for the schools. I’m not sure about that. Then he bought the gin at New Deal with his brother and subsequently bought out his brother, out of business and he operated that gin all his life. He also had…not all of his life, all of his working career. He retired in ’64, ’65 and he also had an interest in Service Compress and Warehouse here in Lubbock which is now part of Lov-Cot. He had several other businesses. He had farm properties and he had some other, just general investments here in town.

SM: Do you recall if it was a very competitive business?


SM: Were there co-ops at that time?

EH: Yeah.

SM: So he was competing with those.

EH: Yes, he was competing directly with co-ops and in fact, the reason he got out of the ginning business and retired from it was because one day a bunch of his customers that had been his customers came in and sat down in the gin office and said, ‘Earl, if you don’t sell out to us we’re going to build a gin right straight across the road from you.’ So
he said, ‘I’ll sell.’ He named his price and they made it and so he got out of the ginning business. He stayed in the compress business with some other men. Old names around Lubbock that had been in the compress business for years. And he stayed in business with them for a long time. My dad passed away in August of ’81. I kind of took over what business he had at that time and continued that until we just finished it up this past year, finished dissolving everything out and closing up the trust and that sort thing.

SM: Did it remain a competitive industry?
EH: The cotton business?
SM: Yeah, everything you were involved with, the press?
EH: Yeah. Pretty much so. The compress business, we got out of that when Service Compress and Warehouse sold to, the corporation was sold to Lov-Cot, which is from Lovington, New Mexico and they had compress through the area here. That’s a very competitive business to be in. They sold that and started, say about 1997, I maybe missing a year or so there, plus or minus a couple of years, but approximately. I’ve forgotten exactly, but it hasn’t been all that long. A few years.

SM: Did you have any brothers or sisters?
EH: I had one sister. She’s two years younger than I am. She’s married, lives in Tyler, TX. Actually, just southwest of Tyler in a tiny little place called Noonday.
SM: Was she adopted also?
EH: They’re famous for their onions at Noonday.
SM: Oh, Noonday [?].
EH: No, she’s my mother and father’s child.
SM: Okay. How old were you when she was born?
EH: Two.
SM: What types of activities did you engage in as a young boy and a young teenager growing up in Lubbock?
EH: Well, I guess the typical things here. I’ve never been the athletic type although, you have to compete in sports a little bit. I played a little football and that sort of thing, but not anything significant. My dad always saw to it that I worked at the gin in the summer time and even during the ginning season in the winter; he would occasionally say, I need you to work the night shift. When I was in junior high and high school, I’ve
driven a tractor all night long, pulling trailers. He saw to it that I learned how to work at an early age.

SM: How old were you when you started that?
EH: Probably in the range of 14, 15, I guess. I continued that up through, at least through High School.

SM: Did you get paid?
EH: We lived pretty well. We lived pretty well. He didn’t pay me as such, although I got plenty of money. I got a lot of spending money. We were affluent. Not wealthy, but comfortable, very comfortable. I was very fortunate in that regard.

SM: How old were you when you got your first car?
EH: About a junior in high school I guess.

SM: Was it common for juniors around Lubbock to have cars or was that kind of an exception.
EH: I don’t think it was the exception at all. I think a lot of us did. There were two high schools at that time, Lubbock High School and Monterey were the only two. Monterey was a brand new school and I think Monterey was a little bit more the upscale school. The funny part about it is, I went to Monterey, my sister went to Lubbock High School because they changed the boundary. The year that I was a sophomore, they changed the boundary and I thought I was going to have to go to Lubbock High School when I was a junior, but they didn’t. I stayed in Monterey but my sister went to Lubbock High School. I think the direct answer to your question about the car is, probably more kids at Monterey had cars than at Lubbock High School, but I don’t think that it was unusual for a kid to have a car at all. It was just very common. As far as extracurricular activities growing up, I played in the orchestra. I played viola. I started playing in the Lubbock Symphony when I was in junior high, really my last year in junior high and played in Lubbock Symphony all through high school and college. And I worked for the conductor. Bill [Wm. A.] Harrod at that time was the conductor for the Lubbock Symphony and I worked in his music store when I was at Tech. That’s what I did.

SM: Now, when you were working for your dad doing the cotton gin work, were there a lot of accidents? Some of the problems with ginning, even now, is hands and things getting caught in the gin and things of that nature. Were those still problems then?
EH: Yeah. Ginning is a dangerous game. It’s dangerous because there is an awful lot of exposed machinery and just as an example, the cotton gin stand, where the cotton comes down on a bat into the gin stand and goes through the ginning process where the seed is extracted from the lint, really, more properly, the lint’s extracted from the seed, but there are a lot of saws that are running through ribs. A saw comes through and runs through this rib. And it’s very easy, as an example, just as an example, to get you fingers or hand caught in there. My dad lost his small finger and thumb in a ginning accident. They used to use, very common- I learned how to do this as a kid. I mean I just grew up doing it. It was just the thing. I mean, that’s what I did. We used to use a stick about this long, about maybe 18 inches long and a little piece of one inch wide, ¼ of an inch thick and that’s what you cleaned out what you called a ‘dog’ inside a gin stand which was cotton that had become balled up on the inside of the stand. His accident was from just exactly that sort of thing. Some people would make a mistake and try to clean out a dog with a piece of wire rather than a stick. A soft pine stick will just be cut by the saws, but a wire is caught and it can yank off fingers and things like that. You learn not to wear a ring around a gin. There’s an awful lot of exposed belts and all kinds of dangerous equipment, but I grew up around it and he taught me what to do and what not to do. And you also picked it up just by watching other people, just like anything else. It’s a type of work.

SM: With certain hazards that are not necessarily common.

EH: There are hazards. That’s right. Farming is very dangerous.

SM: Did you farm or did your family farm other land?

EH: He had farms. I grew up in the cotton, I just grew up in the cotton business. He was a ginner, but he had farms and I grew up. If it had to do with cotton, well, he had to do with it. I knew the business pretty well many years ago.

SM: Did you farm anything else besides cotton?

EH: No. Well, you nearly always grow a little grain.

SM: What kind of grain?

EH: Grain sorghums. Maize, that sort of thing.

SM: How about just vegetables and stuff?

EH: No. Gardens. That’s about it. Just a family type garden.
SM: Small gardens. Did your sister help with those types of activities?
EH: No. She was more, I guess more like my mother. She was not too interested
in the farms and that sort of thing. I think she was pretty typical for her generation, kind
of like I was typical for mine. I was not a very good student in school, terrible student in
school. My sister always made good grades and she’s smarter than I am, just basically.
Sometimes you’ve got to be truthful. She’s smarter than I am.

SM: What was your favorite subject in school?
EH: I don’t know. That’s a hard question to answer.
SM: Was is music?
EH: I liked music, very much. I enjoyed music. I studied architecture at Tech, but
I can’t say that I had any major things that I was particularly interested in. I started when
I was probably, I guess a freshman in college, I started learning how to fly. That would
have been 1959 or ’60. I’ve kind of forgotten now and got a pilot’s license, got a
commercial pilot license and an instrument rating and instructor’s rating and multiengine
and all that kind of stuff. And I guess that’s where I sort of drifted away from school,
which I didn’t have a great interest in to begin with. So then my interest gravitated in that
direction.

SM: You enrolled in Tech immediately after graduating from high school?
EH: Yes. It’s the usual thing when you’re a kid. You get out of high school [and
they say], ‘What are you going to do now?’ ‘Well, I’m going to go to college.’
SM: What year was that?
EH: I graduated in May of ’59 from Monterey.
SM: Some interesting international events occurred when you were in high school
and as you were growing up. You might not have been old enough to remember the
success of the communist revolution in China.
EH: Yeah, I do as a matter of fact.
SM: You do? What do you remember about that?
EH: Well, of course I was real young because we’re talking 1949 roughly and I
guess the long march was in what, ’47, ’48?
SM: Yes.
EH: I remember reading about it. I was interested in it. And of course, I was always brought up to believe that communism was this huge massive, monolithic thing that was terrible and was going for world dominance, which I suppose in a way it was. And so I saw it from the perspective of the kid in West Texas as being a very bad thing. I remember the Korean War that started in late ’50 and went through what, ’52, ’53 something like that. I’ve forgotten now. So that was a big event. Yeah. I’ve answered your question. There are a lot of things from that era that I remember. Yeah, I remember. You have pictures in your mind. I have pictures in my mind of people like Stalin and Churchill. When you’re that tall, you know what I’m saying, there are things that stick with you for the rest of your life. Yeah, I remember things like that. Sure.

SM: Was an awareness and interest in current events something that your parents cultivated in you?

EH: I think so. My mother and father were not political people in the sense that they didn’t actively participate in politics. Although, my dad, I think made some political contributions to friends and things like that. As an example, we’re sitting in the Preston Smith room, Preston Smith, I understand, was his roommate in college. [I think so.]

SM: Okay.

EH: I find that interesting.

SM: Yes.

EH: And I noticed down there when we were talking in the waiting room, that Marshall Formby, that this pavilion was, well he was a friend of my dad’s in college. I knew Marshall from up in the Panhandle for years as a kid, a friend of my dad’s. They were not political people, but they kept us- I was aware of what was going on because I think my mother an father, I think, were aware of what was going on. We didn’t talk politics, we didn’t talk current events, but I think it was just something that we were aware of as a family. Like I said, they were pretty well educated people. I don’t consider myself to be uneducated just because I don’t have a degree, but they were well educated, well informed and it rubbed off on my sister and on me too.

SM: Other significant events that occurred in the ‘50s. Of course, there was the Hungarian Uprising.

EH: Yes.
SM: When these types of things occurred, major international events, did they become topics of discussion in your family?

EH: Yes, they did as a matter of fact and the Hungarian Uprising was kind of an interesting thing. My grandfather on my mother’s side, his name was R.C. Hopping. He was a rather prominent judge here in West Texas. He had been a, kind of a very self educated man and he’d become an attorney and a lot of different things and became a judge. When the depression hit, he went to work for an outfit called the Elwood Estates, which you may or may not be familiar with. I think they’re still in existence. One of their objectives was to finance the maintenance of a lot of these large ranches out in this area, the Spade Ranch, the Bell Ranch and places like that. And if they had to be broken up, the Ellwood, they wanted to be the people that broke them up so that they could try to keep as much of this land in tact as possible. My grandfather was a very prominent man and when the Hungarian Revolution broke out, was it ’58 or ’59?

SM: I think it was like I said earlier.

EH: ’59 I guess. That doesn’t quite sound right to me, but anyway.

SM: I think ’57.

EH: ’57. It might have been. Anyway, he and my grandmother, they lived on the northwest side of Lubbock at that time, between Lubbock and Shallowater. And they brought some Hungarian refugees here. A man and his wife and I am under the impression some other people. They sponsored them. This man’s name was Efee. I remember that was what we called him and he had, of course obviously, a Hungarian last name which I don’t remember at all and I was, again, a kid. And they brought these people there and they lived there for quit a long period of time. Anyway, I’m reaching back and I hope I’ve got my chronology correct, but that’s about right.

SM: That’s an interesting story. Did anybody else bring over Hungarian refugees that you know of?

EH: I don’t know.

SM: It sounds like a pretty unique experience for this part of the country.

EH: I think, maybe, my aunt and uncle who lived out there at that time may have. I may be getting my chronology wrong, but I think that’s the time frame I’m thinking about. I know that these people were Hungarian and I believe that they came over here as
a result of that. But I keep thinking that they may have come as early as maybe ’55. So it might have been before the revolution. But I know that the Hungarian Revolution made a big impact, not a big impact, but I remember it because of these people that were with my grandmother and grandfather at the time. Perhaps they came over before the revolution. But, yeah.

SM: Of course, one of the biggest events, late ’50s was the launching of Sputnik. How was that covered here in Lubbock and what do you recall about that event?

EH: Well, it was a big news story. I don’t remember too much about it to tell you the truth. I remember it was a big news story and I remember you’d see on the television at that time was not, I don’t remember how many channels Lubbock had. Probably three basic networks was about what it had at the time. I remember seeing these pictures of this funny looking thing circling the earth and I thought it was kind of humorous, but I don’t think it made that big of an impact because as a kid, I think we sort of expected that to occur at sometime. After all, the U.S. was already working toward that very slowly. I think, it was the Vanguard Project, was that before or after Sputnik? But it seems to me that Vanguard was about that time frame. Some of these projects were already started, but they just weren’t spun up and rolling along real fast. So, yeah. It had an impact, but out here in West Texas, well, that didn’t make too much, not too much of a splash. Probably the preacher’s mentioned it in church.

SM: Speaking of sermons, how about the concern over nuclear Armageddon. Was that something talked about? Fear of atomic war?

EH: You know, I think people here were not- it was not a major concern. If you go around older Lubbock, you’ll find very few bomb shelters. Whereas, and I think in some larger cities and big cities especially and you might find a lot of them, but here in Lubbock, it never was a thing. It just wasn’t much. I only know of one family that, if I remember correctly, built a bomb shelter. I think that’s the only one. I think they built it more as a cellar for storage. It wasn’t a big thing. People, I think, in those days, I don’t believe there was the hysteria, quote, unquote that you read about. I think there was concern. But we weren’t near any major installations. Reese Air Force Base was just a training base. Webb Air Force Base in Big Spring was a training base. The nearest nukes to us were Amarillo. They had B-36’s maybe or B-47s maybe at the time and then Fort
Worth, they had Carswell Air Force Base which was B-36s. You’re too young to know what a B-36 was, but those were. I just don’t think there was that feeling of panic or hysteria or that sort of thing. I’ve always seen pictures of this duck and cover routine and I don’t have any recollection of that at all. I sort of know, I know what it was, but we never had any drills that I recall or anything of that nature.

SM: How about tornado drills?

EH: No. I don’t think so. I’ve seen a lot of black clouds come over Lubbock and I don’t ever recall that. In school, in high school, pardon me, junior high, grade school, junior high, we had the usual fire drills, you know which I guess took the place also of tornado drills. I don’t know except of course you wouldn’t run outside. The answer is, no, I don’t think so. No.

SM: Kim, did you have any questions before we press on?

KS: Not at this time.

EH: Typical West Texas childhood.

SM: Interesting. You had moved away from school and gone into piloting.

EH: Well, I hadn’t moved away. I was here in Lubbock.

SM: Well, but I mean as your interest had shifted, you were initially in school working on an architecture degree and eventually you stopped going to school and pursued piloting full time. And you worked for a company.

EH: WestTex Aircraft.

SM: WestTex Aircraft.

EH: Which was at that time, it was the Piper dealer and wholesaler. Piper Aircraft dealer an wholesaler for, well really for all of this area stretching from the Big Bend all the way up into southwestern Kansas really. Big outfit. The operator’s name was Roy Neil. A big name in aviation out in this part of the country.

SM: At what point, or how old were you when you got your pilot’s license? What year was that?

EH: Well, I got my private license probably in ’60. I’d have to go back and look at my book, my logbooks if I can find them. But I probably got my private license in ’60, 1960 and within a year I had a commercial rating, commercial license and then I got an instrument rating not too long after that and instructor rating and multiengine. They kind
of follow like that. WestTex was pretty good about giving me some flying time. I would
ferry airplanes for them here and there and that would build up some time and then when
I got eligible, when I became eligible to have the time and that sort of thing and the
qualifications for the next rating, well, I’d go out and get that. So they came along pretty
quickly over that period of time frame. I had most of my licenses by the end of ’64 I’m
sure.

SM: What were you initially trained on? What was your first airplane?
EH: First airplane. Piper Colt, which is called a PA-22 108 which had a 4-cylinder
Lycoming engine, fix pitch prop. It’s a little tri-pacer type airplane except it doesn’t have
the rear seat in it. A neat little airplane. Kind of weak out in this altitude out here in the
summer time, but it’s a good airplane, a good trainer. I learned to fly in a Colt. We flew
Piper Cherokees, we flew Comanches. We flew, when I got my multiengine rating, I was
flying twin Comanches, Apaches, Aztecs, that sort of thing. Later on I flew some other
larger airplanes.

SM: Correct me if I’m wrong. Most of these are tricycle gear aircraft.
EH: Yeah. Most of them. I flew some conventional airplanes too. Crop dusters. I
did a little crop dusting at one time. And flew things like Super Cubs, the usual
Luscombs and Taylorcraft and all that kind of stuff. Super Cubs were real common back
in those days. I flew a Pawnee which is crop duster. I flew a Stearman which is crop
duster. PT-17 I think is the military designation of a Stearman. I even flew a twin Beech
at one time. An interesting little airplane. A Beech model 18 which had two Pratt and
Whitney radial engines on it and it was a tail wheel type airplane, conventional gear
airplane. It was a bear to fly. You flew it until you got the chocks under the wheels. You
stood there kind of shaking until you got the chocks under the wheels and then you could
calm down. At least it was that way for me.

SM: Did you also get your turbo prop rating?
EH: I’ve flown some turbo prop aircraft. Beech King Airs, Piper Cheyennes. I
have flown a 727. I have an airline transport license. I have flown those airplanes. I’m not
typed in them. There’s no reason to be. It takes a tremendous amount of money to get
typed in an airplane like that. When I say type, I mean type certificate, but I’ve flown
those airplanes.
SM: Because you have to rack up a certain amount of hours flying those aircraft.
EH: Yeah. Well, that and you have a check ride that you have to take and it’s just very expensive and there’s no reason to have a type rating in an airplane if you’re not going to fly that airplane.
SM: Do you still fly?
EH: No, I haven’t flown in years.
SM: When did you stop?
EH: Oh, I guess the last time I flew an airplane was back in ’85. I just haven’t had any real desire. It’s another one of those things that I like to do but money enters into it and a lot of other things enter into it and I’m just not really interested in flying. I would fly. You want to go fly?
SM: Well, one of the reasons I’m asking questions about your flight experience, as I was reading your responses to your questionnaire, I was surprised that you did not pursue either OCS or Warrant Officer training so you could fly in the Army as you enlisted for a three year tour. So I guess this is an appropriate segue into Vietnam and what was going on in Southeast Asia. Of course, the Cold War was heating up throughout the ‘50s and early ‘60s. A couple of other important events that we haven’t discussed yet, the Bay of Pigs invasion in Cuba and then the Cuban Missile Crisis.
EH: I remember them well.
SM: What do you recall of those events?
EH: Well, of course, Bay of Pigs happened under Kennedy’s watch. But I think it was really planned during Eisenhower’s administration if I’m not mistaken. My impression, at least the stories I’ve always gotten is that Kennedy just failed to give the support. He just failed to follow through. Whether that’s true or not, that’s what I’ve always been told. What was the other?
SM: Do you remember yourself anything specific about how it was covered in the press here in Lubbock or what your impressions of the time were?
EH: No. I can’t say that I do. No. The *Avalanche-Journal* in those days, to the degree that I don’t know what it is today, but at that time, the *Avalanche-Journal* was a fairly conservative newspaper although I don’t think they used that term. I don’t think anybody. Conservative and Liberal were different terms than what they mean today, I
suppose. But it was a conservative paper at that time, to the best of my memory. And I
don’t think that there was anything, I think it was more or less like factual reporting. I
don’t remember reading editorials so I can’t tell you what the actual feeling was. I think
most people here felt like it was unfortunate that that happened, but if it did happen, we
had our chance at Castro and we should have gotten him. I think that was the feeling that
I remember. I don’t know whether I’m right or wrong, but that’s just the way I remember
it.

SM: How about later in October ’62 with the Cuban Missile Crisis?

EH: I remember that pretty well. You know, I don’t think it made a huge
impression on me. I think the people that lived more proximate to the area had a much
better feel for it. Again, West Texas, and you’ve got to remember we’re talking 40 years
ago, essentially. Things have changed a lot since then. Those things did not have the
impact, the immediacy that we feel for that sort of thing today because of outfits like
CNN and that sort I guess.

SM: But what about the television coverage of the Missile Crisis?

EH: Coverage, I don’t remember a lot about it. I don’t think I watched television a
lot back in those days. I really don’t even remember. I guess, Huntley Brinkley, were
they on? I don’t remember. I just can’t tell you.

SM: Were there any particular programs, television programs that you watched as
you grew up?

EH: In the ‘60s?

SM: Or 50’s.

EH: Oh, I remember a lot of programs that I enjoyed as a kid watching.

Everybody remember Gunsmoke. There was a whole series of Westerns. I remember
Have Gun, Will Travel. My gosh, I’ve forgotten about some of these. And Gunsmoke of
course and what was the one that Steve McQueen was in. He did one for a while. Oh, the
usual things. I never was too much for, who was the redheaded comedienne, the girl,
woman, ‘I Love Lucy’ Lucille Ball.

SM: Oh, Lucille Ball, yeah.

EH: She was big back in those days. I didn’t care that much. I don’t know. I don’t
think I watched T.V. a lot. I think it was on a lot but I don’t think I watched it a lot. We
got television late in our family. They had several channels here before we ever even got
a television set in the house, I think so. Now I watch T.V. a lot. I’m getting to be old.
SM: Well, at what point, it was 1965 you made the decision to enlist. What did
you know about what was happening in Southeast Asia before you enlisted? Do you
remember?
EH: I knew that if I enlisted or if I didn’t enlist, I would be, I would probably go
there. There was about a 90% chance that I would. My enlistment was kind of trying to
make the best of a bad situation. I had quit school so I didn’t have a student deferment
and I was working so I was prime meat. I remember you asked, why didn’t you go for
OCS or Warrant Officer School. Why I didn’t go for OCS, I can’t give you a hard answer
to that one. I wanted to do the Warrant Officer, the Army Warrant Officer Program for
helicopters, but just for the record, because this tape can’t show it, I’m wearing glasses
that are probably a half inch thick and they weren’t any thinner back in those days, so my
vision is what kept me out of flying for the Army. I can add parenthetically right now that
once you’re in the Army, they don’t care what your vision is, they’ll take you, but by that
time you’ve got a longer commitment and once you’re in the Army you don’t want a
longer commitment.
SM: Why’s that? (laughing)
EH: So I had a couple of friends at the time that we were in pretty much the same
situation, two or three of us. We went down and discussed either whether to just allow
ourselves to be drafted. I already had my draft notice; or whether we would join up and
try to get the school or whatever MOS that we wanted. I envisioned myself carrying a
rifle through rice paddies and I didn’t think that was too desirable, so I enlisted in
Helicopter Mechanic school which gave me an extra year but at least I was getting the
school I wanted to get which, being a pilot, being a mechanic is pretty useful. That didn’t
really worry me too much. I was young and stupid anyway. So I went ahead and enlisted.
Then later, after I was in the Army I found out that I could go ahead, after I’d been in for
about six months, I found out that they would take me for the Warrant Officer program.
But, I would have been in about four and a half to five years total time as opposed to
about two and a half that I had to go at that time. So I thought, ‘No, I’ll pass on that.’ I
just never did and that’s the answer to that question. It sounds simple right now, but
you’ve got a lot of things that you’re trying to weigh as a kid. I say kid, I was 24. If I remember I enlisted in December of ’65 so I was 24 years old. So I was a little older than the average. Most of them in those days were 19, 20.

SM: Do you remember when the Tonkin Gulf incidence occurred in ’64?
EH: Yeah, I do.
SM: What do you recall of it?
EH: That was ’64 wasn’t it?
SM: Yes. Do you recall anything specific?
EH: No. I just remember the alleged, quote alleged in a sense, I think in a sense there had been a lot of as to whether or not- it was the Maddox and the Turner, Turner Joy- whether they were really being attacked or not. I don’t really know. The story that we heard here in West Texas was that the Maddox and the Turner Joy had been attacked and they had returned fire. Essentially, that’s what it was. Then Johnson came in with his Tonkin Gulf Resolution which Congress passed and I guess that was the open door to the War. I wasn’t politically, like I said, I wasn’t too politically oriented, but in ’64 it was the first campaign, political campaign that I did anything in. They always said if you vote for Goldwater you’ll be in a war, and I did, and I was. I guess that was the result of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution.

SM: What did you think the United States was trying to accomplish? At the time, as a young man, did you have any idea of what we were doing in Southeast Asia?
EH: Well, I had, I think the conventional view which was that we had treaty obligations with the Vietnamese. At least that’s what I understood. I can’t give you any documentation. I can tell you what I understood - that we had treaty obligations with the Vietnamese and with other countries over there that number one, we’re upholding. Second, there’s this Domino Theory that was very big at the time and Vietnam was considered to be one of those dominoes just like when it originated during the Korean War, I suppose. I suppose that’s when that first started coming up. And I thought that besides those two things, I thought that we probably were, the government, whether right or wrong, was trying to do the right thing with regard to the Vietnamese. I guess history will tell on that. But I think that was the impression that I had at the time. Kind of the
general feeling. And then too, I knew I was going to go. I had about a 90% probability
that I was going to go. I really didn’t know what it was all about. I mean, I really didn’t.
SM: Were you raised to think that participation was a patriotic duty?
EH: Yeah. I was raised that this is my country and I have a responsibility to do
what’s expected of me, at least up to a certain point. And if were going to be drafted,
well, I was going to do what I had to do and so forth and so on. And I willingly signed
the enlistment paper. I knew what I was signing when I signed it. It said, ‘you’re going to
be a private in the United States Army.’ I said, ‘Okay.’ I knew what I was signing. Yeah,
sure.
SM: What did your family think when you went and told them that you had
enlisted or that you were considering to enlist?
EH: Well, it was understood that I was going to be drafted, so it was just a
question of the additional year. Two years as opposed to three. I think that my father, he
said to me one time that if he had known that I was thinking about enlisting, he probably
would have gotten in touch with George Mahon, who was the Congressman at that time.
My dad knew George and he knew some of these people. He said, ‘I might very well
have been able to get you into one of the schools, or get you in where you could get a
commission or maybe into warrant school or something like that.’ I said, ‘Well, the
damage is already done.’ He, I think though, was pretty much glad that I went in. In the
first place, he wasn’t in World War II. He wasn’t in the military in World War II because
he had lost these two fingers and also because he was in a, what they called in those days,
kind of a critical job. That is, certain agriculture and that sort of thing. You had to have a
certain number of farmers to produce the food and the fiber and all this other kind of
stuff. And he was married and had two small kids. Or not in ’41, no. Pardon me. I was
born in ’41 and the War started in ’41. But anyway, he had a deferment of some sort that
he never went in the military. He also had flat feet. My dad was a very good physical
specimen, I want to tell you. He was a strong man, but he did have certain deficiencies.
He had flat feet and he had two missing fingers and I think he had a plate. I know he had
a plate.
SM: Where?
EH: His uh…

EH: A dental plate. I don’t know. All of these things conspired to keep him from being in the military. I think when I went in, I think secretly, he said this exactly although he did later on, that he was kind of glad that I went ahead and went in. Because I had had cousins that were in World War II. Older cousins that were in World War II- much older cousins by the way. So I think he was kind of glad that I went in.

SM: Did he ever talk about the World War II experiences with you?

EH: No. My cousins?

SM: Or any of your relatives.

EH: No. Not really. I had one cousin that was in Europe during the War as a, he was a ball turret gunner on B-17s if I’m not mistaken. I had another cousin that was in Europe as a Signal Corps Officer of some sort. More staff work. He stayed in the Army for many years and retired from the Army. I had another cousin that was in the Adjutant General Corps during Korea if I’m not mistaken. So I had some cousins that were in the military and most of these were on my mother’s side, not on my father’s side. I had one cousin that’s my age that went into the Air Force a little after I did. He stayed and he was in four years enlisted in the Air Force. So, there’s not a strong tradition. I think it’s just a pretty much typical military service.

SM: When you were contemplating joining the Army, did you consider the other services, the Air Force, Marine Corps, Navy?

EH: I considered the Marine Corps for about 30 seconds. Yeah. I did. I don’t know the Army was just, that’s just where I seemed to want to be. I wanted to be in helicopters. Somehow or other I wanted to have something to do with flying and helicopters appeal to me and I’m not mechanically inclined. I’m not a mechanic but somehow or another that kind of appealed to me and I thought well, and I can learn something there and I can learn to be an aircraft mechanic. Because I know factually at that time, you could come out of the Army with a mechanic with being a mechanic in the Army and the FAA made certain accommodations to get your aircraft and power plant mechanic license. And I thought as a pilot, that would be very valuable to me if I have an A&P also. It just kind of makes you like a triple threat type. I thought that will be good. So I picked the Army deliberately. I didn’t give too much consideration to the Air Force
because I think the enlistment was four years. I considered the Marines and I dropped
them real quick because I had two friends that had gone into the Marines and neither one
liked it. The Navy never really appealed to me. I had a cousin that was in the Navy for
quit a period of time. He was a good man. It didn’t ruin him.

SM: Okay. Well, you enlisted, you left, went to basic training. Why don’t you go
ahead and describe leaving and where you went for basic training?

EH: Well, let’s see. I went to basic training at Fort Polk, Louisiana in the winter,
which, believe me, is the time to go through basic training in Louisiana. It’s wet but at
least it’s not hot. Right at the end of basic training I, damaged my right foot; split the nail
on the big toe right down the middle. Shoom! Just like that and it swelled up about that
big. After graduation in basic training I got held over there for a few weeks and then I
went to Fort Rucker, Alabama for mechanic school. Actually, tool mechanic school. One
of them is basically a toolbox holder [carrier]. You kind of learn, ‘this is a wrench. This is
a big hammer. Don’t use hammers on airplanes…’ that sort of thing. Then the next one
was, they call it Single Engine, Single Rotor Turbine Helicopter Mechanic or Crew Chief
School. There, they teach you a little bit more in depth. Some of the stuff, I already knew
having been around airplanes for a long period of time. But, it was actually not a bad
school. Then I got out of there and was sent to Vietnam.

SM: Did you know that was going to happen?

EH: Yeah. You know you’re going. It becomes more and more obvious every day
on a day-to-day basis. You know you’re going.

SM: What was the hardest thing about basic training other than injuring yourself?

EH: Well, that was an accident. If I hadn’t kicked something, it wouldn’t happen.
And I don’t even remember what it was, but I split that nail. Well, I’m not a competitive
person. I say that. Sports don’t mean a lot to me. When I grew up, I didn’t play baseball. I
didn’t play football except what I had to. You know, you play a little football in college, I
mean in high school and things like that. But, I’m not a competitive sports oriented type
person and I’m not a driven type person from a sports standpoint. It’s not that I don’t
have an appreciation of it, it’s just not something that I have ever liked. So basic training
for me, was pretty hard. I didn’t really know how to throw a ball very well, so that makes
throwing a grenade difficult. Although, in shooting, I did real well because I grew up
shooting a rifle out here in West Texas. A rifle is a rifle is a rifle. The military discipline end of it, that’s just a matter of attitude. But I was not physically. I just wasn’t, I’m not a great physical specimen. I never have been. So I had a little trouble in basic training just with the physicality of it- doing the physical things- the running and the jumping and all that kind of stuff. Oh, I was pretty good at doing low crawl in the mud. I could do that pretty good. Anyway, that was probably the hardest part of it was the physical part of it. And I got through it. You get through it. You do the things that you have to do. Then later on, and you learn to run. You know how it is.

SM: You mentioned a lot of rifle experience before going in the Army. I take it you hunted quite a bit.

EH: We used to hunt and I’m not a great hunter. Don’t misunderstand. But out in this part of the country, you learn to hunt.

SM: What did you hunt?

EH: Oh, small game. Bird shooting and rabbits and that sort of thing. I have hunted deer and things like that.

SM: How about javelina?

EH: I never have shot javelina. I never had. I had the opportunity a couple of times. In fact, I went down in the woods one time down in South Texas in the mesquite brush down in that part of the country and heard some javelinas going snort, snort like that and I thought, ‘I’m getting out of here.’ Because I wasn’t sure that I could see them in time so I left. Thank you very much.

SM: In basic training, any blanket parties, shower parties, anything like that?

EH: You know, you always hear about those things but he answer is no. I don’t know of any of that. It just didn’t happen. Not in my unit. How long is basic training. Is it 12 or 16 weeks? I’ve forgotten which it is. 12 weeks I think or maybe it’s only 8 or 9.

SM: It varied but it was about between 12 and 16.

EH: In that time frame, we actually, from what I remember, basic training, we had a pretty good group, pretty good basic training company. I just don’t recall any of that. There were some people I think who had a great deal of difficulty adapting and that sort of thing. And I’m not saying I didn’t have my share of it just because of the physical training. But no. I can’t tell you that I do.
SM: What’s the harshest form of discipline you witnessed in basic training?

EH: Witnessed or experienced? I guess really, they are one in the same.

SM: Well you could have witnessed a trainee take it behind the building.

EH: Yeah. I know what you're getting at. No. I never saw anything like that. I never saw any physical discipline. I never saw a sergeant grab a kid out, take him behind and the kid comes out black and blue. I never saw anything like that. In fact, really, I think that our drill sergeants were pretty good considering what they're working with and what their level of experience is and their training. I didn’t have any complaint in that regard. I may have at the time, but I’m talking about in retrospect. I became a low crawl expert because, well, like I said, I wasn’t physically prepared to do a lot of these things. I got that way real quick. I came out a whole lot better than what I went in. But, I think that was the worst punishment, was making the whole platoon stand out there while I went through the low crawl about four or five times because I didn’t get through the run, dodge, and jump or whatever it was in the prerequisite amount of time or whatever it was. I don’t remember too much in the way of punishment. There was enough incentive to get you mentally up to go through. I just don’t remember that.

SM: Were there many invocations of Vietnam? ‘You pay attention. This will save your life in Vietnam, that type of thing’?

EH: Yeah there was. There was basic training, there was a lot of that and in any other school that you went through. You always heard that. ‘You need to know this because…’ And that was very common. But you got to remember, basic training was in ’66, starting in the last couple of days in December ’65. Vietnam was still new. There were not an awful lot of people who had already been there. So, the cadre that had already been there were really very few out of a cadre of say 8 or 9 instructors say in mechanic school. Maybe one or two of them had had some limited experience. Yeah. Things were already filtering down. These are things that you need to know. And in basic training it was kind of the same way. There were not an awful lot of people that had already been there, so they didn’t have a lot of information to impart. But some of these people, in ’65 were still there held over from making a career of the Army and they had been in Korea. Well, that’s not the same place but these were combat veterans. Some of them were and some of them were very good at imparting their skills to you. These were
things that you need to know. And in some cases they weren’t. There were a lot of guys
that were just there pulling their time and as little of it as they could and they were gone.
So, I think it’s a mix. Just remember that Vietnam was relatively new. People hadn’t
filtered back through the system to come back in and teach.

SM: Were there many references to the Vietnamese themselves in terms of calling
them the Viet Cong or how did they refer to the Vietnamese enemy?
EH: I don’t know. I don’t remember. I think you heard the whole string of varied
names. The Viet Cong, you didn’t hear the two words Viet Cong very much. You’d hear
VC, Charlie, that sort of thing. The indigenous personnel were referred to. You’d hear all
kinds of names, but nothing that stands out. No. I can’t say that.

SM: [?]
EH: No. That’s alright, I’m just trying to think. No. I really can’t say that.
SM: The instructors that did have Vietnam experience, do you recall any
particular lessons that they tried to invoke based on their Vietnam experience? Is there
anything that sticks out in your mind even to this day?
EH: Well, I kind of remember one sergeant, one drill sergeant that had been to
Vietnam. I think he had been in some kind of an advisor group or something and that’s
about all they had up until ’65 or so. He very frequently would say, ‘Now this is the way
we do it here, but that’s not the way it’s really done.’ Then he would say, ‘You don’t
want to step in that hole because there might be a punji stick in that hole.’ I kind of
remember that sort of thing from this guy. For instance, you might be on a range or
something and you were supposed to run and jump in a hole and fire your rifle just as an
example and he would say, ‘Well, that’s the way we do it here.’ He says, ‘You’re not
going to do it over there.’ And he would tell you why. He said, ‘There could be a trip
wire.’ He said, ‘Very typically, if it’s an inviting hole, it’s got a trip wire on it.’ There are
a lot of things and of course these were small things. They were things that I guess, in the
moment made an impression on you but I don’t know whether you remember them later
on. I don’t know. In mechanic school and in Crew Chief School, you learned all of the
basic things that the Army wanted you to know about how your aircraft worked and what
you needed to do, how you replaced this black box and what you did with that piece of
machinery and so forth and so on, on a transmission or whatever the case might be. But,
there were also some instructors that taught you the shortcuts. ‘This is the down and dirty way to get this thing back in operation.’ Things like that. One of the lessons that I remember was packing what’s called the short shaft which was the shaft that connects the engine to the transmission on a helicopter. It’s a shaft that is a flexible shaft. It’s turning at a very high RPM and it’s got constant velocity joints on both ends of it. And because it’s sitting, it’s mounted in the helicopter like this but this is turning at this speed, so it has to, it’s constantly in a mesh situation. Well, it has to be taken apart periodically and repacked, put back together.

SM: Packed with grease.

EH: Grease. There is the correct way to do it and then there’s the down and dirty way to get the aircraft flying in a hurry. Little things like that that you would learn. These are things that you would do in the field and then when you had the time, you’d pull it out and do it correctly. But if you had to get the aircraft flying. Things of that nature. That’s just one of the things that comes to mind immediately. So, yeah, there was some of that.

Yes.

SM: How about the use of 100 mile an hour tape?

EH: Duct tape was not real common back in those days to tell you the truth. Not really. Just didn’t see it very much. I learned how to patch using, you know. I learned the old way of learning how to patch aluminum; to rivet on a patch and things like that. I learned those and I already knew some of that before I went in because I had done a little bit of it on airplanes out in the field, just as a matter of practical experience I knew how to do that. But, I’ve heard of 100 mile an hour tape. It wasn’t used. Not that I know of. I heard rumors that you could put duct tape; as long as you counter weighted it properly, put the same amount of both blades, that you could do it on a helicopter. But I’ve never seen it done. I have no knowledge of it but I heard that you could.

SM: Alright, Kim. Do you have any questions you would like to ask at this point?

KS: Yeah. What kind of helicopters were you trained on [?] mechanic?

EH: Would you like me just to walk you through what I remember of mechanic school?

KS: Sure.

SM: Absolutely.
EH: Okay. The first school as I said, was kind of a toolbox carrier school. Literally, ‘this is a wrench.’ Because some people come in not knowing anything and that’s very simple. The next school is a little bit more complicated where they actually teach you a great deal, and I thought, very effectively in a short period of time, teach you about first, what it takes to maintain an aircraft and secondly, some specifics in the way of maintenance and then relating it directly to particular aircraft. So that was sort of a building block process. I knew quite a bit about general aircraft maintenance because as a pilot, you kind of become familiar with some of these things. If you want to, you can usually go out to a shop some place and walk around and find and learn a lot, which I did. I had always kind of, I’m not a mechanic, but I kind of wanted to know about some things. The more specific thing about aircraft maintenance itself, they would teach you things like how to adjust the valves on a reciprocating engine, which were going out at that time, but the Army still had them. Or how to time the – oh, I can’t even think of the word anymore- the magnetos on an aircraft engine. Those seem like outdated things, but in those days, the Army still had aircraft that had those things on them. In fact, we had some aircraft that had exactly that sort of thing in Vietnam. Then the aircraft you were most interested in learning about was the UH-1, the Huey, what everybody calls Huey, which is not really the Huey. It’s the Iroquois. The UH-1 aircraft was fairly new to the inventory at that time. It was just beginning to come into the inventory as a common item and it was unique in the sense that it was among the first of the military aircraft to have turbine power engines. So it had turbine engines. They didn’t teach a lot about the engines, but they taught you a lot about what to look for trouble in the engines and how to maintain them. They weren’t interested in you being able to take the darn thing apart and put it back together. But they were interested in you being able to recognize what the problem areas might be. Things like being able to recognize problem areas in the transmission. If you’re familiar with helicopters, the engine drives the transmission, the transmission is what turns the rotor blades. So you needed to be able to understand transmissions. Helicopters are very, very mechanical devices. They do not fly naturally. Airplane pilots can become, they’re kind of complacent guys. They’re easy going and happy go lucky, but helicopter pilots, they’re a nervous breed because they know that something is going to happen, it’s just a question of when. So you kind of had to develop
a feel. You needed to know what the problem areas were. I think they were more
interested in saying, ‘This is the way this thing works. This is what it is hands on. Okay,
now, this is what can go wrong and this is what you need to look for. And in the
meantime, we’ll teach you how to adjust the pitch change links, how to adjust the rotor
blades and things of that nature. So you learned some very practical things that you
needed to do to get vibrations out and that kind of stuff and be able to change a radio out
and move the battery from one place to the next place and all that kind of stuff, which
sounds simple, but it’s not really. And you also learned a lot about what to look for so
that you could then go to somebody in maintenance and say, ‘I’ve got a problem with my
aircraft.’ Does that make sense? Specific to your question, the aircraft that I learned the
most about was the UH-1 which is good because that’s what I was on. I also learned a lot
about H-13s which were an older type airplane, a Bell airplane, a Bell helicopter that was
a reciprocating engine driven. I learned a lot about those and to a lesser degree, a much
lesser degree about some of the big helicopters like, at that time, a CH-37 Cheyenne
which was a monster. Don’t ask me even how it flew. Then, later on, the CH-47, the
Chinook. There were a lot of derivatives of these aircraft. But specific to my training, it
was single engine, single rotor, turbine powered helicopter and there was only one and
that’s the Huey.

KS: Did you ever have any of the company’s representatives come out and train
or give specific lectures?

EH: No. Not that I recall. I don’t have any of that. But there was, I do remember
this- there were Bell representatives (Bell was the builder of the helicopters). I believe
it’s Bell. Huey’s a Bell isn’t it? Gosh, time flies. There were Bell people at Fort Rucker
all the time. But you got to remember Fort Rucker was the Army’s pilot training base
also. Fort Walters for primary and then they took the advanced training at Fort Rucker.
So there would have been naturally. Did we have any interaction with those people? No. I
don’t ever recall meeting. I remember seeing Bell stuff- trailers marked Bell and also
Boeing. Boeing Vertol which makes the CH-47 and stuff like that, but I remember seeing
those trailers and people with cars and stuff that had those. But we didn’t have any
interaction with them. You’ve got to remember, I was way down. I was at the bottom of
the pile looking up and those guys were way up here at the top of the pile.
SM: Did you see any Bell field representatives in Vietnam?
EH: I may have, but I don’t have any… I may have, but I don’t recall it. We had some civilians that came through the troop a couple of times having something to do with helicopters but I don’t recall specifically. Nice to have met you. [Kim Sawyer leaves.]
KS: Thank you.
SM: So you find out you’re going to Vietnam. Was it something your parents talked with you about?
EH: No. I think everybody just…this was the way it was going to be. No. We didn’t have any. I don’t think we had any specific conversations about that. I had specific conversations about that with my girlfriend, but with my parents, no. I think everybody just kind of understood that’s the way it was going to be.
SM: Now, this is the girlfriend that became your fiancé in Germany who you visited?
EH: Yeah. She and I, we got to know each other here at Tech. And very, very, she’s extremely intelligent, very good person. The long and the short of it is that we were engaged but she knew the military was something I was going to have to get out of the way before we were going to get married or anything else. You just had to do that. We couldn’t see any future with me being in the Army and that sort of thing. So, she was more interested in staying in school, so she stayed in school and I went in the Army. And she knew that I was going to Vietnam and we talked about it quit a bit. Probably I talked to her more about it - not probably - a whole lot more with her than I did my mom and dad.
SM: Do you recall what you talked about?
EH: What we talked about? No. Not specifically. I can’t tell you that I do, Steve. I really can’t
SM: Why don’t you go ahead then and describe what it was like leaving the United States and arriving in Vietnam?
EH: Real strange. Kind of scary. When I got out of school at Fort Rucker, I was given leave again. I’d had leave out of basic training before I went to Fort Rucker. Then, I was given leave and I was given orders to report to- and I think it was probably two or three weeks leave, something like that. Then I went to, I was told to report to the Oakland
Army Base, I believe they called it at the time. I’m not sure. Which was the processing, the outgoing processing center. I went through Los Angeles and flew up to Oakland and caught the bus out to the- they had buses and everything; it was all pretty well organized-out to Oakland. They did some processing there. They took away all of your gear, left you with a uniform and a couple of changes of underwear. Odds and ends like that. They didn’t issue you anything really. Went to and hung around there, literally hung around there for probably 24 to 36 hours, in that range. They had all the enlisted people in one big building, a big hangar type building and they had all the officers over in another building and identical. Looked just the same. And kept us there for, like I said, 24 to 36 hours, put us on a bus and took us over to- I’ve forgotten what Air Force base it is right there close to Oakland- and shipped us out. It was a charter flight. I believe it was a Pan-American charter flight. We flew from Oakland or from San Francisco to Anchorage. Anchorage to someplace in Japan. We had a little layover in both places for a refueling type layovers. The one in Japan was a little longer than that. It was a few hours. I think something was wrong with the aircraft, something like that. Then we got back on the aircraft and had a very, very scary flight for me because being a pilot, I knew a little bit about what was going on. A very scary flight from Tokyo or Yokota Air Force Base. I think. Isn’t that Yokota? Down to Tan Son Nhut. That was a scary flight for me because it had a lot of weather and it was really bad thunderstorm type weather. That was a very scary, just physical scary. I’m not a good passenger. Got off the plane at Tan Son Nhut and I’ve told this story a thousand times, but I’ll tell it to you. I got off the airplane. I had to go to the bathroom so bad I could hardly stand it. I mean, I had to take a leak. It was terrible. Believe it or not, they made us go through Vietnamese customs. You actually had to go through customs. I mean, you’re going to go fight a war in their country and they're having you go through Customs. Anyway, everybody’s standing in line, we go through Customs. I’ve got to go to the bathroom bad. Somebody said, ‘That’s it over there.’ So I went in there and here is this fairly large room, probably this sized room and there’s a gray slate wall here and a gray slate wall over there. Mamason is hunkered down over here, mamason is hunkered down over there and you’re supposed to pee against that gray slate wall, or there are holes in the floor, Asian type toilets, which I became quite used to. I just thought, well, here I am from West Texas, I think I’ll just
wait a year. But, it didn’t work quite that way. You got more used to it as time went by. I
guess that was the introduction. They then ran us out to buses. I say ran us out. They herd
everybody out to these big buses. They were school busy type affairs painted OD with a
heavy screen, very heavy screens over, wrapped around all the windows in the bus and
sandbags on the floor. I guess they were serious about it because they had an armed guard
on the bus saying, ‘It has happened. We don’t think it will happen, but it has been known
to happen that a grenade gets thrown at the bus.’ They took us in convoys of buses out to
Long Binh Junction or LBJ, which was the replacement depot, which is a terrible,
terrible, terrible place. The food was bad. Latrines were bad. Sleeping was bad. It was a
terrible, terrible, terrible place. Officers and EM all running around not knowing what
was going on. They’d have formations of officers over here, EM over there. They’d call
out names and all this other fun stuff. That’s the first time I stood guard duty in Vietnam
was at LBJ. If you volunteered for guard duty, you didn’t have to do anything else. So I
did guard duty at night. I think we were there two nights, go there one evening, was there
the whole day, and if I’m not mistaken, that night, the next morning we shipped out. They
ran us again the bus routine, ran us back to Tan Son Nhut or some place, took a C-130 up
to, I want to say Cam Ranh Bay. I’m not sure. It’s kind of vague. From Cam Ranh Bay,
we flew in a Caribou up to An Khe. At that point, we knew we were going to the 1st Cav.
Everybody in this bunch was going to the 1st Cav. So then we got off the plane, off the
Caribou at An Khe. We really hadn’t had a change in uniform or anything else for, I’d
say this is like the forth or fifth day now going on. At least the fourth day. Got off the
airplane at An Khe. They herd everybody in to tents and we all kind of waited. There was
this kind of a long waiting process. It seems, in retrospect, like a long time. And I
remember, I talked to a couple of friends that were there with me at the time and we all
remember this real well. He, this specialist, I think he was a Spec 4 maybe a Spec 5, came
out and he says, ‘Well, I’m going to get the bad news over with first.’ He said, ‘The
following people are going to the 1st Squadron of the 9th Cav.’ Well, we had no idea. That
didn’t mean anything to me. You could hear people going, ‘Oh, my God!’ They started
calling off names and called off my name and as you called off your name you were
supposed go outside and form up in formation. From the little airfield, we went inside the
what I think was called Camp Radcliff, I believe An Khe, the 1st Cav’s camp there at An
Khe was called Camp Radcliff. That’s from memory. I'm not sure. Went in there and they
started dropping people off at the various sites. If you were in this unit, you got to that
site and dropped several of us off at 1st Squadron of the 9th Cav. I was now at my unit and
how I got assigned to that unit, I have no idea. I don’t understand. I don’t know the
dynamics of it. I don’t know how the selection process was or anything else. I’m
assuming it was strictly random. Got there and I really can’t tell you too much about it. It
was on the side of a hill. It was the headquarters of the squadron but the squadron itself
was out in the field. All four troops of the squadron at that time were out in the field.
They were always out in the field. They were never at where the cav was located, but
there was a headquarters cadre that was there. There was a first sergeant or sergeant
major who was overall in charge and there were some supply sergeants and various clerks
and all this other kind of stuff and they line us up and said, ‘Okay, you’re going to A
troop. You’re going to B troop. You’re going to C troop.’ And so forth and so on. That
sort of thing. We were sent over to supply. They issued us things like weapons and this is
like the earlier to the middle part of the afternoon, if memory serves. They issued
weapons, jungle fatigues and assorted personal items to you and flight helmets to those of
us that were crewmembers. The usual things that you were supposed to get. Not all of it
because some of that was in short supply. A few things. Anyway, then we were on our
own. Then they mentioned something like ‘Well, you’ll be here for a while because
you’ve got to do some in country training.’ Well a friend of mine and I, a fellow named
Gil Ouellette. He is from Massachusetts. We walked down to the flight line. We had
always heard of the golf course. The golf course at Vietnam - have you ever heard of the
term ‘golf course’? The golf course at Camp Radcliff was where all of the helicopter
landing pads were and it’s called the golf course because it sort of looked like greens with
putting greens and fairways and stuff. So we walked down there and we both just amazed
because here’s this great big huge open field, great big huge thing. All these landing
helicopter pads and everything else and you could walk to a conex or little bunker and
open up the door and there was all kinds of ammunition and grenades and all this other
kind of stuff. And we were just, ‘Wow.’ In training, all this stuff is issued to you one at a
time like this and what you didn’t use, you gave back by counting it out back to them.
Here were thousands of rounds of ammunition and rockets and grenades and you could
pick them up and handle them and do anything you wanted to with them. So we loaded up. Anyway, literally, I remember that. And we went back. The next morning, they said, ‘Well, we’re not going to have any time for training. You're going to back out into the field. You’re not going to go back. You're going out to the field.’ So that afternoon, middle of the afternoon, helicopter came in from B Troop and there were probably, I think maybe three or four of us that were new crew chiefs and we all jumped on the aircraft and went out in the field. That was the first time that I’d ever been on a helicopter ever. My first helicopter flight. The next morning, I crewed the helicopter into combat.

SM: You never received a test flight or a sample flight in training?
EH: Uh-uh.
SM: Never been on a helicopter. Wow. And you were crew chief.
EH: And the next morning, I went out and counted the rotor blades, divided by two and it all came out even and got on the aircraft and we went down.

SM: Now was that a field rep training technique? A couple of questions stepping back. You mentioned getting processed through Oakland and doing whatever processing the Army needed you to do before leaving. Did any of that include getting your personal affairs in order?
EH: Yes, it did.
SM: Like bills, power of attorneys and things like that?
EH: Yeah. It did. It was all just formalities to me because I didn’t have anything. Do you know what I’m saying? But yeah. They had a lot of things like that - making sure you had the insurance that you wanted to get that was whatever was available to you. Make sure you had the opportunity to get that. Making sure that – I think there was a power of attorney that you signed for somebody back home to be able to take care of. I don’t remember at all what all it was. But yes. There were also things like medical records that were checked and personnel records that were checked and a whole bunch of other stuff. It was a processing that you went through. I think some people were getting shots. I didn’t get any shots but there were some people that were getting shots. Because they had a shot line. Remember those guns. Yeah, there was a lot of that going on. There was the stuff about you personal affairs. I remember there was ‘do you own a car?’ That was one of the questions. Do you own a car? Yes or no. Where is it? Do you have a title
to it? Things like that. Yeah, there was a lot of that stuff going on. Exactly. But by that
time, you had been through coming into the Army, you went through that. You went
through basic training and there an awful lot of that. And every now and then, you get
marched through a line so you don’t think too much about. Yes. The answer to your
question in short is yes.

SM: It didn’t feel a little bit different in that, here you are, basically doing what
you need to do in the event that you die.

EH: In the event that you die. Yes. I think that is in the back. I started to say, in
the back of your mind. It’s probably right up there in the front of your mind. Yes. But I
don’t think people were making a big deal out of it because you’re young and you're
immortal. Indeed, the real impact of it doesn’t hit you.

SM: What did you discuss with the fellow soldiers that you sat with on the plane,(passengers on the flights over?)

EH: On the flight over, believe it or not, I was sitting next to, I think it was a
major. I think this guy was a major and I don’t think he was real interested in talking. I
think I said sir to him a few times. I don’t mean by that that he was unfriendly. I didn’t
have anything. I had no commonality with him. I didn’t know him. He was substantially
out of my pay grade and I just didn’t have anything to say to him. I think he was pleasant
to me and I was pleasant to him, but I don’t recall. I tried to sleep as much as possible
which is kind of my technique on an airplane anyway. Be quiet and still or sleep. I don’t
remember too much about that. I remember the flight from Japan down to Tan Son Nhut
as being a real white-knuckle flight for me because the weather was awful. Then we
made a very, very steep approach into Tan Son Nhut. I mean, he pulled a power back and
it was real interesting. It was a 707 and it was the tightest approach I’ve ever seen in my
life and I’ve made some tight approaches before. He brought the airplane in from high
altitude. It was interesting. I remember that flight quite well. I really do.

SM: He did that for?

EH: I am assuming he did it so as not to get shot at. I don’t know that. I have no
knowledge of that. Again, that was in September of ’66 and I don’t know whether, I don’t
know what the air warfare potentiality of the Vietnamese were at that time. I don’t have
any idea. But I do remember it was a very steep approach. It was a high overhead circling
type approach. He’d pull the power up and we made about three or four turns around like
this coming down. I mean, I watched. You could see the same point on the ground all the
time. So it was very interesting. He made about three or four turns like this, came out,
made a base leg and landed. I mean, it was real quick.

SM: So when you arrived in B Troop, 1st of the 9th, and actually let me go back.
From the time you arrived in Vietnam to the time you arrived at B Troop and as you
described it, you went on a helicopter ride one day and were crew chiefing the next. What
kind of briefings did you receive about what you should or shouldn’t do in Vietnam,
interacting with the Vietnamese people, that kind of stuff?

EH: None. That’s always been interesting. That’s a very interesting question,
Steve and the answer that I give you is, essentially, none. We talked earlier about basic
training. What did you learn that would apply to Vietnam? Same thing in mechanic
school. But as far as interacting with the Vietnamese people or having anything to do
with them or what to do socially or non socially, etc. None. I don’t recall any training in
that regard. No briefings. Not anything of that nature. I have no memory of it whatsoever.

SM: How about booklets or pamphlets or something outlining Vietnamese
customs and things of that nature?

EH: There may have been some. I don’t remember them. I don’t have any copies
of them. I don’t have nothing that I can tell you about that. I just don’t remember
anything like that. So my answer has to be, I don’t think I ever saw anything.

SM: Were you ever given any instructions on things that you weren’t allowed to
do like prostitutes, things of that nature?

EH: Well there were the usual cautions that the Army- you get the usual old
training film syndrome. But I never saw any of those what people laugh at about those
old training films. I never saw any of those that I recall. I probably did. They probably
just went in here and out there. But, not much in the way of orientation in that direction at
all. Nothing about don’t deal with the whores or don’t do this or don’t do that. There
were some word of mouth things that came down. Things that you should not do but it
came down more or less word of mouth. People would say, ‘Well, I’ve been told that’
Which is hearsay. But I don’t recall any information with regard to dealing with the
Vietnamese people on any level. In truth, the entire year I was there, I had very little
dealings, directly with Vietnamese people or Montagnards either. I found the
Montagnards to be a lot better people than the Vietnamese myself.

SM: Did you eventually work at all with ARVN units?
EH: Yeah.
SM: South Vietnamese military units?
EH: A few times. A few times. I didn’t find them to be particularly well trained or
trustworthy. Now, I may have gotten some of my feelings about that from other people. I
may have sort of picked that up, some of that by osmosis. But I know this - the few times
we would carry them into landing zones and stuff like that, you practically had to kick
them off the aircraft?
SM: Why?
EH: Because they weren’t going to get off. I know factually, I know for an
absolute fact, that one crew chief on one of my sister aircrafts, same unit, pulled a gun on
a Vietnamese Lieutenant and forced him off the aircraft and that’s the only way they
could get that aircraft unloaded. I know that for an absolute fact. That’s the only way they
got those people off that aircraft. He literally had to pull his pistol out and point it at that
Vietnamese head and said, ‘Get you ass off this aircraft.’ That’s the way that that aircraft
unloaded. He wasn’t going to go otherwise. And knowing this guy, he probably would
have shot him, too.
SM: Were these hot LZs?
EH: No. If they had been hot, he wouldn’t have been on there that long.
SM: Did you as a crew chief ever fly the Vietnamese into a hot LZ?
EH: Hot LZs come in a lot of different…Hot LZ is sort of what you want to make
out of it. I think we probably flew some Vietnamese into LZs where we were drawing
fire, but very minimally, very, very minimally. Maybe some very light small arms fire.
But, into one where you had something like twelve sevens shooting at you or something
like that, no. Nothing. No. In fact, one of the things about B troop was we did not have a
lot of interaction with the ARVN at all. The most that I remember interacting directly
with the ARVN was out to the West and southwest of Pleiku in the area around what we
call Plantation. Have you ever heard that term ‘plantation’ out west of Pleiku? Oh okay.
And also down near Plei Me which is not too far from the Chu Pong Massive where the
big famous, the Battle of the Ia Drang was. That seems to me to be, if memory serves, 
where we had the most interaction with the ARVN and that wasn’t a lot. It seems to me, 
we went in a picked up maybe a platoon or a little more than a platoon of ARVN at the 
most a half a dozen times. I would say that’s probably my limited experience with it. One 
of those would have been the time that that lieutenant and his squad refused to get off the 
aircraft. That was not on my aircraft. See, that was another one. I heard about that from 
three separate sources. I know that that happened. There is no question in my mind. But I 
didn’t have a great deal of respect for the ARVN and if I had been on the ground, I would 
not have been counting on them to give me much help. And I was on the ground a few 
times.

SM: What model of Hueys did you have at the B Troop 1st of the 9th when you 
arrived?

EH: When I got there, as far as Hueys go, we had ‘B’ model gunships. Those 
gunships were equipped with either flex mounted M-60 machine guns, quad mounts, or 
rockets, or M-5 40 millimeter grenade launchers or a combination of them. In addition to 
that, they carried a gunner and a crew chief as a gunner, so a crew of four and weapons. 
The gunner and crew chief also usually carried a couple of cases of grenades, or at least a 
case of grenades; very useful, and especially for smoke grenades and Willie Pete and 
stuff like that for the purpose of marking targets and also for taking out some light targets 
and stuff. Those were the gunships. We had Delta Model Hueys, the longer, extended 
model for the lift ships. Later on the gunships, the Bravo models were slowly exchanged 
out for Charlie Models which was a big improvement, and the Delta Models, the D 
Models were changed out for H Models and the only real difference in the D and the H 
Model was the engine. They went from the –11 to the –13 engine, and that helped quite a 
bit because there’s a lot more torque. So, I started off…well, I started off in lift which 
was the Deltas, but immediately thereafter I went over to gunships and I spent some time 
in gunships as a crew chief there and then I went back to lift and I spent the vast majority 
of my time in there. I also spent a little bit of time trying to learn to be an observer on H-
13s. We had these little bubble model Bells and I’d be flying as an observer on a mission 
and those things and they’d say, ‘See those guys down there?’ ‘No.’ ‘You see that 
bunker over there?’ ‘No.’ I just didn’t see things. I didn’t have the knack for being able
to spot from the air what was obvious to other people I guess and I just wasn’t very good at it. As a gunner, in gunships, that’s okay. I didn’t have any trouble there. But, my natural place seemed to be over in the lifting job, and that’s where I gravitated. They kind of let you – they meaning the commanders of the various sections, the gunships, the lift ships, the scouts – they kind of let you gravitate to where your best place was. It was not all that unusual for a crew chief to move from one place to another place if there was an opening until he sort of found out, ‘Well this is really where I’m best suited.’ Of course if they needed you someplace, they were going to put you there. Don’t misunderstand. But, I kind of gravitated to the lift aircraft and there were other guys that kind of gravitated to the red ships. So, I think it worked that way pretty well.

SM: So the first mission that you went out on, this would have been in mid-’68?
EH: It would have been September.
SM: Of ’68?
EH: Of ’67.
SM: Of ’67? Excuse me.
EH: Pardon, September of ’66.
SM: That’s right, that’s right.
EH: I got there the first part of September of ’66.
SM: You went on your first mission the next day. Why don’t you go ahead and describe that mission, who was involved, and where did your ship fit into that mission?
EH: Well you kind of have to go back to the evening before that when we had first gotten there. I reported to the first sergeant, all of us reported to the 1st Sergeant and he didn’t really have time for us and he said, ‘Hobbs, you go see Captain Higginbotham.’ Well hell, I didn’t know who Captain Higginbotham was, but he was the man in charge of lift aircraft and Higginbotham said, ‘You know how to crew an aircraft?’ and I said, ‘Well, I’ve been to school,’ and this is all in military parlance and he said, ‘Well you crew my aircraft tomorrow.’ ‘Okay, that’s fine with me, sir. Anything you want, sir.’ He said, ‘We’ll be inserting blues around six o’clock in the morning so have the aircraft ready to go,’ at whatever it was, 5:30 or whatever, I don’t know, it was early, sunrise type thing. So, I went over. I made up my bed for the evening in a pup tent. We slept in a pup tent a lot those days. The next morning I was up, didn’t have any breakfast I
remember, or at least I don’t think I did, and went out to the aircraft and I really had no idea what to do. Truthfully, I had ridden on a helicopter one time in my life and that was as a passenger in the back and that was it. And, I had been schooled on helicopters so I literally, as a joke to myself, I said, ‘Well, it’s got four rotor blades. There’s two in front, two on top, and two in the back, and that’s four, and divided by two is two.’ So, I was making a little joke about it but I knew where to check the oil so I checked the oil. I did the things that I knew how to open up and look around and after a while they came out and said, ‘Is the aircraft ready to go?’ and I said, ‘Yes, sir, I guess it is.’ So the pilots always did a walk around and he did and I walked around with him and I said, ‘If there’s anything you can teach me, I’d sure appreciate it,’ and he said, ‘Is this aircraft ready to fly?’ or, ‘Is this helicopter ready to fly?’ and, ‘Yes, sir, as far as I know.’ About that time the infantry came out. We had our own integral…I didn’t know anything about…I had no idea what this was about. I didn't know what we were going…I didn't even know what this was. But, the troop had its own integral infantry platoon and they came out and they had their own aircraft. They flew them with the same squad, flew on the same aircraft most of the time and so forth and so on. He was the leader. He was 3-5. So, the squad for 3-5 came out and loaded on board the aircraft and I’m standing out there and they crank up the aircraft and everything and the airplane’s running and he motions me to get on and we get on and we take off and go. Steve, it’s strange, you think this doesn't happen, but that’s the story. Well, we went out. We flew probably I don’t know how long. I don't remember exactly how long, I’m going to say 20 or 30 minutes, 20 minutes, and the other aircraft joined up on us in an echelon formation and they’re all pretty close and I’m pretty nervous about this because helicopters you don’t want those rotor blades to touch. I really was kind of nervous and I had no idea what was going on and I’m wearing this big white flight helmet and I’m listening to all that’s going on and I can turn this here and all this, I’m finding out about these things. It’s touchy-feely. I’m wearing my .45, I was real impressed. They went into trail formation, we’re the lead aircraft, and as we went in toward the landing zone here are these gunships and they’re shooting rockets and you can hear machine gun fire and all this other kind of stuff, and you know, the thing that went through my mind, and to this day it still goes through my mind, is I was thinking, ‘This is just like I’ve seen it on Walter Cronkite. It’s just like being on
Walter Cronkite except it’s panoramic,’ and everywhere I looked there was war going on. I mean, rockets were going off and it was just everything was going on. It’s just that kind of a deal. It’s hard to imagine. We went in the LZ and the guys jump off the aircraft and I’m hearing, ‘Pop, pop, boom, boom,’ and, ‘Rat-a-tat-a-tat-a-tat,’ and I don’t know what’s going on. I have no earthly conception of what is going on. Am I making any sense? Do you know? This is happening. Well, I found out later that yeah, that was a hot LZ and yes, you were being shot at. No, we didn’t get hit. But, you don’t know! I guarantee you I found a can of spray paint and painted my helmet OD because they kept saying, ‘White is not the right color. It’s too good a target,’ and it was so big that I could turn my head inside of it. I got some pads for that. But, you learn.

SM: But they threw you right into the thick of it?
EH: Oh yeah, and I wasn’t the only one, don’t misunderstand; everybody was thrown into it just that quickly. It was just the way it was done. There was supposed to be some training. There wasn’t. But, what can I say?

SM: Now they didn’t have a checklist for you to use to prep the aircraft?
EH: A Huey comes with all kinds of paperwork and in that paperwork there are books and there’s called a –10. The –10 is things that…but as a practical matter, you find out that most of those things are missing from the aircraft when you get to the aircraft, especially if it’s an aircraft that’s been out in the field for any period of time. They come with a toolkit. It’s been scavenged if it’s even there at all. They come with a lot of things, but that stuff is just not there. Yeah, I had a –10. I had the green book sitting right in front of me but it didn’t have anything in it that pertained to me. It had a lot of pilot stuff in it. I mean, it had a lot of things that they need, but it didn’t have anything that pertained to me, and the question is why didn’t it? Well, because I wasn’t on a new aircraft, number one. That aircraft had been out in the field for quite a while. Number two, even new aircraft that we got in from time to time, all of that stuff was gathered up by maintenance and kept back in the back, either back at An Khe or if we had a maintenance nearby it was kept there.

SM: So you went in, dropped off infantry, went back to the headquarters?
EH: Right, and waited, and then later on we extracted.

SM: Was it a hot extraction?
EH: You know, I’ve thought about that a couple of times. I don’t think so, no. In fact, that’s an interesting question; we rarely had what I would call hot extractions. They were not the norm. In fact, I think a lot of people were under the impression that insertions and extractions generally were under fire. I’d say that’s the exception. Most insertions and most extractions are really quite tame affairs. I have a set of pictures that were made up near Duc Pho. We got called. We were waiting to extract our blues one day and they said, ‘We’ve got to go now,’ and I didn't have my weapon, anything. I jumped in the aircraft and all I had was my camera and I took some pictures of a hot extraction. We went in totally unarmed. I didn’t have anything. I have a series of pictures of that whole extraction, with the guys running toward the aircraft and all the fire that was going on, a lot of burned area, a lot of flames and all this other kind of stuff. That’s really the only action series that I got. There’s slides that I took but the norm was if you received any fire in an insertion, it was not really the usual thing. It was kind of…you just didn’t normally receive fire in an insertion because it was usually pretty well suppressed. Extractions were the tame affairs. The danger in the extraction was that you would get into an LZ that was too tight. The guys would jump onboard the aircraft and you wouldn’t have enough room to get into translation and get out. That was the real concern in most extractions. When you did have a hot LZ, things got very interesting. But, I can’t speak from great experience here but it has been my experience that in a combat situation, things happen so rapidly and so chaotically that what you do is reactive. It’s usually a reaction based upon your training or your experience. But, things are so chaotic and happening so rapidly that you don’t have time to reflect on these things. ‘Well now, this is happening and this is the action that I’m going to take.’ You just don’t have that opportunity. I’ve been in those situations – not that many times, but a few times – and I think that most of the things that you do are either instinctive or reactive. I don't know whether I’m making sense or not. I hope so.

SM: Yes, you are.

EH: I’ve heard other people say pretty much the same thing. Once you have been in that environment, once you have been in a situation where other people are trying to kill you, not you, but where they are actively firing at you, you would think, ‘Well maybe I’ll get used to it.’ You never do. There is no such thing as getting used to it. You
may get to the point where you react a little bit better or perhaps your reactions are a little
bit more effective. I don’t think that you could train for that. I don’t believe that you
could actually train people for that. This is off subject, but you see a SWAT Team and
these guys are highly trained and highly motivated and all this other kind of stuff, and my
reaction to that is, ‘Bullshit! They haven’t been shot at.’ Do you know what I’m saying?
SM: Yes.
EH: So let’s wait until they get shot at and see what they do, in effect do, because
it’s a whole different world. I don’t know. I may not be explaining it very well.
SM: No, I think you are. Speaking of being highly motivated, what was the
morale like generally when you arrived?
EH: I don’t think any of us thought in terms of morale. I think that the spirit of
the guys that I’m talking about, the way people felt about things, was more or less
acceptance and if I’m going to do this, I’m going to do it as well as I know how. I know
that there were some pilots, crew chiefs, ground troops, and we had all three in my unit
who were gung-ho. These guys were out there to be natural born killers; you know what
I’m talking about? They were out there to do it. You also had guys that were very
reticent about doing anything. I would never use the word cowardice, but they were
super-cautious. Then I think there were the people that were, ‘Well, this is where I am.
This is what I’ve got to do and I’m going to try to do it as well as I can,’ and I think I fell
kind of in that range in this sense. That helicopter was my responsibility and everyday
there were two pilots and nine other troops that were going to be climbing on that other
aircraft, including me. So, I wanted to make sure it ran. My aircraft was never downed
for maintenance. When my aircraft was needed, it was flyable. I think that a lot of
people felt that way. It’s not a question of good morale, it’s a question of, ‘Well, this is
what we’ve got to do and so let’s just do it and get it over with.’ Am I making…
SM: Absolutely. What was the relationship like between the enlisted men and
the warrant officers and officers?
EH: My relationships were always very good. To the best of my knowledge, the
relationships between…I never knew of any friction. There were the natural tensions
between human beings. We had some officers that were better officers than other were
officers, and that includes the warrants. A warrant was an officer as far as we were
concerned, and everybody was really treated pretty much the same as far as officer class, enlisted class. But, in our particular unit, while there was clearly that distinction, they relied upon us, we relied upon them. There was a very, very good working relationship and in a lot of cases a very good personal relationship. One of the best friends that I’ve got today is my old pilot. I don’t see him that often, maybe a couple of times a year, but he’s a good person and I think that most of these people were good people. They were just good people, on both sides, officers and enlisted men. We didn't have a lot of tension in that regard. There were a few. We had a couple of officers that were assholes but we had some enlisted people that were exactly the same way. The distinction was always there but it’s very gratifying when your pilot walks out and he says, ‘Is that aircraft ready to go?’ ‘Yeah, let’s go,’ and he just gets in the aircraft and goes without any question whatsoever. But, by the same token I would get in the aircraft with him, you know what I’m saying, and I have flown in some really bad stuff with him. So, you see, it's a trusting type situation and these things have to develop over a period of time.

SM: What about the relationship between the junior enlisted and especially the draftees and the volunteers that were volunteers because they were impending to be drafted and the senior NCOs or the career oriented NCOs?

EH: I’ve heard that question asked before and I would say very little in my experience. The US’s, the draftees, and the RA’s, like me, we were treated the same. Now if you were an RA back in the States, an RA tended to get a little bit better assignment than the US. That’s just a given. But, in Vietnam I think everybody was treated pretty much the same. I really do. Between the junior NCOs and the senior professional type NCOs, there may have been some distinctions that I wasn’t aware of because at the time I was a Spec 4, which is not up in the NCO grade. I made Spec 5 when I came back and began to be treated as an NCO and then for a while I was wearing staff sergeant stripes. They were temporary. I was the manager of the Fort Campbell Flying Club. I began to see a little bit of…that was a different level. E6 begins to be that level where you are now sort of…you’re in the Army. In other words, it’s a day to day type job as opposed to I’m here for a temporary time and I’m getting out, and I began to see that. There’s a difference in the way that E6s and above are treated. In Vietnam, I wasn’t aware of it. I really wasn’t aware of it.
SM: On the issue of morality I also wanted to ask about any kind of ethnic
tension, racial tension?

EH: I’m sure there was. We had a mix of white guys like me and some
Hispanics and some blacks. I can’t tell you that there was any outward tension. In fact,
I’ll go back. I’ll make a flat statement; there was no outward tension, nothing that
manifested itself, and I’m talking about there were no fights, there wasn’t any of this or
that or the other that was a manifestation of racial tension that I’m aware of. I didn't see
it. I know that there was an underlying feeling among some of the black guys or maybe
some of the Hispanics of being put down maybe or just not being accepted, or I don’t
know, whatever word you want to use, prejudice or whatever, among…they felt inferior
somewhere, that they were treated in an inferior way. You never came across it in my
unit in Vietnam overtly, but every now and then you’d get a little feeling, nothing spoken,
no actions, no nothing, but I think it was an undercurrent that was there, but it wasn’t
strong. We had a couple of black guys, they were real ethnic, which is fine. That’s fine.
But, I just didn’t see that, and I always knew, I always felt, I always felt if my aircraft
goes down they will be there. There was no question in my mind. The first guy that I
carried off the field was a black guy. You knew it was there but it just wasn’t something
that I could put my finger on. I can’t give you any examples, and I thought a lot about
that because you used to hear a lot about it. Now back in the States, that was an entirely
different thing, but on a day-to-day basis in at least a situation where people are from
time to time in combat or at least maybe on the verge of being there. They get along
quite well.

SM: What was different about being stateside duty with regard to this issue of
racial...

EH: The black troops in the States tended to stay with their own, the Hispanics
tended to stay with their own, the white guys tended to stay with their own.

SM: Self-segregation?

EH: Sort of a self-segregation type thing. On the job, on a day-to-day basis,
everybody worked together and everybody did their job as best as they would in the
Army anywhere, but there was that feeling, there was that self-segregation – yes, that’s a
very good term, self-segregation – in the States. There were certain EM clubs that black
guys didn’t go in. You could go in there, but you just weren't welcome there. You knew
it was not where you were supposed to be. There were certain EM clubs that white guys
didn’t go in because they just knew that they weren't welcome. The atmosphere was
different, the music was different, the language was different, and certainly the look was
different. You know what I’m saying? So, you just didn’t go there. It wasn’t that you
couldn’t be there, but that you just really weren't welcome. That’s all right with me, I
didn’t have any problem with that. It’s just not something that I gave a lot of thought to,
I don’t know. I have given it a lot of thought since then because I’ve had people ask that
question and I still don’t know how to answer it.

SM: One last question; how about the relationship between aircraft crews and the
ground guys, the guys that were going in and getting dropped off. What was your
relationship like with them?

EH: Well, I think our relationship in my unit was unique. It was very, very good.
I cannot speak to other units. For instance, if you had an ordinary aviation company with
a bunch of lift aircrafts and they went in and picked up a bunch of ground troops over
here that they did not work with on a day to day basis and carried them over to an LZ and
dropped them off, the guys that are on the ground watching the aircraft go away could be
a little bit unhappy about that. Fine. But, in our unit, the infantry platoon, what we
called the blues were integral to those lift aircraft. They were just another part of our
unit. We took them in, we took them out. If they were in trouble, we supported them. If
they were wounded, we picked them up. If they were dead, we carried them out. We and
they were the same. Now, they may have been on the ground, but we knew that we could
wind up on the ground, too, and they knew that their way of getting out of there was with
us. Everybody took care of everybody else. It was not something that you talked about,
but it was something that you knew and so our relationship between our crew, flight
crews, and the troops that we put on the ground was very good. These were guys that we
knew. I called them by name. They called me by name. They knew that I was flying on
that aircraft and they knew that I would be there when the time came to get them out.
They came out to the same aircraft day after day. Do you see what I’m saying? It was an
entirely different relationship. We saw them. We stood guard duty with these guys. So,
it was not the same relationship as an unknown aircraft picking up an unknown bunch of
guys, putting them in or taking them out. They were us and we were them.

SM: You had good unit cohesion?

EH: We had very good unit cohesion, I thought very good unit cohesion. On
those occasions when we would lose an aircraft and have a crew on the ground, whether
they were alive or they were dead, our blues never hesitated to go in and get that aircrew,
never. By the same token, if our blues were under fire and they had to be extracted, we
took them out and it’s just that simple. We did not call in Medevac. We never used
medevac. We picked our own people up. It was just…so that made for a real good
interface between the ground troops and the flight crews. I’ve had the ground guys come
down and say, ‘What is it that you do?’ and I take them up on top of the aircraft and
unbutton stuff, and I’ve been on the ground. I have gone in on the ground with our blues
and taken a little walk in the woods upon occasion and I didn’t like to do that but I did it
a few times because I wanted to know what that was like, too. So, there was a very, very
good relationship between our aircrews and the ground troops. I can’t speak to other
units because you’ve got to remember, the 1st Squadron of the 9th Cavalry was a very
unique organization. It was a very unique organization. It had its own reconnaissance.
We were, I called it an armed helicopter reconnaissance unit with an integral ground
platoon. When I say integral, I mean they were part of us. Sometimes we’d go out on a
mission where you’d have a scout aircraft down low, a red ship with guns above, and a
platoon and a lift aircraft up here. They’d make contact, we’d put not the platoon but a
squad on the ground, they’d do a little recon, we’d go in and pick them up, single ship
operation, like three aircraft going out and doing this sort of stuff. It’s like a
reconnaissance. It was a cavalry unit. These guys were like cavalrymen. They were
reconnaissance.

SM: Do you recall your unit’s call signs?

EH: Yes, a couple of them. SABER was one of them. I think that’s what they
were when I left. We were CHARGER when I first got there. There was something else,
I’ve forgotten what it was now. For a time I was CHARGER Blue 3-6 Charlie Charlie,
which is CHARGER being B-Troop, 1st of the 9th, Blue being the section, and 3-6 being
my aircraft identification which was the number two, Charlie Charlie being crew chief.

When I left I think we were SABER.

SM: Well thank you very much.

EH: You bet.

SM: This ends the first interview with Mr. Earl Hobbs.
Stephen Maxner: This is Steve Maxner continuing the interview with Mr. Earl Hobbs on the 31st of January 2001 at approximately 9:10 Lubbock time. Mr. Hobbs is in Alto, New Mexico. I am in Lubbock, Texas and this is a telephone interview. Okay sir, why don’t you go ahead and discuss briefly the Hungarians. You said you wanted to clarify some information about the Hungarians who moved in with your grandparents?

Earl Hobbs: Well you had asked me a question about if I remembered anything about the Hungarian Revolution which was in 1956 if I recall and I had told you that my grandmother and grandfather on my mother’s side had had some people living there from Hungary, living with them from Hungary, but apparently they came there sometime before the revolution and I was unable to find out the reasons why, but it really didn’t have anything to do with the Hungarian Revolution. I just wanted to clarify that. I remember the revolution and I remember it because of these people, but they were not there with my grandmother and grandfather because of the revolution.

SM: Okay. Why don’t we go ahead and pick up with some of your Vietnam War experiences, and if you could, why don’t you go ahead and discuss some of the first operations and missions that you remember.

EH: Well, the very first operation that I remember was the first actual day that I was in the field. I was in B Troop, 1st Squadron of the 9th Cavalry, which is part of the 1st Cavalry Division. The troop was camped at a place called I believe LZ Hammond, which was very close by the newly being built Phu Khat Air Force Base which is Northwest of Qui Nhon. My first actual combat operation was the first day that I was in country. That
was a hot insertion in an LZ I think someplace up to the northwest of Phu Khet in I think an area that was called the crow’s foot if I’m not mistaken. I just have a very strong memory of that particular operation because it was my second ride in a helicopter and I had absolutely no idea what I was supposed to be doing. I think I may have said this last time, it was just like being on Walter Cronkite. I remember watching pictures of operations in Vietnam on the CBS News with him and then there I was all of a sudden. It made quite an impression on me. We inserted the troops and it was a hot LZ. I can remember the gunfire and the live rounds and the guys jumping off the aircraft and laying on the ground, and we were just in the LZ for a very, very short time, and when we got back well I asked... I had no idea what was actually going on so I asked my pilot who was a captain named Higginbotham and I said, ‘Was that really what I thought it was? Was that live fire?’ and so forth and so on and he said, ‘Sure as hell was,’ and we had kind of a lively discussion about it. That was the first thing right out of the bat. It made an impression on me. We went in later the same day and picked up our troops. The people that we were inserting were our blues, which was an integral infantry platoon that was part of the troop. What can I tell you beyond that?

SM: That’s good. I was interested in the other operations you conducted. Did you move around very much in terms of your base location?

EH: Oh yeah, we moved a lot. We were at I believe the name of the place was Hammond. I said that, but I think it was called Hammond. We were there for a few weeks and I can’t tell you the times. You’ve got to remember that’s’ going on 33 years ago now. We went from Hammond to an area west of Pleiku that was out in the central highlands, much higher elevation. Hammond was down almost at sea level northwest of Qui Nhon, which Qui Nhon was on the coast, major port city. From Hammond we went to what we called Plantation and Plantation, west of Pleiku, was up in the central highlands. The terrain was entirely different. The vegetation was a lot different. Plantation was I remember the red dirt there that was...it was just an entirely different area. We set up camp there and were there several weeks. We conducted operations in that area. There was a tea plantation close by, had tea and rubber trees that had been a French operation I guess back when it was French Indochina and we would drive through that area every now and then on our way to Pleiku. I made that trip just to drive a couple
of times in the back of a deuce and a half just for the heck of it when my aircraft would
be down for maintenance or something like that. It was a very, very pretty country. To
the South and southwest of Plantation was the Special Forces camp called Plei Me.
There had been a very big battle at Plei Me not very long before we got there where I
guess it was the NVA had tried to overrun Plei Me. There was also to the southwest of
Plantation was the Chu Pong Massif, the Ia Drang Valley and the Chu Pong Massif was
were the 1st of the 9th had initiated the famous Battle of the Ia Drang and where Colonel
Stockton, the original squadron commander had been relieved of his command because
he didn’t follow some orders, or at least he kind of went beyond his orders. That was
where the 7th Cavalry got in some really deep trouble fighting the 33rd North Vietnamese
Regiment. The 33rd was the Regiment that we were always on the lookout for there in
that area. They were definitely there and we were definitely involved in a lot of
operations trying to seek them out and search and destroy type operations. So, I spent
quite a bit of time down at Plei Me with the troop. We would laager there in the daytime
and then go back to Plantation in the evening. A lot of insertions, small firefights, a lot of
scouting activities, that sort of thing, all around the Chu Pong and the Ia Drang, and even
once or twice...that’s the area where Cambodia and Laos kind of meet in a triangle there
with Vietnam and we would occasionally cross that border. We weren't supposed to be
crossing the border of course but I know for a fact that we did two or three times. One
evening my aircraft inserted some long-range patrols, LRRPs, we called them L-R-R-P
people, way to the west. It was a nighttime insertion, single ship type operation. It kind
of made me a little bit nervous, but a nighttime operation and we went way out to the
west and I know we were someplace right along that Cambodia-Laotian line, probably
well west of the Vietnamese border out there. So yeah, a lot of operations in that area.

SM: Sir, I’m sorry, just to clarify, did you say you were west into Cambodia or
west into Laos?

EH: I’m not sure if it was Cambodia or Laos. I know that line was right in there
someplace and that’s been so long ago, Steve, I can’t tell you whether we were northwest
into Laos or west, straight west into Cambodia. I just can’t tell you. Crew chiefs didn’t
ordinarily...we didn’t have the map with us so I don’t know. I can’t tell you precisely.

SM: I completely understand.
EH: We also had some kind of detached operations to the North of Pleiku up
toward a beautiful little town called Kontum which looked like a little French…like
something right out of a postcard, a little French village sitting on a river bend. Then we
had some more detached operations a little further up at a place called Dak To, which of
course had some rather heavy fighting at a later point. From Plantation, we were there
for a few weeks, the troop was there. Then we moved to the Bong Son Plain and I’ve
always been just a little bit confused about the names of our LZs out in there. There were
two of them, our base camps out in that area, but I think one of them was LZ Two Bits if
I remember correctly. We were there for several weeks conducting operations around
and in the Bong Son Plain to the west and the southwest into the crow’s foot and the An
Lo Valley, I think it was An Lo Valley, yes, An Lo, up the An Lo River. Then, from the
Bong Son Plain…Bong Son was where there was a major LZ near there, LZ English right
in the middle of the Bong Son Plain north of the river, pretty much adjacent to Highway
1. We would spend some time there. That was our major fueling point and armament
point and that sort of thing. From Bong Son we moved North to a place called Duc Pho,
D-U-C P-H-O, Duc Pho, and at Duc Pho the troop was operating detached from the 1st
Cavalry Division and we were part of the…I think there was some people there from the
101st or maybe it was the 173rd Airborne. I’ve forgotten who it was exactly. Later on
that was consolidated into an area where the Americal Division operated. We were at
Duc Pho, to give you a time frame, before April and into May and possibly even June of
’67. So, from Hammond to Plantation, Plantation to Bong Son Plain, I think that was
Two Bit, then up to Duc Pho into the spring, late spring and early summer of ’67, and
that was where the very, very famous picture was taken of the troops jumping out of - my
pilot thinks it was my aircraft and I’m not sure whether it was ours or not – of the troops
unloading from the H Model Huey on the side of the hill out west of Duc Pho. It’s a very
famous picture, I’m sure you’ve seen it. We were there operating for a while there out
also along the coast line which is just a beautiful part of the country and then South again
down to the Bong Song Plain in the middle of the summer I guess it was, maybe June or
July, and we were there until I came home, middle of September of ’67. So, the major
operations that I was involved in, mostly I would say the major operations were in the
Southwest of Pleiku and also in the Duc Pho area and west of Duc Pho and then in the
Bong Son Plain. I’ve forgotten the names of the operations. I wrote them out for you there on those answers, and frankly now that I’m just sitting here with no paper in front of me I don’t remember them. Some of them were Thayer; I’d have to go back and look those up. I’ve got the Cav history in my files over there someplace but I’d have to go back and look those up, September of ’66 into September of ’67. Our troop would stay in a camp for anywhere from just like three-four weeks all the way up to maybe two or three months. What can I tell you now?

SM: That was good. I was curious; you mentioned during some of your operations you had taken some pictures. Do you still have those photographs?

EH: Yes, I do. Most of the pictures that I took were in and around camps and some airborne operations. When I say airborne, you know what I’m talking about in the air, that sort of thing. I have a few pictures…I don’t have any real combat operations. You have to understand it was kind of frowned on to be taking pictures when you needed to be on your weapon!

SM: Absolutely!

EH: I started off, when I first got to Duc Pho [Hammond], I started off in the lift section, which was the Slick aircraft as a crew chief. Then I gravitated from there over to being a machine gunner, crew chief and machine gunner in what we called our red aircraft. I did that for a while. I was truthfully not a very good machine gunner but I managed to keep my weapon operational. Then I spent a little bit of time, just a tiny bit of time, as an observer on scout aircraft and that was really not my…I was not much cut out for that. I didn’t see the things on the ground that I was supposed to see and I just wasn’t very good at it. I went back to red gunships for a while and finally I spent most of my time in the lift aircraft and so I’d say the majority of my time was in the lift aircraft, what we called blue. So, that’s where I was. I wasn’t really the warrior type, you know. I was pretty happy in the lift aircraft.

SM: Did you guys ever lift others besides your own internal infantry units? Did you carry any ARVN or other US troops around or allied troops?

EH: We carried our own troops probably 99% of the time and occasionally we would carry someone else, usually other American units, and that was very rare. A few times we did carry some ARVN. A few times we did carry some Koreans. I remember
out at the Plantation area there were some ROK troops out there and they were really hard-core. I didn’t have…I think I mentioned this last time, we had one incident that came to mind with some Vietnamese indigenous personnel. They weren't very well motivated and very well led, and it got pretty hostile trying to even get them off the aircraft. So yeah, we had some interactions with Vietnamese; not very much, but some. I don’t want to give you the impression that the Vietnamese were worthless, they also had some very good troops. Down at Plei Me there were some Vietnamese troops that they were pretty much hard-core. They were willing to get out there and really get into the operation a lot. But, by and large they weren't much. Koreans, boy, I’m telling you, those were some tough people. They were hard on themselves and hard on everybody else too. They were really tough.

SM: The ARVN troops, did you ever have any experience…I’ve been told a story by a couple of other veterans that basically sometimes when you would take out ARVN, if you went back to pick them up it wouldn’t be completely unknown or unheard of to get shot at by those troops. There might have been VC or whatever infiltrated in the ARVN unit and basically they were just waiting for you to come back to English?

EH: I heard stories like that. We never experienced anything like that. The stories that I heard were something…and I give some credence to this story. I understand over in A Troop, which was one of our sister units that they inserted some ARVN one day and as they left the LZ the ARVN were shooting at them because they didn't want to be left behind. I do not know whether that’s true or not but I give it some credence. I think it’s entirely possible. I never experienced anything like that. I don’t know. I do know of one situation, and I think I told you about it last time, where a crew chief had to level his pistol directly at an ARVN lieutenant, and I know that for a fact. I heard it from three separate sources and I know that for a fact, just to get them off the aircraft.

SM: Yeah, you did mention that before.

EH: That really stood out in my mind because ordinarily when you went into an LZ, you want their ass out of that aircraft as fast as possible.

SM: You mentioned earlier that long-range reconnaissance patrol you guys inserted somewhere?

EH: Yes.
SM: Did you ever do that again, or was that the only time?
EH: We did that a few times. It was always a blue aircraft and it was nearly always a single ship operation at night. Treetop level at night is very interesting, especially when there’s an overcast. We did that a few times. I don’t recall any other operations that far to the west, but from where Plantation was located, which again, I can’t give you specifics on this, but if you’d look at the map, from Pleiku, imagine about halfway to the Vietnamese border is about where Plantation was which is not very far. We would fly, oh, 45 minutes or so to the west, which would place us well inside either Cambodia or Laos, and my best judgment is that we were in Laos. We just never really discussed these things, we just did them. You know what I mean? You’ve got to remember crew chief is the low man on the totem pole and you just get on the aircraft and do what you’re supposed to do. So, I didn’t know a lot about those operations. But yeah, we inserted LRRPs several times and they were nearly always nighttime insertions. We also did one other thing. Are you interested in people sniffer operations?
SM: Oh sure, absolutely.
EH: We did that for a while. That was a worthless piece of garbage. They came out one day and said, ‘We’re going to put a people sniffer on your aircraft,’ and I think they had selected one of the other aircraft, too. They put this [proboscis] I’ll call it on the front of my aircraft. It was a ram air type thing. They ran this thing back up into between the pilot and the co-pilot’s seat past the console and there was a great big box. It was about I don’t know how big or what the exact dimensions, but it was a man sized box, this thing in there, and it was a people sniffer. Now the premise was that if you were flying along at treetop level, if there was an enemy camp or something like that underneath you it would smell the smells of people. I assume ordinary human excretions, urine and all that kind of stuff and body smells and the smell of cooking and all this other kind of stuff, and of course it took a few seconds for this to register on the machine so you’re already down some ways from it. But, they apparently had some way of getting…there was a print out that came out. It was like a graph, piece of graph paper or something that came out, and it would tell you where these people were. Well my aircraft would be down on the ground, right down on the treetops and we’d be flying along in a straight line and all of a sudden we’d register something. So, we’d make a
loop around, come back, and fly over this same area and of course after you passed it it
would register again and we’d begin to find out where they suspected there were
encampments of people down under the trees. We would always have a pair of gunships
up on top of us and if we found something well then they’d go in and try to find it.
They’d strafe the area with machine gun fire or rockets if they found anything. It was a
hope and wish type operation and I thought it was totally and completely useless, but at
least you were right down there amongst the trees. You weren't going to get shot at
too…if you did get shot at it would be very, very short exposure. It wasn’t a bad deal, it
was just totally worthless. We did that…

SM: Did you ever uncover any enemy units?
EH: Not to my knowledge. Not anything directly related to that, no. I have no
knowledge that we ever got diddly squat out of it. But, they did that for…I don’t know,
we had those on there for I don't know how long, maybe a couple of weeks and then they
disappeared as quickly as they came in. The maintenance people came over one day and
yanked them off the aircraft and we went back to regular operations. I think that the
reason that they put us on…I think I was flying a D Model at that time, and the reason
was it had a larger place to put the machinery. It wasn’t heavy, it just needed a little bit
more room than you could put in a B Model or a Charlie Model.

SM: Well how far out did that proboscis stick out from the front of the aircraft?
Do you recall?
EH: I don’t remember. I’ve thought about that several times and I wished I’d
taken a picture of one of those machines. It was kind of an air scoop out in front, just like
a scoop, and I don’t think it stuck out there a long ways but it was under the chin. You
know, on a Huey there’s a clamshell door in the front of it that opens up where the
battery compartment and radio compartment is?

SM: Yes, sir.
EH: I think it was underneath that. I really don't remember too much about it.
SM: You don’t remember if it stuck out beyond the nose of the aircraft?
EH: I think it probably came out even with the nose of the aircraft or maybe a
little bit beyond it, but see, that wouldn’t be very far. That would only be maybe at the
most a couple of feet. But, I don't recall. It was just an air scoop was really what it was
and then this stuff was duct past the pilot and copilot up through the floor there. They just took out some panels and it was really kind of a straightforward plumbing job.

SM: Well I was curious because it seems to me that the rotor wash would have a very powerful effect on some of that.

EH: No, it wouldn’t because once you're moving forward, once a helicopter reaches a certain speed, it’s about ten to 15 knots, it moves into what’s called translation. At that point, the air in front of the aircraft is clean. It’s not affected by the rotor wash. A helicopter flies either in hovering mode or it moves forward into translation. The translation is almost like an airplane type flight

SM: Right, where the rotor actually becomes the blade?

EH: Yes. That’s the only way I know how to describe it to you. I’m not a helicopter pilot.

SM: Yeah, I understand.

EH: That air, once the aircraft is up to about 15 or 20 knots it’s in clean air out there. Of course a Huey, a D Model Huey cruises at about 95 knots approximately so it’s well out in clean air.

SM: Very interesting. The LRRP insertions that you did, how long did they usually stay out, and did you also go back and pick them up?

EH: We did go back and pick them up two or three times. I don't recall how many times, but yes. How long did they stay out? I don’t know. We had attached to the 1st Squadron of the 9th Cav… I think these guys were ranger type people who did LRRP operations. It was a small detachment and we did not have a lot to do with them, just occasionally insert them or they would maybe overnight with us every now and then. I really can’t tell you about that. The operations…for instance, if we inserted somebody we didn’t know if we were going to go back and pick them up or if somebody else was going to go back and pick them up or if somebody else was going to go back and pick them up. We had no idea when we would do it. We did go out a few times and extract them and that was daylight extractions, usually early morning or late afternoon, very late afternoon extractions. But, that was just…it was not a common operation. We did it a few times.

SM: There were never hot extractions?
EH: No. I don’t ever recall any of these LRRP operations as being hot. In fact, that would have been the worst possible thing was for them to be anywhere near any kind of firefight. I do know, I’ve heard stories of LRRP operations where these guys would get in trouble and have to be extracted on a very short notice. But, I have no…I never had anything like that happen.

SM: Were there any other operations that you recall of particular interest?

EH: I don’t think I ever really explained to you. We had three colors of aircraft. We had our whites, which were H-13s. They were the scout aircraft, H-13s, old Bell bubble canopy reciprocating engine helicopters. They were the scout aircraft operating in pairs. They were white teams and they operated down low and slow. Their purpose was to look for Charlie and they scouted the area. That was their purpose. Then, we had red aircraft, which were Huey B Model and C Model aircraft, which were the gunships. They operated in pairs and operated much the same as the scout aircraft and also provided cover for the scout aircraft when they would find themselves under fire. Then we had an infantry platoon, what we called the Blues, and we had four aircraft that carried the blues, which we would insert, and after contact was made with the enemy. If our six, the commanding officer, decided it was appropriate he would insert the blues to be on the ground and try to make contact with the enemy and assess the strength of the enemy. They would sometimes do little small search and destroy operations, some ambush operations, that sort of thing. So, that was the three types of aircraft. I spent some time on the red aircraft, a little while on scouts trying to learn how to do that, and I just wasn't really very suited for it, and then most of my time on the blue aircraft as a lift aircraft crew chief and gunner. So, I wanted to clarify that because I don't think I really ever said what our operations were. We were in I call it an armed helicopter reconnaissance squadron, that’s what it was.

SM: Okay, and by and large, the major operations that you were a part of, these were in general the sweep and clear and search and destroy type of missions, correct?

EH: Yes. The usual purpose of B Troop was to go out and find the enemy. Our B-Troop, A-Troop, and C-Troop, we went out and found the enemy and ascertained the strength of the enemy, their positions, that sort of thing, and once contact had been made we would maintain that contact until a larger force of infantry could be put on the ground.
Then our troops were withdrawn. We would extract our people and the reason for that was that our guys went in very light. Almost never…I shouldn’t say that, rarely did they stay on the ground overnight, and even when they did it was only because we couldn’t get them out. We always tried to get our people off the ground at night. They were very lightly armed and couldn’t carry anything basically except water and ammunition. So, they just didn’t have the ability to stay on the ground overnight. It was a small platoon. When I say platoon, 21 or 22 men was about the most that we would field at any one time, putting them on the ground. A couple of times the blue platoon leader, it was always a lieutenant, but I think it might have been a captain once or twice, but a blue platoon leader, they let me go on the ground with them if my aircraft was down for maintenance or something like that. Well, I went for a little walk in the woods with them a few times. I want to tell you, that was the hardest job. They really had my full respect, I’ll guarantee you that.

SM: Did they ever make contact while you were with them?

EH: Yes.

SM: What was the enemy’s strength, do you recall?

EH: At most, squad. I was with them one time out west of Bong Son out west of Two Bits in a little river valley, I believe it’s the An Lo River, and they saw some people running away from us armed and there was a little fire fight. It was not a major firefight of any sort. It was mostly a matter of I think it was probably a VC unit. They didn’t look like they…they had black pajamas as opposed to the green uniforms, so I would say that they were probably a VC unit and they were trying to get away from us as fast as they could and there was some small arms fire back and forth, no heavy weapons or anything like that. I was scared to death so I cant tell you too much about it. I got on the ground as quick as I could and stayed there. I’m not sure I even fired my weapon. But, that happened once out in the An Lo Valley. Another time we were going through a little village or I guess more of an encampment type village west of Duc Pho when I was with them on the ground there and we received some fire, more like sniper fire than anything else, no automatic weapons fire but rifle fire it seemed like from a pretty good distance. Our guys went toward the fire. We all went that direction, and it just kind of stopped and that was it. So yeah, I was involved in a couple of fire fights on the ground but nothing
ever very heavy. I received some fire. At night we would nearly always you’d pull some
guard duty at night. Crew chiefs were not exempt from guard duty and several times I
received weapons fire at night during guard duty.

SM: When you mentioned that the primary mission of the unit was to go in, find
the enemy, make initial contact, and then allow for a larger unit to come in, what was the
largest unit the troop ever encountered while you were flying with them?

EH: That’s a very interesting question and I think you have to assess...you don’t
just go in and find a whole regiment of troops. You don’t just land right on top of them.
That’s the rare exception and if you did, you wouldn’t survive. I think the largest single
organization that we ever encountered was probably a regimental sized operation, a North
Vietnamese regimental sized operation and that was probably out west of Duc Pho, my
best judgment. That’s while I was there. So, but what you’re doing there is scouting
around and trying to locate the enemy. In scouting the area of operation, what you’re
actually going to encounter is the fringes of the enemy movement and usually they did
not want to make contact with you. You could be over them. Unless they had an
overwhelming strength, they weren't going to attack you because they knew that they
were going to have a much stronger force brought in on top of them. So, I can’t tell you
precisely but I believe we did encounter a regimental-sized operation to the west of Duc
Pho, which is probably the largest unit we ever encountered, that I have personal
knowledge of.

SM: What was the largest enemy weapon fired while you were there?

EH: Probably the equivalent of a .50 caliber. I think it was a 12.7-millimeter
machine gun that they had. I don’t believe my aircraft was ever hit by that kind of fire,
but based upon the sounds that I heard and what I was told to listen for and just general
experiences as you get more experience flying, I know that I was in the vicinity of a 12.7
one day and I know that they had to have been shooting in our direction. I don’t have any
bullet holes to show, thank goodness.

SM: Was your aircraft or any other aircrafts in the troop shot down?

EH: Yes, sir, many times.

SM: Yours?
EH: We lost quite a few aircraft to enemy fire. My aircraft was downed also, yes.

SM: Was it downed in a friendly or enemy territory?

EH: Let’s just say semi! Yeah, we got our troops around it very, very quickly and they provided us good cover and we got our aircraft out. But yes, we lost quite a few aircraft to enemy fire. We lost quite a few scout ships, quite a few red ships. We lost a couple of lift ships to enemy fire, yes.

SM: What was the casualty rate like for your unit? Did you guys take a lot of injured and killed?

EH: It depended. Steve, I wish I could give you figures on it.

SM: That’s okay.

EH: I just can’t. I can give you a feeling for it.

SM: What was your impression?

EH: My impression was that we lost, in infantry personnel, probably 25%. In crew chiefs, gunners, and pilots, we lost probably in the range of 20%, and I’m not talking about…I’m talking about dead and/or wounded. So, I’m just kind of pulling those numbers out of my head, but I think that I would be well in the ballpark that crew chiefs, machine gunners, and pilots, one in five had a pretty good probability of being injured sufficiently that they would be out of the troop for a period of time, and I’m also including killed. We did lose…we lost several crews. I say several, we lost a few crews when I was…whole crews and the aircraft. One particular incident comes to mind. You might not be interested in the long war story here.

SM: Oh yeah, go ahead.

EH: I have a very, very close friend, and this is a hard story for me to tell I guess.

SM: Do you want to take a break?

EH: No, I’m fine. He swapped off with another friend on aircraft one day. I don’t have any earthly idea, but Gil swapped off with another guy and the other man was flying his aircraft, and apparently they went over. The aircraft flew over a bunker of some sort and the Vietnamese blew up the bunker. They had it booby trapped I guess, and the whole belly of the aircraft was just blown away and of course the aircraft landed upside down and all four guys on board were killed, pilot, copilot, crew chief, and
gunner. They found the aircraft after I guess it was the second or the third day, let’s just say the second day they located the aircraft in the afternoon, put our blues on the ground and secured the area, and then brought in a Chinook to lift the aircraft out. They got three of the bodies out of the aircraft before they lifted it out. The body of the crew chief was wedged in where they couldn’t get him out so they lifted this aircraft back to our base camp and I still have this picture in my mind, Gil stood under that aircraft and they lowered that thing down on top of him and he cut that body out of the aircraft and carried it away.

SM: Let’s take a break.

EH: The point I wanted to make was I know that to this day, and I had talked to Gil about this, and he feels like he should have been on that aircraft and it just…it was a very, very emotional experience for him and for the rest of us that knew everybody on the aircraft. That was a particular incident. We had other things like that that happened and it’s just a part of combat operations, that’s just all there is to it. Pardon me, I’ll get on with it.

SM: Okay, let’s go ahead and talk about any other operations that come to mind.

EH: Well, I don’t have…let me just go back from one base camp to the next. From Hammond…pardon me, at Hammond I don’t have an awful lot of memories of the Hammond area because I was new and just beginning to learn the job and that sort of thing. I can’t tell you too much. Out in the Pleiku area, west of Pleiku when we were at Plantation, I found that a lot more interesting area. The terrain was very interesting, lots of heavily forested area and lots of open, I’d call it almost scrubland type area. The operational area itself in the Ia Drang and the Chu Pong area down around Plei Me was historically quite scary to us because it was the area where the 1st of the 9th had gotten into its first heavy operations after the Cav got there in ’65. You want to remember this would have been right at the end of ’66, beginning of ’67 in the Christmas time frame there. All of a sudden…I think our power is going on and off here at the house. You’ll have to excuse that. It probably makes a clicking sound on the phone. The operational area there was kind of I’d say scary, especially at night. It seems to me that I was more afraid of enemy attacks on our perimeter out there at Plantation than any other time because it was such an open area and our perimeter was not as well fortified as it usually
was. We got over toward Bong Son, our perimeters were very heavily fortified and lots
of concertina wire. We would clear the areas for open fields of fire, had just a lot better
security so the nighttimes were not as scary as they were out toward Plantation. At Duc
Pho, we were operating with a larger unit. We were in a big base camp there with part of
a brigade of infantry and so we did not have to provide a lot of our own security in the
area. It was very well secured; that is, the base camp was very well secured. There was
one funny incident I’ll tell you about, extremely funny. At Duc Pho, the area along the
seacoast there is a plain and there’s a small mountain, almost a cone shaped mountain
that rises right up out of that plain and that’s where the base camp was and we were on
the southwest side of that. That’s where our base camp was, on the southwest side of that
mountain. When we had gotten there, the Marines had just moved off that mountain and
they had mined the mountain. They had an observation post up on top of it, and they’d
mined the mountain and they’d lost the key to the minefield so they didn’t know where
the mines were. So the Army brought in a bulldozer with a great big huge blade out in
front of it and this bulldozer went up that mountainside carving a path and every now and
then it would hit a mine, and it was just absolutely hilarious. You’d hear this bulldozer
roaring around there and a big, huge bang and there’d be a big cloud of dust and gray
smoke and everything else and then bulldozer would keep going up a little bit further and
carving this little road or path up to the top. He went all the way around the mountain
and it was just kind of humorous because the Marines had lost the key to the minefield
and nobody knew where the mines were located. I guess they were using those anti-
personnel mines that were made out of plastic. There’d be a big bang so we didn't think
too much of the Marines at that particular point! In the meantime we supplied the little
observation post up on top with their goodies, took people on and off and that sort of
thing until they got the path up the mountain built. It was kind of humorous. Very pretty
area around Duc Pho, beautiful white beaches. The water was just as clear and blue as it
could be and we’d fly last light missions at night up and down that coast and you’d see all
kinds of things that a kid from West Texas didn’t see.

SM: Yes, sir. Any other operations you recall from Duc Pho?

EH: Well of course I told you there is a very famous picture of the operations,
minute. Okay, I’m back on the phone here. There’s a picture that was made and I want to get it for you so that you can look it up if you’re interested. It’s a squad - and I’m reading from the caption on the picture – it’s a squad of blue rifle platoon, B Troop, 1st Squadron, 9th Cavalry, dismounting a UH-1D on the 24th of April, 1967. The photograph was taken by Staff Sergeant Howard C. Breedlove during Operation Oregon out west of Duc Pho in Quang Ngai Province. I don't have the Army picture number on it, but it’s a very, very famous picture.

SM: Are you looking at a copy of the picture itself?
EH: Yes, I am.
SM: Or is it in a book somewhere?
EH: I’m looking at a copy of the picture itself. You’ve seen this picture. The funny part about it was we’ve had all kinds of fights break out, verbal battles break out, trying to figure out which one of these aircraft it is, but we know it has to be one of four aircraft and we recognize the people getting on and off the aircraft. In fact, one of the boys that’s standing on the side with his rifle up in the air was later killed and we know who it is. We know who all these people are, we can identify them. The captain on the ground is a fellow named Ted Chilcot, I know him well. We all know who these people are but we cannot figure out which aircraft it is, but I think that it might be mine because it has a patch that I had replaced on the bottom behind the pilot’s...below and to the rear of the pilot’s door. So, my pilot and I think it’s our aircraft but one of the other guys thinks it’s his. It’s just very, very difficult to tell, but it’s for sure us. You know what I mean? It’s our outfit. It’s a famous picture. That’s probably my only claim to fame, as a matter of fact! To make a long story short, yeah, we had a lot of operations out in the area around Duc Pho. We were detached at that time from the 1st Cavalry Division. We were operating with...I keep wanting to say the 173rd but I know that’s probably not correct. I’m sorry, I’m getting off of track here.

SM: No, you’re talking about it, just the different operations and stuff that you did while you were at Duc Pho.
EH: While we were at Duc Pho I said we would do the last light missions, flying out over the coast, and I just remember a lot of the things that I remember about Vietnam was how pretty the countryside was and things that I had never seen before. Of course
coming from West Texas I had not been associated with the ocean very much, so flying around seashores and that sort of thing was very interesting. The coast line was just very pretty there, beautiful white beaches, and of course if you went out on the beach to pick up some guys, the sand would just do terrible things to your aircraft, get the inside all...any bearings and everything else, so you didn’t want to operate on the coast very much, especially landing and taking off from the coast on the beach. That’s just bad on aircraft. Pretty country there. In the Pleiku area, very, very pretty country. I mentioned the little town of Kontum. It was just like a little French village, pretty country; hidden waterfalls up little valleys with these three tiered canopy forests that you’d read about them in books and you’d think, ‘I’m never going to see things like that,’ but there you were flying over it. It was just beautiful country. Sometimes it just didn’t seem like a war zone, you know what I’m saying? Then something of course would intrude. But, it was a very pretty countryside. I didn’t care too much for the towns, they were dirty and very primitive, but I did not have to spend much time around the towns. We were always out in the field. Occasionally we would go maybe ride through a town in a truck or something like that if you were going to the garbage dump or something like that, but that was about it.

SM: Well, is there anything else you want to talk about?

EH: Operationally?

SM: With regard to your time in Vietnam?

EH: No, not really. I’ve tried to give you a fairly clear picture of what I did and the kind of operations that we did and I think I pretty well covered it.

SM: Well what was it like leaving, and what was it like to arrive in the United States?

EH: Leaving the country was very abrupt. In fact, that’s a very good word was abrupt. There were three or four of us that got there at the same time and we left at the same time. I was told...of course I knew what my time to go back was, and I didn’t want to leave the field immediately. I did not want to go back into An Khe because if you went back into An Khe you were liable to get assigned details of one type or another, so we avoided going back into An Khe until just the last moment. Believe it or not, the day...we were supposed to leave in the afternoon, leave An Khe and fly down to I guess
it was Tan Son Nhut, I was still flying missions up until that morning. They had located the day. I guess some of our red ships had located some weapons, NVA weapons and enemy troops out near the pass between An Khe and Qui Nhon, and they got kind of an ad hoc bunch of us, we jumped on board aircraft and went out and we were flying missions that morning before I left. So, when I left country it was quite abrupt. I came back, put on my khakis, and we got on the airplane and rode down to Tan Son Nhut if I remember correctly. I believe that’s where we left from, and we flew home. Again, it was a charter flight. To tell you the truth, I don’t remember too much about the flight home, mostly night and not too much...I think everybody was just kind of subdued and glad to be out of country. I got to Seattle was where we came in. It was at Fort...I’ve forgotten what it is, got off the aircraft in our khakis, and some guys were still in fatigues. We got off the aircraft. We were bussed to – it’s Fort Lewis, Washington – and we were bussed I believe out to Fort Lewis and they ran us through a really a very efficient operation. You went in one door and came out the other door in greens and everything was on your uniforms, all your patches and everything was on your uniform. They even reissued all of your ribbons, everything that you were supposed to have. You got a complete issue of just about everything. It was one of the few times I’d seen the Army really do something very efficiently because we were in and out of there in like two or three hours, shaved and showered and cleaned up and I had to fight to hang onto my cavalry hat because I had a Stetson that we were all…the 1st Squadron of the 9th Cavalry wore Stetsons. They said that wasn’t an authorized hat but I managed to hang onto that and I’ve still got it sitting over here in my closet to this day. I had to hang onto that. I wore my cavalry hat home. I was kind of proud of that. But anyway, they took us by bus over to Seattle-Tacoma Airport and caught a Braniff flight. It was a 727 nighttime flight. It went from SeaTac to Portland. It was a big, long trip. From Portland to Dallas Love Field. Dallas Love was opened in those days for Braniff Airlines. Then from there to Lubbock, I got off the airplane wearing my cavalry hat. My folks met me and everybody met me. My girlfriend was at that time she was in Germany and so I spent a few days at home and then went to Germany and had a rather long leave in Germany. I always hear these stories about the bad reception that people got when they came home. I did not encounter any of that. There were I think maybe in ’67 it was a little bit early for the
protests to have taken any organized shape. I heard some other guys say that they were not treated very friendly but I was well received coming home. My mother and dad were big in the Baptist church in Lubbock and I think my church made a big deal about me coming home and all that kind of stuff. I don’t have any bad memories about coming home. I stayed home a few days and then I went to Germany and I spent I think it was 54 days. I had a lot of accumulated leave, and the Army let me take that. I spent 54 days with my girlfriend up there. We traveled up and down the Rhine. She was enrolled in the study of I believe they call it Germanistic which is the emersion in the whole German culture and she and I traveled up and down, in and around the Hamburg area and down around Munster and Westphalia and down toward Freiburg and Westbrook and Breisgau and into Switzerland some. She was in the University of Freiburg I believe was where she was enrolled. We had a good old time, came back and reported into Fort Campbell, Kentucky. That was my duty station.

SM: How much more time did you have left in the service?

EH: About a year, and I spent that year at Fort Campbell. I did do one short TDY, I returned to Vietnam. That’s really not that big a deal. It’s just a TDY thing and I’d just as soon not get into that.

SM: How long did it last?

EH: About 90 days.

SM: Is it something that you don’t want to talk about because of classification or is it just something that…

EH: It just…I’m not real comfortable talking about it. It was during the TET situation. I’d just rather not, Steve.

SM: Okay. Was the transition at all difficult for you in terms of going from Vietnam back in the United States, going from being in a military combat environment to being in a civilian environment?

EH: No, I don’t think so. When you get to Vietnam, the general Army experience, let’s just talk about that for a second. When you are in a training environment or you’re in the states, everything is very measured, very cadenced, very structured. When you get into the...when I got into the combat environment in Vietnam, it was an entirely different thing. Certainly you were still in the military, certainly it was
the Army, certainly it had all of the military discipline, but it was more of a work
environment. You did your job and everyone worked quite well together. Officers and
enlisted men, we had that distinction, but there was this environment of working together
and working for each other. Do you understand what I mean? When you come back to
the states, back into the military environment in the states, it becomes, again, very, very
structured, very cadenced, very regimented. That was the big difference. Being back in
the States was of course a great relief, but I didn’t mind…I enjoyed my time at Fort
Campbell. In fact, I had a very good job there. I was made the manager of the Fort
Campbell Flying Club because I had all my pilot’s licenses. They gave me orders,
temporary orders, as an E6 and I was drawing quarters and rations and living off post. I
didn’t have to go back on post except to pick up my pay and occasionally go in and report
to the 1st Sergeant and tell him what the hell I was doing because they always liked to
know. So, I had a very good thing at Fort Campbell. My last year at Fort Campbell,
really last nine months or so at Fort Campbell, was just fine. I had no problems with it
and I was kind of living high on the hog to tell you the truth because I was also, when I
was manager of the flying club, if I was getting [giving flight] instruction, well I would
just pocket that money and I walked away from Fort Campbell with a pretty nice little
bank roll.

SM: Then after your year at Fort Campbell you got out and came back to
Lubbock?

EH: I got out and came back to Lubbock, yes.

SM: Why don’t we go ahead and discuss some of the ways the Vietnam War has
been important to you. In what way or ways has your experience as a Vietnam veteran
affected you the most?

EH: Well, I had always lived…I grew up in a very comfortable, very sheltered
environment. I grew up I guess you could say pretty privileged in many respects. The
Army, and in particular Vietnam, was a great growing up experience to me. I don’t
think…I would not wish combat or war, I would not wish a war off on anybody, but I
think that it was good for me. Do you know what I’m saying? It made me grow up, and
so in that respect I’m very appreciative, not of the war but of the things that…of the way
I grew up. Another thing is that…I don’t know how to explain this to you, it’s a difficult
thing to explain. If I had to go to Vietnam, I am very grateful that I was in the unit that I was in, that I was in a real day-to-day combat prone environment. I am grateful for that because I don’t think it was the same experience as someone who went as let’s say a clerk typist or a quartermaster or something along those lines. Do you understand what I’m saying? I’m grateful that I had the experience that I had, not that I would wish it off on anybody else and I would not want to go back and do it again, but I am grateful for the experience and I talked to some of the other guys in the last…I did not in any way participate in any kind of veteran’s organizations at all until about 19 probably ’91 or 2 so there was a long interval in there where I did not participate in anything. I guess I was a member of the Vietnam Veterans, but I didn’t participate in anything. Long about that time frame, I began to kind of…I began to talk to some of these people and I think a lot of people feel the same way that I do; if you had to be there, it was better to be a part of it than sort of on the outside looking in. Am I explaining that well enough?

SM: Very well. What did you think about how the war came to a conclusion, and really if you want to look back too after Tet, Johnson’s decision not to run for reelection, Nixon’s Vietnamization, our pull out with the Paris Peace in ’73 and then the fall in ’75? What did you think as those events unfolded?

EH: Well that’s a broad question. I’ll tell you what, I watched – I forgot where it was – but I watched Lyndon Johnson make his speech that night when he said he would not accept. I think everybody was just flabbergasted, just couldn’t even begin to imagine that he wouldn’t run for president again. I’m not sure how to answer your question. I think that if we had prosecuted the war, I love that term, if we had fought the war, prosecuted the war to the full extent of our capabilities, I believe the outcome would have been different. I think the war was very, very badly handled politically and I think it was badly handled militarily. Everybody’s entitled to their own dumbass opinion. I think Nixon was flat ass lying through his teeth when he said he had a plan. I think his plan was to do whatever was politically expedient. Johnson was…he was a politician who should have just left the war up to the generals. I think the war was very badly handled. That’s the way I would say it.

SM: Now you said that you thought it should have been fought to the fullest extent of our capability, to include nuclear?
EH: No, I don’t think that would have been necessary. I just don’t think it would have been necessary, but let me give you an example. Of course I was a lowly crew chief on one aircraft out of thousands and my perspective is rather limited. My point is this; if we were going to wage war, let’s wage war. The thing about, ‘Well we’re not going to bomb certain areas in Hanoi,’ or, ‘We’re not going to attack certain targets,’ or, ‘We’re not going to engage the enemy except under certain conditions,’ or ‘Well we’ll put this area off limits and we’ll only conduct operations over in this area,’ I think that was the wrong strategy. If you’re going to fight a war, fight a war. If you’re going to…there’s nothing pleasant about war. If you’re going to fight it, you fight it with every available means and you don’t pull your punches. You don’t want to get in a fight in the first place but if you’re in a fight then you do exactly what you have to do to win that war. That’s my point. I think that we were in the war for the right motives but our ally in the war, the Vietnamese, were not well motivated. They were not well led, and they were politically and morally corrupt. I don't have anything good to say about the Vietnamese. So, that’s my viewpoint. I don't want to tell you a war story, but I’ll tell you a little story. You’ve probably heard this from other people but it is the absolute truth. I have been in a situation where we were receiving fire on our aircraft and we were told, ‘Do not return fire, those may be friendlies.’ Now, think about that. That’s just stupid. You know that you’re under fire, you know where the enemy is, and you’re told, ‘Don’t return fire.’ That’s ridiculous.

SM: How often did that happen?

EH: In my case, exactly once. I know that it has happened. Factually, no, I probably could give you names of people that it happened to in other situations. But, in the case of my aircraft, one time. We had them on the ground. We could see the weapons. They were shooting at us but we couldn’t return the fire. They told us, ‘Do not do that.’

SM: Were the rules of engagement for your unit restrictive in other ways?

EH: No; in fact, I would say the rules of engagement within my unit were very loose. I do not recall any occasion when I did not have an open gun, with that one situation. In fact, I always had an open gun. I kind of got myself in trouble one day. We had just inserted some troops, our blues, and as we came out maybe a quarter of a mile
away from where we’d inserted the blues we were still at very low altitude and we went right across a pagoda and I saw this guy with a rifle and he was running away from the pagoda and I opened up on him and didn’t tell my pilot what I was fixing to do, I just opened up on him and I was screaming into the microphone, ‘Turn to the left! Turn to the left!’ and they got real excited because there wasn’t supposed to be any fire on that particular mission. It was expected to be a completely cold LZ and just kind of a walk in the woods type situation. I think I got everybody all excited. My pilot kind of jumped on me that day and says, ‘If you’re going to do that, let me know!’ But anyway, I’d already opened up on the guy and I don’t think I came anywhere close to him but I opened up and was screaming into the microphone, ‘Turn to the left, turn to the left!’ and they circled. The guy disappeared into the woods. I don't know whether they ever found anything or not.

SM: When you say you had an open weapon, you’re talking about round in the chamber, safety off?

EH: Oh yeah, and as far as when I say open weapon, you were on your own responsibility.

SM: Right, and your finger was on the trigger, ready to fire?

EH: I was ready to go. Well, I don’t know about the finger on the trigger, but yes, the answer is yes. We carried weapons. Our weapons were locked and loaded, you bet. In fact, in my unit in B Troop, you were expected even in base camp you carried your weapon. We had our weapon at all times and on the aircraft. Once the trigger was pulled to crank up the engines, we were locked and loaded, yeah, with good reason.

SM: What are the lessons we as a country should take away from the Vietnam War?

EH: I think I said it as well as I could say it a couple nights ago; if you’re going to fight a war, fight a war. We made a mistake by going into that thing not prepared. I think we were prepared militarily to fight it but we were not prepared politically to fight it and I don't think we were prepared emotionally as a country to fight it. It was a war that we probably were fighting for the right reasons but we were not well motivated to fight it country wise. I don't know whether we could have ever been made that way. That’s a question for debate. I guess it’ll go on for hundreds of years. We could have
fought the war much more effectively. I think Westmoreland and his people were bad commanders, I really do.

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

EH: No. I think I’ve told you pretty much how I feel about things and what we did. If you have any other questions I wish I could expand but I’m not really sure what you want to know, Steve.

SM: Okay, well why don’t we go ahead and end the interview for the day then?

This ends the second interview with Mr. Earl Hobbs.