

Interview with Ron Milam
Session 6 of 7
January 30, 2006

1 Richard Verrone: This is Richard Verrone. I'm continuing my oral history
2 interview for the Vietnam Archive's Oral History Project. I'm here with Ron Milam.
3 We are again in Lubbock, Texas in the interview room of the Vietnam Archive, and
4 today is January 30, 2006. It's 9:10 am Central Standard time. Ron, we're going to pick
5 up with approximately where we left off last fall, and I wanted you to talk about R&R,
6 when you were able to kind of take off, leave Vietnam behind you, and then go and see
7 Maxine.

8 Ron Milam: We had scheduled the R&R, I believe for about January the 20th.
9 That was when my time actually came; it would have put me about eight months into my
10 tour, I believe, and it came right after Christmas, so it allowed me to kind of get through
11 Christmas in a little better frame of mind. I didn't think as much about being away from
12 my family at Christmas because I knew that just three weeks after Christmas I would be
13 going to meet my wife. So, one of the benefits of being an advisor with MACV is that on
14 things like R&R, you could figure out ways to maybe get a little bit more than your
15 allotted time. As I recall, I was going to have about six days in Hawaii, actually there
16 and then time there and everything. So I made it into a longer trip than that by going to—
17 doing some business in Pleiku, which was our headquarters, spending a night there, and
18 then I think I went to Nha Trang and spent a night there at the Officer's Club, and then
19 during the day went to see some of the headquarters people. And then I remember in Nha
20 Trang, I was supposed to catch a plane to Saigon, and I ran into a guy at the Officer's
21 Club. He was a headhunter pilot and flying those Cessna 172s, and he had a plane that
22 was going down for maintenance, so I hitched a ride with him to Saigon, and then hung
23 out with him in Saigon for two or three days. We actually—so I was able to extend my
24 time away from Phu Nhon to probably 10 or 11 days total. Gave me time also to kind of
25 wind down because I think most soldiers in Vietnam by 19—this is 1971 now, I think
26 that most of us felt like if you got to Saigon, that was relatively safe, and it was a much
27 more relaxed atmosphere down there in terms of security, than it was back in Phu Nhon.
28 It was nice to use that time sort of to prepare yourself for the real world in Hawaii.

1 RV: How'd you do that mentally?

2 RM: Went to bars. Went to bars and didn't feel like I had to look over my
3 shoulder all the time. Didn't carry a gun. That was a little weird because I went
4 everywhere with at least a pistol. But we hung out on the streets, and like I say, this man
5 whose name I have forgotten, a pilot, we hung out together, and then I think he was going
6 to Australia or someplace. I was going to Saigon—I mean, to Hawaii, but it was just time
7 to sort of relax and realize that the world is not constantly having to look over your
8 shoulder to see who's trying to kill you.

9 RV: Yeah. So when you get to Hawaii, what was it like for you?

10 RM: Very strange. I remember they took us off the plane, and then we went into
11 a holding area, and we were told about what it was going to be like to meet our wives or
12 girlfriends. 1971, if it wasn't our wives, it was girlfriends. Back in those days, if you
13 were married, you pretty much went to Hawaii. If you were single, you went to Hong
14 Kong or Taipei or Bangkok or Australia. Single guys, a lot of single guys going to
15 Australia. But married guys pretty much went to Hawaii. It was an easier place to get
16 your wife in and out of, it didn't require a passport for your wife, that sort of thing. But I
17 remember being in this holding area, knowing that the wives were on the other side of the
18 wall, so to speak, being told all about, you know, what time we had to be back and the
19 things to look out for and that we may run into some demonstrators, you know, that sort
20 of thing and then what it was going to be like when you were gone from your wives for a
21 long time. Just general stuff like that. Quite frankly, I don't remember hearing a lot of it.
22 I don't remember paying much attention; I just know that my wife is on the other side of
23 the wall. And then we processed through, and I remember my wife telling me—this is
24 not something I knew at the time, of course, but telling me that sure enough, I was like
25 the last one for some reason. How I got in the front—anyway, I was one of the last ones,
26 and then she said, 'Every single man that got off the plane looked the same.' We all had
27 dark skin, and we all had moustaches, and most of us didn't have dark skin or moustaches
28 when we had left. And it was really hard for her, even though she'd probably seen
29 pictures of me, it was really hard for her to see that it was me. But it was a nice time. It
30 rained everyday. It never rains in Hawaii, but it rained every single day. We had a car; I
31 remember we rented this convertible, and we couldn't ever even have the top down. But

1 I don't remember caring that it rained everyday particularly because I wanted to be with
2 my wife.

3 RV: What else did you all do?

4 RM: Little things, nothing big. Went to a movie, a real movie with popcorn, and
5 you know, where you couldn't hear the projector running. The movie was *Where's*
6 *Papa?* with Ruth Gordon and Rob Reiner, and Rob Reiner, it's one of his first movies,
7 and it had sort of an anti-war, anti-Vietnam subject matter to it; I remember that.
8 Laughing about it, it was a pretty funny movie. We went to a nice restaurant every night,
9 and that was fun. We didn't go see Don Ho; that's what everyone did. We didn't do that.
10 I remember feeling like I didn't want to do what everyone else was doing, so we didn't
11 do that, but we did go to some kind of other kinds of shows. But we went out to dinner
12 every single night; I do remember that. We talked a lot. When it was raining, we went in
13 the car, and like I say, I didn't mind that. We went all around the island. I don't
14 remember doing anything really big and spectacular. I remember watching the Super
15 Bowl from the bed because it was on there at 8:30 in the morning, and the game would
16 have been at 2:30 in the afternoon or something; it came on at 8:30 in the morning in
17 Hawaii. The Baltimore Colts and the Dallas Cowboys, I believe. So I remember that,
18 and then I remember calling my parents, and we had arranged that we would call on
19 Sunday, and both my parents and my wife's parents and my son were all together that
20 Sunday afternoon to receive this phone call, and my dad taped it.

21 RV: Really?

22 RM: Yeah, and we have that tape, yeah. It's really something. In fact, I have just
23 listened to it within the last couple of years, and it was really revealing.

24 RV: What do you sound like to yourself?

25 RM: I sound very young. I was pretty confident. The thing that is amazing about
26 that phone call and what my wife tells me about the week together is how confident I was
27 about, you know, I'll go back, and it'll be fine, and then I'll come home. And I don't
28 remember, as sad as I was to leave, I don't remember worrying about the outcome of my
29 life or anything when I went back. If I had known what was coming, I would have, of
30 course, felt differently, but it kind of tells me, and based on the things I said to my
31 parents, it kind of tells me that my tour up to that time, I was pretty comfortable with it. I

1 could not say that if you'd asked me those questions at the end of my tour because the
2 last four months of my tour were much more dangerous, much more exciting in respect
3 than was the first eight.

4 RV: Did you all talk about the war at all?

5 RM: Not a lot, I don't think. I do remember reacting a little bit to noises. To tell
6 you the truth, how much of this I remember and how much she tells me about it is a little
7 bit hard, but she did tell me a couple times that I jumped under the table on some loud
8 sounds and things like that. I remember being just amazed at how good everything tasted
9 and how, just little things, you know, bags of potato chips and stuff that just we sort of
10 took for granted that we didn't have back in Phu Nhon, we were able to have there in
11 Hawaii. I remember just being really, really liking all those little things. It seems like
12 it's always the little things that you miss. But it was a wonderful time. I'm so glad that I
13 did it, and then another 10-hour flight back to Vietnam, maybe more than that. I don't
14 remember exactly how long. It was a long trip back, I remember. And unlike going there
15 where I knew a lot of people because I had gone over with some of my friends I'd been in
16 OCS with coming, but going to Hawaii I was all by myself; I didn't know anybody. So I
17 was real sad going back, but I don't remember being worried particularly.

18 RV: What did you tell Maxine when you left?

19 RM: That I'd see her in four months. I think the big thing was Vietnamization
20 had kicked in, and we all felt like maybe our tour would be shortened by the president,
21 President Nixon, which it was. Mine was shortened by about 20 days.

22 RV: So when you get back in-country, and I assume you went right back out to—

23 RM: Went to Saigon, spent another day in Saigon, and then flew, I think, directly
24 from there back to Pleiku. And I don't remember when I got home that anything major
25 had happened while I was gone. There had been some personnel changes; some people
26 had DEROS'd out, and new people had come into the team to the headquarters. We had
27 a new major, Major Amberzack and replaced Major Major. So he was kind of getting his
28 feet wet, and I liked him. I thought it was a vast improvement, I felt, in leadership. And
29 so I was ready to finish my tour, so I got back, I guess, around the first of February,
30 February, March, April, so I would have, you know, three and a half, almost four months
31 left on my tour.

1 RV: And what do you remember about that first week back? Was it difficult for
2 you to kind of transition back into that routine?

3 RM: Yes, it was, but there were a couple of things that happened in that next
4 couple of weeks that were very positive. We had a visit from, I remember we had a visit
5 from the, I don't remember the acronym of the organization, but it was sort of the
6 equivalent today of Doctors Without Borders. They were AMA retired doctors who
7 came to Vietnam, and we would take them out into the villages. I remember one of the
8 doctors, he was probably well up into his late 70s, and so it was kind of our job to take
9 them into the villages and to do medical, physical examinations of a lot of the people in
10 these Montagnard villages. So I was sort of part of that, so I enjoyed all of that. Then
11 there was a visit by Donut Dollies, Red Cross, I remember. So those kind of things sort
12 of I always thought as being positives, as opposed to going out on operations.

13 RV: Tell me about the Donut Dollies. What do you remember about their visit?

14 RM: They were absolutely terrific. I remember them being, you know, putting a
15 woman that looks like an American into a village setting was strange because I'd never
16 seen that before, even though I hadn't been home long—or, been back not too long
17 previously from Hawaii where you saw all that, but in this context, they looked so
18 strange. They'd, you know, stay for a day and leave kind of thing. We weren't into
19 the—normally what they did was play games and stuff. It wasn't that way with a bunch
20 of advisors; that was what you did with the troops that had been out in the field for three
21 or four weeks. We weren't like that. We were, you know, more professional with the job
22 kind of the thing, so it was more just talking to them about, you know, what they did so to
23 speak. But I remember them looking very nice, and I took some—I have footage of some
24 of those visits from them. I was very impressed with them and very appreciative of what
25 they do. Very much so.

26 RV: So after these two weeks of some positive experiences, and I assume then the
27 kind of positive experiences end and things pick up.

28 RM: Yeah, around the first of March, we started seeing some signs that there was
29 new enemy activity north of us. We would hear the reports over the radio and things
30 about activity north of Pleiku, first, up around Kontum, NVA. We had not, other than the
31 one experience I'd had with sort of that scalp team, I hadn't been in contact with any

1 NVA. Everything was VC. We started hearing about NVA activity over at Plei Me,
2 which wasn't too far from us. And I had a friend at Plei Me who'd I'd gone to OCS with
3 that I sort of would correspond with now and then, and his unit was hit pretty hard at Plei
4 Me. So we knew the NVA were back. I say back because I don't think they'd been there
5 since the 4th Division had left Pleiku about a year earlier, year and a half earlier.

6 RV: Did it worry you that it was NVA, do you remember thinking—

7 RM: Yeah, oh, absolutely. I remember thinking at the time, 'These are the big
8 boys, this is hardcore, this is well-trained, and this is maybe bigger equipment.' So, I
9 started—I don't remember picking up on activities and going out too much. We did,
10 maybe I went out on another night ambush or two, but I started flying a lot. I started
11 getting into headhunters, these headhunters. I'd gotten to be pretty close to those guys,
12 and we had the landing strip there at Phu Nhon, and they would fly in, and so I'd jump in
13 with them, and I'd fly. I probably flew, I'll bet I flew three or four recon things each
14 week. What I was looking for, I was looking for movement, looking for big activity. Not
15 that they couldn't do it without me. Well, I guessed I sort of liked it for one thing; I
16 enjoyed it, and it was a way of sort of doing my part because I felt like, you know, I'd
17 been there nine months now, and I was pretty experienced, and I knew the area very well
18 all around there, so I did a lot of flying. Never really saw anything other than some, you
19 know, that I can honestly say, 'Whoa, they're coming,' or anything like that. But you
20 just had this sense that because it was happening everywhere around you, that it was
21 ultimately going to happen in Phu Nhon. And about, I think it was on the 14th of March,
22 we heard—we got a word down from one of the pilots, and I believe it was not a
23 headhunter, but maybe a FAC. The FAC Forward Air Controllers of the Air Force who
24 directed the F4 activity out of Pleiku Air Base flew these little Cessna push poles; they
25 called them push poles, you've got an engine in the front and an engine in the back. They
26 had a sighting between Pleiku and Phu Nhon, which was only 50 kilometers, they had a
27 sighting that they reported of armor. They couldn't tell exactly what it was, but the
28 description sounded like APC not like tank. And they reported it up to Pleiku, and they
29 reported it down to us, and then it never went anywhere. In fact, I remember the guys in
30 the radio booth there saying, 'That can't be true because the NVA don't have armor in
31 this area.' And it died on the 14th, and then the night of the 15th, at about 11 o'clock at

1 night, I was in bed, but I wasn't asleep. And the mortar started coming in. That was no
2 big deal; mortars had come in before, but usually it was one or two mortars hitting, and
3 they were usually, you could tell they were 60 mm; they were small. And usually it'd be
4 one or two rounds, and then what we would do would be run out of our hooch and go to
5 this bunker that I think I described that we had built on what would be the west edge of
6 the compound. But this wasn't one or two rounds; this was maybe 20 rounds, and they
7 weren't needing to adjust. They were already hitting inside the compound.

8 RV: And that was different?

9 RM: Oh, yeah, that was different. I could tell that this was a different kind of
10 attack.

11 RV: Did you speak up and say, 'This is different.'?

12 RM: Well, yeah, I went to the bunker, and then I remember some of the guys that
13 were going to other locations saying, 'They're hitting inside the compound.' They were
14 coming right into the middle. Not on the edges, they were right in the middle. They hit
15 our ammo—I mean, they hit our diesel, where we had our generators and set it on fire,
16 and this was right outside of my hooch. And they were falling all around us. I remember
17 running to the bunker and getting upstairs there and starting to fire flares to see what I
18 could see in the wires because the trip wires had gone off that we had out there.

19 RV: That's got to be a huge warning sign.

20 RM: Yeah, we know they're in the wire, but we don't know where. So I
21 remember what I had was an M79 grenade launcher, and so I remember firing flares in
22 the air, a lot of them. We had maybe four 79s up there and a couple of M60s, and I
23 remember flying the M79 flares and then getting on the M60s to see if I saw anything,
24 but I wasn't seeing anything. The reason I wasn't seeing anything- the trip flares had
25 gone off. The VC, in this case, there was a VC unit working with the NVA, were already
26 through the wires; they were already in the compound.

27 RV: Wow. You didn't know that at the time?

28 RM: No, no, didn't know that at the time. And I remembered doing something
29 that I don't remember that I'd ever done this on any other mortar attack, but I put my flak
30 jacket on. Not my pot, never wore that, but I put my flak jacket on, and I was in boxer
31 shorts; I was in my green boxers, and I think I probably even had flip-flops on. I don't

1 know that I put my boots on; I can't remember that for sure. But I had my M16, I was
2 wearing a .38-caliber Smith & Wesson, kind of a personal thing that I carried, and then I
3 had my M16 or a CAR-15, I don't remember which exactly, but it was of that—you
4 know, small arms. And I remember going up there, and then I remember turning around
5 and looking because from there I could look down into our compound, and I remember
6 looking down into the compound and seeing the diesel burning and the generators
7 burning. And of course, when they were on fire, then all the lights had gone out. We had
8 to go on auxiliary for our radios.

9 RV: Which was a purposeful shot to take?

10 RM: Oh, absolutely. They also brought in three mortars right on top, and I think
11 these were 81s or something of that; they were bigger than 60s. Brought it in right on top
12 of our NCO—that's not an accurate description. It wasn't an NCO hooch because—but
13 there were no officers living in there, so even though we had NCOs, we didn't break it
14 down like that. But where several of my sergeants were, those mortars came in and
15 destroyed that hooch completely. And so my first thought was, 'Well, they must have
16 killed them all,' because I can see that it was gone. It was literally gone, and I got
17 pictures of some of that destruction. Completely destroyed, and I didn't know where
18 anyone was, and we had a prick 25 in our bunker. And I remember I was up there with
19 Lieutenant Goram who was on the other MAT team and with Sergeant Rober, Ed Rober.
20 And the first thing that we did was we said, 'Ed, you can't be here, you know the rules.'
21 Ed was a member of—he was a sergeant first class, and he was a member of the—he was
22 our intelligence NCO, but he was also part of the Phoenix Program, the CORDS
23 program. And the rule was that if there was an eminent takeover, if it was a situation
24 where the NVA, the enemy, was to take over a compound, we were instructed to put Ed
25 in the most secure part of the compound, and obviously on the edge in a bunker fighting
26 was not the most secure place. So I remember saying to Ed, 'You need to go over to the
27 center of the compound, get over by the COMMO dump, which would be—I mean, the
28 COMMO Headquarters. That would be, theoretically, the safest place, that's where
29 Major Amberzack was. And I remember saying to Ed, 'You know where you're
30 supposed to be; you're not supposed to be here.'

31 RV: And why was he the protected? Because of the work he was doing?

1 RM: Because of the Phoenix Program, because of the work he was doing. That
2 was just the SOP.

3 RV: Did you all resent that or anything like that?

4 RM: No, no, but Ed did. Ed wanted to be out there with us. Ed's MOS was
5 intelligence; Ed was a career officer. I remember thinking how old he was, so he was
6 probably 36 or 37 at the time, and Ed wanted to be—I don't want to say that Ed wanted
7 to fight, but Ed wanted probably the security of people with guns because Ed was nothing
8 with a gun. Ed was not a—he would admit this, he was not good at fighting because he
9 had not been trained that way. Not a combat soldier. He was a thinker, he was a doer, he
10 was a spy, a spook, you know, all the things that we always kind of kidded about that.
11 And I remember Ed was wearing one of these African—and Ed was white, but Ed was
12 wearing one of these things that were popular at the time, that purple and gold and a lot
13 African-Americans were wearing back in the States, the Black Panthers and everything,
14 to show their African identity. I have no idea where he got that.

15 RV: He was wearing that?

16 RM: He was wearing that, yeah.

17 RV: That night he was?

18 RM: That night he was wearing it. He was wearing that, like I say, I was in my
19 boxers.

20 RV: Where'd you put your Smith & Wesson?

21 RM: I had a holster that was made—it was not an Army holster; it made down in
22 the village. It was made out of leathers, beautiful.

23 RV: I remember you talking about that.

24 RM: Oh, yeah.

25 RV: That night you've got it...?

26 RM: I had it hanging on my—I had my Smith & Wesson revolver hanging on the
27 post of my bunk, and that was just automatic for me, and my SOP was that when the
28 mortars came, I put that on. That was the first thing. I strapped that on, and then I
29 grabbed either the M16 or the CAR-15. It must have been a CAR-15 because I
30 remember where I had it in my room.

1 RV: It sounds like you struck quite a pose there in your boxers with your Smith &
2 Wesson on.

3 RM: Oh, yeah, I was a fighting man. So we all kind of were trying to figure out
4 what to do, where to go with all this activity. We knew they were in the wire.

5 RV: Was it loud?

6 RM: But we didn't know when. It was loud, yeah. Mortars kept falling; they just
7 kept coming and coming, and it was like I don't know how many rounds fell. A couple
8 of hundred, maybe, in those first few minutes. So the decision was, where are we going
9 to all go to ward off this attack because outside of this perimeter is an entire Montagnard,
10 probably two companies with their families, ARVN and PSDF—mostly ARVN—that are
11 supposed to be protecting us, and they're in the wire. And on the backside of the
12 compound, I don't know what's going on back there, and it was Vietnamese, so it would
13 be the district chief that would be in charge of making sure that everything's going on in
14 there. And the words that we're getting is, 'It ain't good back there,' on the backside, on
15 the east side was the most vulnerable. And the artillery, we had an American artillery
16 unit on the south side of the compound, and they were also in contact, and they had, you
17 know, 105, 155s.

18 RV: And I should note that you have a lot of pictures.

19 RM: Yeah, I was trying to find a picture of our compound. And that's a picture I
20 took the next day when I flew out.

21 RV: This is a picture you took the next day?

22 RM: Yeah, I flew up. We had to go out; we had a FAC shot down, so I went
23 down on that, so I took that picture from the headhunter. Anyway, we were trying to
24 coordinate amongst ourselves, but we didn't know where they were. So the decision was
25 made that I would go, and I cleared that with my major. At this time, we're not really—
26 I'm not like an officer in charge of my team because we've got people pretty much doing
27 their own individual things. I would have to say that as a unit, we were not prepared for
28 this. That is, we had not anticipated our compound being overrun. So, we were good at
29 operations out in the field, initiatives, but we were being attacked; we were totally
30 defensive at this point. So I remember running down from the top of my bunker and
31 running across the courtyard and going to the artillery compound with the idea that I

1 could get over there and coordinate with our MACV unit in our interior compound and
2 coordinate the external firepower that we were going to need. So I did that; I went to the
3 American artillery compound.

4 RV: Now the mortar's falling everywhere?

5 RM: Yeah, yeah, I mentioned that I was wearing a flak jacket because my flak
6 jacket, the back of my flak jacket was filled with shrapnel.

7 RV: Wow.

8 RM: So, I was smart, and I had a couple of pieces in my leg, shrapnel in my leg,
9 but I was not seriously wounded.

10 RV: Did you remember getting hit and just keeping going?

11 RM: I don't remember getting hit, no, no. I remember being in those flip-flops,
12 and I remember—but I don't remember being hurt even though I did get hit. I don't
13 remember it, remember even burning; I just remember trying to get over there. And I got
14 over there, and I called for—called Pleiku, and I called for Cobra guns. And I remember
15 the artillery guys lowering their cannons and being prepared to fire point blank because
16 they were on top of the artillery compound. I stayed over there about 45 minutes, and
17 then I went back, and it's a little unclear to me as to how I went back, whether I ran back
18 or whether I used a jeep because there was a jeep there, and I may have driven back. And
19 I got back, and the medic, our medic, the first thing he said to me was, 'Ed's dead.' I
20 said, 'What?' He said, 'Yeah.' He said, 'Ed's dead.' He said, 'We put him in the
21 bunker, the ground level bunker right outside of the COMMO Headquarters. He had a
22 steel pot on, and a Sapper that was in the compound threw a satchel charge, and it
23 exploded in the rock right in front of the bunker. And a rock, one rock, hit him right
24 between the eyes, right below his steel pot. One rock, wasn't even a bullet.

25 RV: That's crazy.

26 RM: And he said, I think, he says, 'We Medevac'd him,' and that's when
27 Medevacs started coming in. Not Medevacs, helicopters. Obviously the first one was a
28 Medevac. And this medic told me, he said, 'We put him on the chopper,' and he said, 'I
29 think he was dead when put him on the chopper.' Now as it turned out, when he arrived
30 at Pleiku, and his death certificate or his date of death that's showing on the wall of

1 information, is that he died on the 16th. I think he was killed on the 15th, but by the time
2 he got to Pleiku, it was after midnight.

3 RV: Right.

4 RM: But they told me later that when they got him into the hospital, he had
5 somewhere between 9 and 15 bullet wounds in his body, which would have been when
6 they put him—I think they put him on an outside gurney. I don't know if they got him in.
7 The only thing we could figure is that he got shot up as the chopper went off. Every pilot
8 that came in that night, we had resupplies of ammunition in the dark. Every chopper that
9 came in, the pilots were hit. Nobody was killed that I know of; I think everybody made it
10 out of there. But for the next all night long, we were in enemy contact, and I don't know
11 when I can say we got the compound back, but the Cobras came, and I went back up to
12 my bunker, and I was able to talk to the Cobras and have them work the perimeter.

13 RV: In front of you?

14 RM: In front of me, but also on the backside was where they were the most
15 activity was. And this went on all night until daybreak. The contact was all night long.
16 The Cobras saved us. I don't know that we would have been able to sustain it without the
17 Cobras. I think there were enough in the compound that the reinforcement was coming
18 in. We were able to take out those that were inside, but the Cobras worked the edges on
19 the reinforcements because it was obviously a ground, a planned ground attack.

20 RV: What did you do during this time? Did you stay in the bunker?

21 RM: Well, I had the trip across to the artillery round and the trip back. While I
22 was calling the guns, I was with the overhead bunker. We found, I forget, out in front of
23 my position, we found it was not nearly as many KIAs out there as there was on the
24 backside. Most of the fighting was on the backside, on the ARVN side of the compound.

25 RV: Do you mind showing me on the picture here where you're talking about?

26 RM: Okay.

27 RV: Of course people wouldn't know—

28 RM: This is the front side. This is looking west right here, and this is the
29 backside, and this is the artillery placement on the south side. This is part of the
30 compound here, and this was all troops all the way around this side. Most of the—the

1 NVA unit had assaulted from here, but the Sappers had come in along here and come in
2 here. This is Highway 14 that runs out here, and this is the road into it.

3 RV: And you are here?

4 RM: I was right here, yeah. I stayed right there. And then this is the NCO hooch
5 that I said, when I looked down, that's what I saw from my bunk.

6 RV: It's complete rubble.

7 RM: Yeah, complete rubble. This—I believe that's the diesel, the generator
8 bunker down in there. These are just all pictures that we took. We spent the next day,
9 when finally we could see, when finally we could have some daylight, we started going
10 out to the edges of the bunkers and kind of starting to do a body count. The numbers
11 were just incredible.

12 RV: Of enemy dead?

13 RM: Both. We had—this is where the numbers get really crazy because my
14 memory of it was something in the range of 100 enemy and about 75 friendlies dead, plus
15 Ed.

16 RV: Mainly ARVN?

17 RM: Yeah, and a lot of women and children because they lived in the bunkers
18 with their husbands. As it turns out, someone has done more research on this than I had
19 because there's a website on this, and the artillery unit claims 375. I don't think that
20 number's accurate; I think it's more closer to the 150 because I counted a lot. We put all
21 the enemy dead in the backside, and we formed a big pier out there, and then we burned
22 them.

23 RV: Were you in charge of that?

24 RM: I don't know if I was in charge.

25 RV: But you were there? This was in the morning or afternoon?

26 RM: This would have been in the early afternoon. We had to check each body to
27 make sure that it wasn't, you know, that there wasn't booby-trap—that they weren't
28 booby-trapped and things like that. I didn't find any, but you know, you hear about those
29 things. But we had to check everything out that way. I don't remember being in charge
30 of it; I think it was more like the ARVN were in charge of it. I don't remember carrying
31 any bodies myself, anything like that, so I think it was probably an ARVN detail.

1 RV: What was that like? I mean, burning human bodies.

2 RM: Oh, the smell is just incredible, but it was for sanitary reasons. What are you
3 doing to do with them otherwise?

4 RV: Did the ARVN have a problem with that, burning Vietnamese without
5 burying them?

6 RM: Didn't seem to, no, didn't seem to. I also, about noon of that day, I got word
7 that last night a FAC had been shot down just about 20 clicks south, and we were going
8 to try to get a party in there to get them out. And they needed somebody to go up and
9 direct that operation from the air, so because I'd done so much flying, I went up with a
10 headhunter, and we flew it. And that gave me a chance to see what was going on. I've
11 got some more pictures somewhere because that picture is not as close as I remember
12 taking it.

13 RV: But you took that picture the next morning?

14 RM: The next morning, yeah. So, it was an unbelievable night, and it seems like I
15 know so little about it in terms of what really happened, and I don't remember ever
16 caring very much. Now that I'm a military historian, I guess I have more of an interest,
17 but I read with interest. Never saw anything about it much in our own records. The *New*
18 *York Times* got a hold of it and published a pretty good article on it, which my father read
19 and sent to me in Vietnam about a week later and said, 'Was this you?' I hadn't read
20 anything about it. I remember we had this deal where, sometimes is something I'm not
21 necessarily proud of, but we had this deal where sometimes on Sunday afternoons, we
22 didn't normally try to work on Sundays, go out into the village and stuff, so sometimes
23 on Sundays, since I tried to send my wife a letter everyday, I would sit down on Sunday
24 and write five days worth of letters, and then each day when the mail chopper came in,
25 they'd drop of our mail and pick up our mail and bring in food and stuff, I would give
26 them one letter. And then next day I'd give them another letter, and I'd written them all
27 on Sunday. Oh, they all said the same thing anyway, so what difference does it make?
28 Well, it was a problem because the mail guys couldn't get in, so my wife went like a
29 week without getting a letter.

30 RV: She knew something?

1 RM: She knew something was going on because I think that's the first time I
2 hadn't written her, and then my dad gets this thing, you know, and he didn't want to say
3 anything to her. So he sent me this letter saying, 'What's going on?' So I did, I wrote
4 him back and told him, 'Yeah, that was us, and it was a bad night.'

5 RV: Were you honest with him? Did you tell him?

6 RM: Yeah, yeah, I did. I told him pretty much what had happened. Told him
7 about Ed. The thing that was hardest I sort of felt some responsibility for Ed because
8 even though he wasn't even on my team, he was sort of part of the district team, but it
9 was me that had said, 'You can't be here.' And you know, if Ed had stayed with me,
10 then you know, theoretically, he would have made it. We put him in the most secure
11 place, and then it turned out to be the least secure, under the circumstances.

12 RV: You couldn't have known that.

13 RM: Did exactly what the SOP called for. It seemed like the war was different
14 now. Every one of my best friends—and Ed was a really close friend because he was
15 older, and he was one of the funniest men, just a crazy man, just a likeable person. And
16 so we've lost one of our men, and our compound had been destroyed, I mean all the care
17 that we had put into building all these things gone. All those soldiers dead, and men and
18 women and children on the perimeter. Big body count, I thought, 'What the hell?
19 What's this plan here?' Well, I never did follow up. No idea, but within the last year or
20 so, I've gotten more curious, and so I've done some digging, and I did find this website,
21 like I say, that told about that night from the artillery guys' standpoint, not—because they
22 were a separate unit, they were supporting the engineers' efforts of building Highway 14.
23 But I read in Merle Pribbenow's translation of the After-Action reports called *Victory in*
24 *Vietnam* that was published by the University of Kansas last year. I read for the first time
25 the North Vietnamese account of that battle, and they talked about Phu Nhon. It's the
26 first time I'd even seen those words anywhere and about that particular night and how
27 successful they were.

28 RV: How successful they were?

29 RM: Yeah, yeah, so that means they went on and did some other stuff after having
30 hit us.

1 RV: How do you feel about that? You know, tremendous body count on their
2 side, and they call it a success.

3 RM: Yeah, but they killed a lot of our guys.

4 RV: And destroyed the compound.

5 RM: And destroyed the compound. It was a District Headquarters, and they did it
6 with us, you know, without us knowing it, so they were successful in the sense of being
7 able to do it without us knowing. I mean, our intelligence was obviously very faulty. So
8 I had an intellectual curiosity now that may become my second project. Not just about
9 the Battle of Phu Nhon, which I think will be a story, but I hope to roll it into the whole
10 relationship between Americans and Montagnards and everything into something more
11 by going over there and spending some time and asking some questions of people around
12 there. That's kind of a long reach plan, but the interesting thing about it is I think the
13 intelligence—remember I told you that we had all those mortars came right in on top? I
14 think the intelligence of our compound and everything was given to the enemy by our
15 staff, our Montagnard and Vietnamese staff.

16 RV: Why?

17 RM: On the bodies of some of the Sappers we found diagrams of our compound
18 right down to where each of us slept, my name, my wife's name, and my son's name.

19 RV: You're kidding. When did you find this?

20 RM: The next day as we rifled through the bodies.

21 RV: What was your reaction seeing Milam on an NVA—

22 RM: Seeing Alex was worse than that. Seeing people that weren't even there,
23 which means—because I had, you know, pictures of my son and my wife on my desk and
24 everything in my hooch. That was pretty wild, pretty wild.

25 RV: What was your reaction?

26 RM: Well, and then let me tell you this. Every single one of our staff were gone
27 the next day. Our cook, all our house girls, all of the guys that did, you know, the shit
28 burning and stuff, all those guys gone. Never saw them again.

29 RV: They disappeared that night?

1 RM: Yeah. They may have been killed by the enemy, knowing that they worked
2 for us, or they were kidnapped. And all of those people had been with me for almost the
3 whole nine months I'd been there. Gone.

4 RV: Does this piss you off or does this just shake you?

5 RM: I don't think so. No, no, not at this point in my life. Curious. I'm curious.

6 RV: But back then, what did you think on the 16th?

7 RM: I remember thinking, 'Gee, we're going to have to do our own cooking
8 down, Jim was gone.' We called him Jim, Montagnard. I don't remember, Richard, I
9 don't remember whether I was upset that it was inside or not. I don't know that I was
10 necessarily because, you know, I'll make the argument that whatever happened,
11 happened under duress. They put themselves in a difficult situation by working for us in
12 a combat zone, and so I don't know that I hold—I certainly don't at this time hold any
13 animosity towards them. But I'm absolutely convinced that the coordinates and
14 everything had been given to them by somebody on the inside because they didn't walk
15 anything in. They didn't even need a forward observer; they were right on target with all
16 those rounds (imitates rounds), right on target. The only thing that they didn't hit is they
17 didn't take out that bunker that I'd spent nine months building over on top of that trailer.
18 That sucker stood, and I don't think it even took a round. My hooch was not hit, or at
19 least there was no damage to it. The other ones were destroyed. So we had to rebuild, so
20 we spent the next month rebuilding things. But the funny thing is, we were never hit
21 again, at least in my tour.

22 RV: It was a one-time shot.

23 RM: It was like they moved on.

24 RV: Let me ask you a couple of questions, backing up, touching on a few points.
25 What was the purpose of putting Maxine and Alex's name down? Do you think this
26 individual or his commander knew this person probably would die or most likely would
27 die, most likely captured or killed, and that you all would find this, and it was a
28 psychological ploy to shake you all up a little bit?

29 RM: I don't know of that; it might be.

30 RV: Just a theory.

1 RM: My theory would be more that if they were to capture me that they would
2 have somebody that they knew had a wife and kid, as opposed to a single guy, and that
3 therefore, I would be more valuable than someone else. But my other buddies like my
4 friend Trung-uy Goram, Lieutenant Goram, single, and we saw his name on the diagram,
5 but he was single, so there was no one else to put on there.

6 RV: Were you all like, 'Holy crap, this is unbelievable.'?

7 RM: Yeah, oh yeah, 'What the hell?' So you can't call it an inside job, but they
8 had information that was given to them by someone.

9 RV: It had to have been leaked out.

10 RM: Yeah, I'm sure it was. And the Sappers had that.

11 RV: Right. Let me ask you another question, and obviously you don't have to
12 answer this. There's a gap in the story where you don't really, you know, after Ed was
13 killed until daybreak, this whole night what did you do? Do you remember your actions,
14 or were you running around, did you stay in the bunker and just—you said you stayed in
15 bunker.

16 RM: I called the Cobras from the bunker.

17 RV: I mean were you having to fire yourself as well as talk? I mean, do you
18 remember?

19 RV: No. The answer to that is I was not firing while I was in [the bunker]
20 because I think most of the action was on the backside by that time. The only time I fired
21 weapons that night was the M60. I fired an M60 when I had put the flares—when I had
22 shot the M79 with the flares, we saw movement in the wire, and I fired M60s, and we
23 found bodies the next day, and those were Sappers, but the Sappers were already in the
24 wire. In terms of the ones that were doing the damage, they were already in the wire.

25 RV: You were just preventing more from coming through?

26 RM: Yeah, yeah.

27 RV: Do you think they obviously targeted the ARVN end of the compound?

28 RM: Yes.

29 RV: Knowing that it might be weaker?

30 RM: Yeah, and I think we had a done a better job of fortifying the front end with
31 claymores. We had claymores; it was a solid front off Highway 14 there, between

1 Highway 14 and us. We'd really done a pretty good job, so I assume that they knew that
2 too, so they came in the backside. But the ARVN, I mean, the ARVN killed a lot of
3 them. Took a lot of tolls themselves. I guess, you know, you're living in a bunker. I
4 can't make an argument the ARVN didn't do their job that night. Ultimately, we got the
5 compound back. Now, the Cobras were terrific; the Cobras were terrific.

6 RV: Tell me about them. What do you remember about them that night?

7 RM: I remembered night fighting, my gosh, coming in at night like that, and I
8 remember them wanting us to mark our perimeter, and I said, 'Mark our perimeter?
9 We're on the perimeter.' You see where we are, you know, and you can't use smoke at
10 night very effectively, so it was like flashlights and things.

11 RV: Yeah, I was like, how do you signal them?

12 RM: It seems like we had flares in the air all night long. I don't ever remember
13 saying, 'It sure is dark around here.' And I don't even know for sure where all the flares
14 came from, but I'm thinking that maybe there must have been a spooky or something
15 overhead that was dropping flares because I remember the night being very bright, and
16 the Cobras not having trouble finding the perimeter, but they were firing, you know, 20
17 yards out in front of us, mostly with the miniguns. The miniguns were very effective.
18 Miniguns were safer, too, than the 40 mm grenade launcher guns because they have a
19 secondary explosion, but the miniguns you could really work it. So I think they had
20 pretty good visual sighting along our perimeter, and it was, you know, pretty distinct.
21 They could just see it, and we were sort of saying, you know, it wasn't like don't fire too
22 close to me; there wasn't an options. They had to fire the perimeter, and then we were
23 just kind of on our own. Stayed down as much as you can.

24 RV: They're 20 yards out from you?

25 RM: Yeah, probably 20 to 30, yeah.

26 RV: Must have been very close and loud.

27 RM: Oh, yeah, it was very loud, yeah, but the miniguns, like I say, the miniguns
28 are essentially firing like machine gun ammunition, and I think those are 762s. I think
29 it's the NATO round that they were firing. So, you know, it's (imitates round) like that.
30 The mortars stopped falling, remember that.

31 RV: How many Cobras do you think were involved in this?

1 RM: I think we probably had two teams of two, maybe. I don't know for sure, but
2 I think so. They were terrific, I mean, on-site at any one time, down from the Pleiku Air
3 Base or Camp Holloway, it was Camp Holloway that they were out of because they were
4 Army. But I don't know that they were the same ones out the whole night. I remember
5 them working several hours, and I remember wanting daybreak to find out what
6 happened, but I remember, it seems to me that at daybreak, it quieted down. But then, let
7 me show you a picture here. Then one of those interesting things happens. Everybody in
8 Pleiku wanted to know not only what had happened, but everybody wanted to be part of
9 it. So we get the colonel, light bird colonel, Colonel Dombrowski I believe his name was.
10 RV: Do you know how to spell that? D-O-M-B-R-O-S
11 RM: D-O-M-B-R-O-Y-S-K-I. Flew in.
12 RV: Is this him?
13 RM: Yeah. Flew in with his maps of the area. He was an artillery officer, I
14 believe, but he was not a combat veteran, so he flew in to get himself some combat
15 experience, and he decided to come in and start bossing everybody around.
16 RV: And this picture I'm looking at shows him with a steel pot, maps in hand,
17 standing in front of two jeeps with tons of sandbags on top of them. He looks fierce.
18 RM: He told us to get it as secure as it could be, so he was going to call in the
19 artillery and the air strikes from then on, which I thought was absolutely ridiculous. We
20 didn't even need help.
21 RV: Was anything going on? Was anything happening?
22 RM: Well, it was anticipated that it would be, and we would—anticipation was
23 there would be retreating NVA, and if we could work, you know, a five kilometer circle
24 around us, or say one to five clicks out, we could not only get a lot of kills, but maybe
25 keep that from happening again and that sort of thing. So, he was brought in to do that,
26 and I remember—and I say I remember this. I do remember it, but I have had it
27 reinforced in my mind in some follow up letters and things when I finally got a hold of
28 some letters that I had written to my wife after it's over. But I remember him chewing us
29 out for the way we looked.
30 RV: The morning after this all night fight? What's the reasoning behind that?

1 RM: I have no idea. I remember him really getting onto me about the length of
2 my hair, which obviously didn't grow just overnight. He knew that, I'm sure, and the
3 way I looked and the fact that my moustache was not in conformance with military
4 regulations, and I just thought to myself, you know, 'Sir, you want to tell me that, this is a
5 really bad time. I just lost my friend last night.' Been through all hell, and you have to
6 say something like that. I was probably still in my boxers, and certainly it was not a
7 priority with me that I should take a shower and clean up, nor with any of us. So, the
8 pictures that I took the next day, and I got my video camera out the next day, and I
9 videoed everything. In fact, it's on your website in my own collection, but I videoed a lot
10 of the damage, and I videoed and reenacted for the camera the—had one of our men
11 reenact the Sappers coming through the wire. And I remember in those videos, I'm
12 walking around without a shirt on, so I'm sure I was not his idea of the perfect officer at
13 that point. But it left a lasting image with me of field-grade officers wanting to be part of
14 combat when they're not supposed to be, they're not, and then coming in when it's
15 relatively safe and being part of the glory. That's kind of the way I took it.

16 RV: Obviously he knew about this when it was happening.

17 RM: Oh, yeah, yeah, where was he that night? We had a lot of choppers coming
18 in, could have been on those. Wasn't. And if I'm wrong about that, and that's my
19 memory, and if I'm wrong about that, then I just am, but that was how I felt about it.
20 And I remember Major Amberzack, our district advisor and all of our bosses were very
21 good that night, as was everybody, and then awards came down to us for that night's
22 performance. I think virtually everybody was decorated.

23 RV: What did you receive?

24 RM: I received a Bronze Star for Valor. The citation read that I had saved so
25 many lives because I had gone to the artillery compound and some danger to myself in
26 getting over there and then that I had coordinated the attacks with the Cobras and
27 everything from there and that I was providing the aid that we needed to repel the enemy
28 advance kind of thing. I think the highest—I think most of us got Bronze Stars with V
29 that night, and Ed was awarded a Silver Star.

30 RV: What about your wounds?

1 RM: I don't remember doing anything but putting a band-aid on. I've still got the
2 shrapnel.

3 RV: I was going to ask you. You didn't get that out?

4 RM: No, it's right there.

5 RV: You can feel it?

6 RM: Yeah.

7 RV: And you're touching your lower left thigh.

8 RM: Yeah, it's still there.

9 RV: One piece?

10 RM: I think there's a piece in my back.

11 RV: Do you set off metal detectors?

12 RM: Yeah.

13 RV: And what do you do? Do you tell them?

14 RM: Well, I have a heart condition, and I wear a pacemaker, so I can't go through
15 metal detectors anyway, so I usually set it off, yes. And when I'd go through, particularly
16 when I was in the business world, they'd say, 'Well, here we go again,' and then they'd
17 put the (imitates metal detector), the thing go off. But surprisingly, other than Ed's death,
18 I don't believe very many of us were injured that night. I don't remember any Purple
19 Hearts.

20 RV: How about the Americans?

21 RM: Among the Americans, yes, absolutely.

22 RV: You did not receive a Purple Heart?

23 RM: I didn't file, no, I didn't. I didn't do that.

24 RV: Why not?

25 RM: Ed was dead. Ed got a Purple Heart. Ed deserved it. I saw too many
26 soldiers that were really wounded, not that night, but just generally in my career, to think
27 that's not what Purple Hearts were supposed to be all about, so I didn't even file for it or
28 anything. I think I had a piece in my neck. My father—

29 RV: Have you ever had an x-ray to check this out?

30 RM: No. Oh, this one shows up, but, no. I was later in the lecture, or later in the
31 interview, but when I came home from Vietnam, the day that I came home, we were

1 ambushed on the highway, and I received a piece of shrapnel in my hand, and the scar's
2 right there for that.

3 RV: I see it.

4 RM: Yep, wasn't much, and I didn't file for it either, and my father swears that
5 when I came home—my dad's 90 years old, my father swears that when I got off the
6 plane that I had a bandage on my neck, and that it was from the shrapnel that I'd received
7 on my trip home. But I think he's forgetting; I think it's this because I don't remember
8 being hurt in the neck.

9 RV: On your right hand. See where you're pointing here. One question before
10 we take a break- on March 15th each year do you think about that?

11 RM: Every single year. I think—isn't that the Ides of March?

12 RV: I don't know.

13 RM: March 15th? I think the Ides of March.

14 RV: I think it is.

15 RM: I think that was when Caesar was killed. Every single year.

16 RV: What do you think about?

17 RM: It's just automatic with me that this is the night. I think paramount it's the
18 night that my friend Ed was killed, and I remember the reaction that I had at the wall the
19 first time that I went to the wall, which was, I believe, the year, I think a year after it was
20 up. It went up in '82, and I think this was '83, and I remember seeing his name in the
21 book on the outside there and seeing that March 16th date, and it just hit him so much
22 because—and I told my wife, I remember she was with me. I said, 'You know, he was
23 killed the day before that,' and that was, you know, 11 years after it happened, or 12
24 years after it happened, and I think that for the ensuing 12 years, maybe I didn't think
25 about March 15. I think I was in that whole denial period that so many veterans were, but
26 once the wall was up, those memories came back, and so now, you know, I know that
27 line 53, 4E is Ed's name. And a few years ago, surprisingly, when I went on my first
28 Run for the Wall trip to Washington with the bikers, I, of course, went to the wall and did
29 a tracing of Ed's name. And then about nine months later, six to nine months later, I was
30 on an airplane, and I was still in the business world then, and I was flying somewhere,
31 and *Easy Rider* magazine, biker magazine always does a story on the Run for the Wall

1 Memorial Day trip into Washington. And of this huge wall with 58,000 names on it, they
2 took a picture, and right in the center of that picture is Ed's name.

3 RV: Wow.

4 RM: I mean, they could have taken that picture from any angle, and if probably
5 not more than 50 names, but Ed's name is right in the middle of that, and I saw it on this
6 airplane and said, 'My goodness.' So that's the meaning of the wall for me. I'm
7 fortunate that I have very few friends' names on that wall. Mostly guys that I went to
8 OCS with. Ten, maybe at the most, or people that I know, but Ed's is on there, and Ed
9 was my good friend, and I was essentially with him when he died, even though I did not
10 put him on the chopper; that was—but it happened with me that night. And I think about
11 the other veterans that have, you know, hundreds of buddies' names on there, and, you
12 know, the guys that we were so fortunate to talk to that survived the Battle of the Ia
13 Drang Valley that have hundreds of names of buddies on there and just want an impact
14 that one name has on me that was so close. Because there's something about when you
15 see that name, you see it in the book first of all. You see it in the book, and you see the
16 name, and you see the date that they died, and you know that was the date. There's no
17 question; you were there, you know it. And then to have, you know, hundreds of names
18 like those Ia Drang [...]. Tells you the power of that memorial. But the Battle of Phu
19 Nhon, and I call it the siege of Phu Nhon because it was truly a siege, was, you know, the
20 most memorable, probably if I had to pick one night of my life before then, and I'd never
21 had anything before then and haven't had anything since then that made a more profound
22 impact on me than that night because I know how close we came to all losing our lives
23 that night. And the Cobras and some pretty brave ARVN I think saved us. It was an
24 incredible night.

25 RV: When you saw the Cobra out there, what, two weeks ago at Memorial Circle,
26 Texas Tech University, did you think about that?

27 RM: Oh, absolutely, I told Maxine my wife, I said—she was there with me, I said,
28 'I'm not sure I've seen one of these that close since March 15th.' At least I don't
29 remember that I have.

30 RV: And she knew what you were talking about?

1 RM: Oh, yeah, yeah. She knew all about it. Well, and we went back to Phu Nhon
2 on our trip back in 2001, we went right to the place that this had all happened and
3 photographed it. So, yeah, it was an important night.

4 RV: Let's take a break, Ron. You ready to go?

5 RM: Yeah.

6 RV: Ron, tell me about post-March 15th, 16th, and you rebuilt the compound you
7 said. How long did that take?

8 RM: About two weeks. Not very long. We got some tin, and I remember really
9 putting some big effort into rebuilding it, and we got some Vietnamese to help us, and we
10 got that up and running. It was mostly rebuilding that one, well, the two big things were
11 the generator compound because it was down and had sandbags on top, so it was a low-
12 grade. And then where most of the NCOs lived we had to rebuild it. A funny and
13 humorous story in all this mess about that was in addition to my other jobs, I was the
14 designated property officer for the district team, and that particular night when the
15 mortars came in, we had a big poker game going on. I wasn't playing that night, but
16 there was a pretty good poker game going on, and we had about close to 1000 dollars in
17 military script on the table that a mortar round got.

18 RV: (laughs) That didn't sit well, did it?

19 RM: No, no, it was one thing to have to fight your way and stay alive, but man,
20 you don't want to lose a 1000 dollars, so that was a lot of money back in 1971. So I put
21 together a little bit of a phony report about what was lost, and then when the government
22 paid off, we distributed the funds, and then it was like, 'Whose money was it?' And
23 everybody claimed that they were winning at the time that mortars hit.

24 RV: And you weren't there.

25 RM: I wasn't there. I had to rely on what everyone was telling me, so I guess
26 they came up with—that was almost at the time I left, so I think I said, 'Here it is, you
27 guys fight over who gets it.' But I had to say that, you know, there were a lot of personal
28 effects lost up to the tune of this 1000 dollars.

29 RV: Did you have to list them?

1 RM: Yeah, I just made stuff up about what—if you had put down 1000 dollars in
2 military script on the table at a poker game, I don't think the government would have
3 paid, so I had to call it other things in order to get the money. But we did it.

4 RV: Let me ask you this- did you all hire back local Montagnards or South
5 Vietnamese to come back in and be the hooch maids and the cooks?

6 RM: Yes.

7 RV: What was involved in that process, and were you leery?

8 RM: I don't remember, and I wasn't involved in it. I don't know how the hiring
9 went. I left about six weeks later, and I don't remember whether I even had a house girl
10 doing my—I mean, someone was doing it, but I was very close to—I had two girls that
11 kind of worked for my end of the thing, and I was very close to them, and I don't
12 remember getting that close to anyone after that.

13 RV: You never saw those two again?

14 RM: Never saw them. When we went back to Vietnam four years ago, I carried
15 their pictures in my wallet, and when we got to Phu Nhon, I was ready to start pulling out
16 pictures and ask them questions, and I kind of froze up and decided not to do that. I think
17 I was scared of the answer that I might get because the two, one girl I remember was like
18 14 and one was 16, and they were beautiful Montagnard women. Chu and Ki.

19 RV: C-H-U?

20 RM: I don't know.

21 RV: Ki, K-I, K-H-I?

22 RM: I don't know, I don't know. That's what we called them. And I don't know
23 how I would have felt if showing those pictures around, someone would have said, 'Oh,
24 that's so and so's daughter, and she was killed on March 15th.'

25 RV: Because you don't know if she was kidnapped and executed or anything.

26 RM: I don't know, and I don't know whether I want to know that now. I thought
27 about—I made some contacts over there with some guide people that work out of Pleiku,
28 and I thought about, you know, scanning their pictures and sending them over and having
29 them look and stuff. And the funny thing is, I didn't carry those pictures. This is another
30 subject, but I had my wife carry those pictures because I was so concerned about when I
31 went back about being a veteran and everyone knew that I was a veteran. All my guides

1 knew I was a veteran and having stuff on my person, you know, that would tie that
2 together, so I had her just sort of stick it into her wallet because I knew she would be less
3 suspect than me. But I lost my nerve. I did ask questions about my interpreter, for
4 example, because my interpreter who I just loved, Ramar Hecht was his name. I think it
5 was R-A-M-A-R H-E-C-H-T. Oh, he spoke such good English. He was Montagnard.
6 And I did ask the question of one of my guides, I said, you know, asked because all these
7 people were assembled around us there in the area. I said, ‘Ask him about Ramar Hecht,’
8 and one guy said, ‘Oh, yes, I believe he is an old man. He lives up in the mountains.’
9 And I thought to myself, ‘He was an old man; he was about five years younger than me at
10 the time.’

11 RV: (laughs)

12 RM: But I would particularly like to know what happened to him because he
13 disappeared also, and he was so good, and not just as good as an interpreter, he was a
14 good soldier, good fighter. He was a civilian, but he was also—he could speak both
15 Vietnamese and Jarai. We were in a Jarai area.

16 RV: He doesn’t seem like one who would be a double agent.

17 RM: I don’t think he was. I mean, I have trouble even thinking that the girls were
18 that, but I just assumed that he was, you know, maybe kidnapped and killed. Well, I
19 don’t know the answer to that.

20 RV: Did you want to go up and see him?

21 RM: Yeah.

22 RV: I mean, he was obviously a long distance up.

23 RM: Yeah, and I had so much trouble even being where I was. It was not a good
24 experience from the standpoint of my guide didn’t want us to be there because Phu Nhon
25 is an off-limits place for Americans. There’s a lot of ethnic—at least in 2001, I think it’s
26 gotten worse according to my friend Lap Sui who’s a student here at Texas Tech. He is
27 from that area and knows a lot of the people, and it’s getting worse since then. So, if I go
28 back, it will be hard for me to go back and spend any time there, I’m sure, until things get
29 better because there’s a lot of problems between American GIs, Special Forces
30 particularly out of Ft. Bragg that communicate with the Montagnards in the Central
31 Highlands, even to this day. Everyone doesn’t like us, like our involvement with them.

1 RV: The United States government or the Vietnamese government? Obviously
2 Vietnamese.

3 RM: The Vietnamese government doesn't like all our United States involvement
4 with the Montagnards in the Central Highlands unless it's very definitely a humanitarian
5 kind of thing. When I talk to people around here, they go to Vietnam all the time.
6 Nobody goes to the Central Highlands.

7 RV: No, they don't.

8 RM: I did. I went back there.

9 RV: We'll talk about that a little bit later. Go ahead and walk us through your
10 remaining weeks there in-country.

11 RM: The couple of weeks up to April 1st, we tried to rebuild things, and then I
12 took an R&R to Hong Kong. We were allowed to take—actually took a leave. We were
13 allowed to take one R&R that didn't count against your leave time, and I had 30 days
14 leave that they would pay you for if you went home. If you went home, you'd get a
15 check for, and I was going to do that, but one of my friends Lieutenant Goram wanted to
16 go to Hong Kong, so he and I both went to Hong Kong together. Ostensibly, the reason I
17 went was so that I could buy a wardrobe of clothes. I'd been in the Army for three years,
18 I was going to come home, hopefully get a job, and so it made sense that I tried to buy
19 some clothes. So I went there and bought a wardrobe. Spent a week there, it was fun. In
20 fact, I was there at the time that the American Ping-Pong Team played in Beijing. It was
21 the first time that Americans had been involved. This was before Kissinger, before
22 Nixon went back and everything. Ping-Pong plomacy, and I remember the people in
23 markets standing in the market areas watching on television these Americans playing
24 ping-pong up in Beijing; it was a really big deal. That was my first trip to Hong Kong.

25 RV: What was Hong Kong like?

26 RM: It was very nice, very western, and this would have been before the turnover,
27 of course, before the announced turnover to the British—I mean, to the Chinese, so it's
28 still a British commonwealth. And I remember having a wonderful time. We had been
29 given the name by somebody that had been there of a woman who, she was actually from
30 Pakistan, Pakistani guide that would take us everywhere. So, the two of us hired this
31 woman to essentially be with us anytime we wanted. She had a driver and a Mercedes,

1 and she took us all over, and then everyday for a couple of hours, we would go to this
2 tailor who would do measurements on us and to a boot maker, shoemaker that would
3 make us shoes. And boy, I came home with a lot of really nice stuff. Very good quality
4 stuff.

5 RV: Was it a good, you know, get out of Vietnam trip for you?

6 RM: Yeah, and you know, when I think back on it, I think of my motivations for
7 going and everything. I think part of it was because I just was not real confident that I
8 was going to make it home after what I had just been through. I remember being pretty
9 scared after that, but on the other hand, I don't remember being so scared that I didn't,
10 you know, get into that headhunter and fly down and look for that FAC, which we found,
11 incidentally. Rescued him, yeah. I didn't go hunting on the ground; I stayed on the air,
12 and we sent a unit in of Vietnamese, and I don't know whether we had any of our own
13 people on it or not. I assume we did, but I watched it from the air, watched the pilot be
14 pulled out. He was saved, and then we brought in a Jolly Green Giant and brought the
15 plane up. And I did all that, I mean, I flew on all those missions. Don't remember
16 particularly being scared about going into Pleiku on the jeeps, and I did that. Ran the
17 highways. Went out on one more night ambush is all.

18 RV: For you or to go, did you know you had to go out?

19 RM: Probably. I don't know. Major Amberzack was not that kind of a guy. I
20 think he would have probably said, 'We need to do this, who wants to go?' And I was
21 becoming a short timer, you know, with a month left, but I went out. So either, yeah, I
22 had a lot of respect for him, so if he thought it was something I should do, I did it. But I
23 remember being really scared on that night ambush and knowing it was my last one. So,
24 I don't remember thinking—I remember being scared, thinking to the point of anytime
25 that I'm not here, I've got a better chance of surviving, and I think that was part of the
26 motivation for going to Hong Kong, in addition to being able to get the wardrobe. But
27 then, the last—I sort of remember my last two weeks of being in Phu Nhon. That would
28 have been probably from about the last week of April to the first week of May because I
29 think I left Phu Nhon around the first week of May. I remember saying, 'For the next
30 two weeks, I volunteer to pull radio duty every night,' and as officers, we didn't have to

1 do that. Most of the time, we'd pull a couple of hours. I said, 'I will pull all night RTO
2 duty, and I'll sleep during the day.'

3 RV: Why did you do that?

4 RM: It was the most secure place in the compound.

5 RV: And everybody knew that?

6 RM: See, I didn't think we'd be subject to another ground attack, but I did think
7 we'd be subject to being mortared, and that had the best mortar protection. The depth of
8 sandbags and everything was the best there, plus you could do some good. It comes in,
9 you know it first because you're up, and you're awake. So, I remember volunteering.
10 Now, it may not be two weeks. In my own mind now, it's two weeks, but it may have
11 been, you know, three days or something, but I remember saying, 'I ain't going anywhere
12 at night. I'm not sleeping. I'm staying awake through the night to make sure that I
13 survive.' I remember really feeling that way.

14 RV: Did you tell others that?

15 RM: Yeah, yeah.

16 RV: Were they okay with it?

17 RM: I don't know. I think so because I don't remember that anyone was upset
18 with me. They had a really nice party for me when I left. I remember we drank nine
19 bottles of champagne, and there was about seven of us that drank it. I remember being
20 really hungover the next day, and I remember some really nice speeches, and I remember
21 they gave me some really nice stuff. Some plaques, and they gave me some beautiful—
22 Montagnards gave me some beautiful sabers that I have on my wall at home now with tea
23 candles. And I remember several plaques that were given to me and stuff. Montagnard
24 table clothes and things. It was a really nice party.

25 RV: Do you remember what they said? The speeches?

26 RM: Not particularly.

27 RV: I mean, that's hard.

28 RM: We laughed.

29 RV: So many years ago, plus the champagne.

30 RM: Yeah, exactly, and I remember laughing a lot, and I remember there were a
31 lot of Montagnards there. I wanted some of the village people to be there that had meant

1 something to me. But the part that's so troubling for me that I don't remember is like
2 none of the staff were still there. They were all gone, so if we replace them with other
3 staff, I don't remember that, so someone else did it. I remember I was going home May,
4 around May 5th or so, and I had gotten there in Vietnam May 25th, so I was about 20 days
5 early. So I probably left maybe three or four days even before that, but I remember I had
6 these buddies from the engineering compound that you've heard me talk about that were
7 out on that operation with me way back in October. And those guys became really close
8 friends, so they all came to the party, and I remember saying, 'Hey, you guys spend the
9 night, and go with me to Pleiku tomorrow. I'd like to have you in my convoy.' And we
10 had kind of an unwritten rule that whenever someone went home, we would put a
11 massive convoy together of jeeps and .50-cal machine guns and if we could get a deuce
12 and a half, an armored gunship or a road ship, we would do that to just secure it. And
13 that's what we did. We put together a hell of a—I bet you we had six or seven jeeps, and
14 we had this deuce and half up front. And I remember saying, 'I don't want to ride in the
15 jeep. I want to ride in the deuce and a half and the gunship.' We had this big deuce and a
16 half that we had armor plating on the side of, and I remember we were almost to Dragon
17 Mountain, which is the big mountain just south of Pleiku, and we got hit. We got
18 ambushed.

19 RV: What were you thinking?

20 RM: 'Oh, shit. Not again. How can this be?' And I remember jumping down off
21 the deuce and a half and getting down into prone position and firing my weapon and all
22 that stuff and going off into the—chasing whoever fired at us. We found some blood
23 trails but no bodies. And I looked down, and my hand was bleeding, and I think that was
24 actually, I think what happened is a B40 rocket bounced off that armored plating, and a
25 piece of the plating of the vehicle got into my hand. I think it wasn't really shrapnel from
26 the 40; it was shrapnel off the side of the thing. I don't know for sure.

27 RV: And without the armor plating, you wouldn't have gone in.

28 RM: Oh, yeah, yeah. And it was probably dumb to be riding back there instead of
29 maybe in shotgun in a jeep, I don't know, but it just seemed like I'd like to be up there
30 high and everything on my last trip home. And sure enough, we get hit.

1 RV: What were you thinking when you're laying down there prone and firing
2 your weapon? Were you just—

3 RM: 'Am I ever going to get out of here?' Then we went to Pleiku. Had to
4 process out. That's when I met John Paul Van. John Paul Van was just coming in as the
5 new II Corp advisor, taking the place of, I think he was taking Squires place, I can't
6 remember exactly. And he came to my awards ceremony where I got two Bronze Stars.
7 I got the Bronze Star with V, and I got a Bronze Star for Service, and maybe they
8 awarded me my—because I had an RCM with a V device also that they hadn't given me.
9 Anyway, two or three other things, and they awarded that. He shook my hand, and he
10 stood there. He wasn't really part of it, but he was there. That was the first time I'd met
11 and the only time I ever met him. Of course, he went on to become—and I didn't know
12 who he was. I don't know that I thought, 'Oh, that's John Paul Van,' because he was not
13 somebody that, by that time, had grown into any great favor, and then of course, he was
14 killed a year later near there. So, they had my awards ceremony, and then I got in a
15 chopper, and I flew to Nha Trang, which was the next step of processing out. By myself,
16 I was the only one. And I get into the—I land in this chopper, and then I get in a jeep to
17 drive me over to the Officer's Club at the air base. And the air base comes under 120
18 mm rocket fire while I'm there... and I remember thinking—and there was this
19 Philippine band that did James Brown that was appearing at the Officer's Club that night.

20 RV: (laughs) I don't mean to laugh at this, but can you—what in the world is this
21 band song?

22 RM: 'Oh, I feel good.' Oh, it was terrific. They were so good.

23 RV: Really?

24 RM: No, they were horrible, but I mean, as mimicking James Brown, they
25 weren't bad.

26 RV: Were they dressed in James Brown attire?

27 RM: Oh, yeah, long hair, and they had a little wig thing on.

28 RV: Did they do the whole showman thing with the cape?

29 RM: Oh, yeah, faint, whole nine yards. And I remember everybody was saying
30 because they had that rocket attack, no one was going to go. All these guys were scared,
31 and what happens—Nha Trang was sort of the central place where guys coming in and

1 guys leaving all sort of pass each other, and the guys that were just coming in-country, no
2 one wanted to go. 'Oh, no, they just got rocketed today. They're going to cancel that,
3 aren't they?' I said, 'They aren't canceling nothing. They throw rockets in here all the
4 time.' And I remember going to the show and thinking how stupid this was for me to be
5 sitting here watching this James Brown knockoff group when it's been under mortar
6 attack, under a rocket attack.

7 RV: This is post-attack?

8 RM: Yeah, their attack was about five in the afternoon, and the show was at eight
9 at night, and I had to walk from my hooch over to the bar there. The Officer's Club, it
10 was on the base. Walk over the Officer's Club, sit there and drink beer and watch this
11 James Brown thing after it'd been rocketed, and there was like nobody there but me and
12 you know, a couple of other guys going home. But none of these new guys wanted to
13 have anything to do with it. Boy, they were scared to death, and I thought, 'You know,
14 I've survived all of this and probably those rockets are random, so don't worry about it,'
15 so I didn't even think about not going. So I did. They next morning I flew to Saigon,
16 and we processed out in Saigon, and I ran into some of my old buddies from OCS that
17 had gone through 82nd Airborne with me and everything.

18 RV: They were coming or going?

19 RM: They were going home, too. And we had a few days to spend in Saigon, and
20 I remember—I don't remember the details too much, but I remember running into this
21 Vietnamese woman that wanted to take us to her house for dinner in Saigon. And I
22 remember that evening, jumping on the back of her scooter and going through alleys and
23 doing some really stupid things that night. Going to bars, going to her house for dinner,
24 and then she took us out barhopping in Vietnamese bars. We were in civilian clothes.
25 MACV officers sort of had the right to go anywhere, anytime. We weren't restricted like
26 the American GIs were, so we were not doing anything that was totally against
27 regulations, but it was really stupid.

28 RV: In the sense that this is your last night in-country, anything can happen?

29 RM: Yeah, and somebody could pick me off, or you have an accident on the bike,
30 I'm drinking too much. It was dumb, but it was exciting.

31 RV: Do you regret it now?

1 RM: No, I don't regret much of anything that I did. It's all part of the memories
2 now. But at the time, it was one of those things when I finally got, well, went back, the
3 next day I think we left for Vietnam—I mean, left Vietnam the next day, but it was
4 probably not one of those real smart things that—but I've always lived a little on the edge
5 anyway, and I think that's probably where it comes from is that, you know, if you've
6 survived that long, there's a couple of ways to do it. One is to crawl in the bunker, which
7 I had done in Phu Nhon, but then the other part of that is that, you know, you still want to
8 enjoy life, and it looked like we were almost going to make it, so therefore, I wanted to
9 appreciate all those last moments and the culture and everything, so we did.

10 RV: You were with your buddies?

11 RM: There was about three of us, I think, three women, three scooters. And they
12 were good-looking girls, too.

13 RV: Did you have to pay them to kind of take you around?

14 RM: I don't remember paying them anything. Maybe we did. We probably did, I
15 don't know. They were probably prostitutes, but they had really nice homes. I mean,
16 nice within that context.

17 RV: Maybe they were paid well.

18 RM: They maybe were. Maybe they thought there was going to be something
19 else coming that didn't because that's not the way I live my life and wasn't going to be
20 involved with any of that sort of thing. But it was an exciting evening. I was hung over
21 for about four days, I mean, I just drank my way home. One party to the next.

22 RV: So you flew out the next day?

23 RM: Yeah, I think we must have been in Saigon a couple of days. We had to turn
24 in all of our weapons and things. The one weapon that I'd been assigned way back a year
25 earlier, had to leave all of our jungle fatigues. We weren't allowed to bring any jungle
26 fatigues home. We had to be issued new greens. I was issued greens, and I forget what
27 the rule was, but it was like you had greens and you had beige, you know, your tans, and
28 I had gone over in tans, and I think I gave them all away. So I had no clothes, and I
29 believe the rule was that if you were coming back to—it was where's your final
30 destination? And my final destination was Detroit, Michigan, May 15th or 20th,

1 somewhere in there. And if that was your final destination, they had a chart, and the
2 chart said greens.

3 RV: Why?

4 RM: As opposed to if I'd been going to Birmingham, Alabama, it would have
5 been tans. It would be whatever the Army was wearing, their uniform of the day at that
6 location based on the season. That's sort of what I remember because I remember, like I
7 say, I left May 31st, and I left in tans, but I came home in greens. So maybe it's not that
8 elaborate, maybe everybody came home in greens, but I came home in greens.

9 RV: What's your rank at this point?

10 RM: First lieutenant. I was promoted while I was there. I remember wheels up,
11 everyone clapped when the plane took off.

12 RV: How'd you feel?

13 RM: Oh, yeah, I was really... I really sort of by that time thought I was going to
14 make it. And I remember coming into Travis AFB and wanting to get to a phone as soon
15 as possible to call my wife, and I didn't know how long I was going to have to stay there.
16 We'd heard rumors about one day, two days, three days, depending on what you had
17 wrong with you. We had to have a physical exam and what they find would determine
18 how long you had to stay, on your physical. But I remember calling and saying, 'I'm
19 going to be home soon, but I don't know when because I haven't had my physical yet.'
20 They let us make a phone call right away when we landed. I remember a big steak
21 dinner, and it was okay, but I remember it was not anything special because the Saigon
22 stuff had been kind of the way I wanted to go out, and so there was just a piece of meat at
23 a big military base, I remember. But I think we got in late in the night, but then I
24 remember—then we were bussed out of there the next day, I think, after we had gone
25 through our physicals. It was nice to be home.

26 RV: What did it feel like to be back on American soil? Besides just, 'I want to
27 get to a phone,' do you remember feeling coming back into your country what that was
28 like?

29 RM: It was something really special, landing, and I'm trying to think of where I
30 saw the protesters. The protesters I don't believe, I don't think they were on the base, but

1 they were—when we were bussed to, must have been to the commercial airport after we
2 had signed out and everything, I remember seeing protesters.

3 RV: What did you think?

4 RM: Well, it was pretty bad because they were throwing stuff at the bus.

5 RV: Really?

6 RM: Yeah, they had all these—

7 RV: Such as?

8 RM: Oh, I don't know, probably mud. Probably mud. And there wasn't a lot of
9 them, but maybe a group of 20. I mean, San Francisco had them assigned. And by this
10 time, there may have been less than there were earlier in the war, but I remember them,
11 and I thought how weird that was. I was not a gung-ho, believed in the war person. I
12 never was, while I was there, before I went, and I thought how silly it seemed, though,
13 that we came back to this. And then I remember a couple of incidents of my coming
14 home that stick in my mind. One was I took my physical, and my ears were a problem.
15 My ear chart—I had dropped off in one ear something like 40 percent and in the other ear
16 about 20 percent. And I remember them saying, 'You need to go over to this other place
17 and have a more definitive ear examination done, and if it holds, if these records hold like
18 we have seen them on the initial, then you would be entitled to benefits.' And I said,
19 'How long will it take?' and they said, 'Well, we can't get you in until Thursday.' This
20 was like... this was Tuesday, I believe, thinking backwards from when I actually arrived.
21 They said, 'That would be probably Thursday. You might be able to get in,' and I said,
22 'You mean, I have to stay here 48 hours?' They said, 'Yeah, and then maybe beyond
23 that, too.' And I remember saying, 'Well, what kind of benefits are we talking about if
24 my ears are as bad as you say they are here,' and they said, 'Well, you would be able to
25 get some points on the Civil Service Exam if you wanted to become a postmaster or
26 something.' And then I remember thinking, 'No, I'd rather have two extra days home
27 than sit around here.' So I blew that off. That may have been a mistake because I do
28 have bad ears, still do.

29 RV: Well, can't you put in a claim?

30 RM: I don't know. But I remember thinking at the time it was of no interest to
31 me. I have constant ringing in my ears, and I've had it for 35 years. Tinnitus, I guess it's

1 called. I've had that since I came home. Then I remember going to see the re-up officer,
2 this colonel.

3 RV: Did you have to?

4 RM: I think it was part of the processing. It was the next step on the thing. You
5 got this big form, and they just check it off, so you go to the next station. And I went in,
6 and he said, 'Well lieutenant, what are your plans?' And I said, 'Well, I don't know.' I
7 said, 'I've been trying to go back to school, get my Ph.D.'

8 RV: Even then you thought about that.

9 RM: Yeah, yeah. I said, 'That's still out there.' And he said, 'Well, I'd sure like
10 to talk to you about re-upping.' He said, 'You've got the right MOS, 71542, Airborne
11 qualified platoon leader, small unit commander.' He said, 'You've got the right MOS.'
12 He said, 'You've got a lot of decorations.' He said, 'You could have a real good career
13 in this man's Army.' I said, 'What would be my next duty station?' And he said, 'Well,'
14 he said, 'You can go anywhere in the world for one year. We'll send you anywhere you
15 want to go, any duty station.' He said, 'Either accompanied or unaccompanied,' meaning
16 my wife. And I said, 'And then?' And he said, 'Well, you'd be back in Vietnam
17 probably as a company commander.' I was two weeks from making captain, and I said,
18 'Well, colonel, with all due respect, if I were to do that,' I said, 'this next tour would
19 definitely be unaccompanied.' That would result in a divorce, I'm sure. I'd survived one
20 tour, and so I told him that there was no interest on my part in that. So I did not re-up.
21 So I went home, and I arrived back in the airport there at Metpol Airport in Detroit,
22 Michigan about noon on a Saturday, the day before Mother's Day.

23 RV: And at the airport, are you in civilian attire?

24 RM: No, you had to fly all the way home in military clothes if you were going to
25 have the military pay for your way home. Flew standby, I know that, and I remember
26 getting on the plane in San Francisco. There was a few others of us, and I think my plane
27 left at midnight, so we went to the bar, and we drank. Drank and drank and drank, and
28 like I say, for about a week there, I just drank all the time it seems like. And so I think
29 we left San Francisco about midnight, which would be three in the morning Detroit time
30 and then about a five hour flight probably. So it must have been earlier. No, it was not

1 noon, it was eight in the morning. It was really early. And my wife and my son and my
2 parents and I think my wife's parents were all there.

3 RV: Wow.

4 RM: And it was just really strange. And I remember going to my in-laws for
5 breakfast and having pancakes.

6 RV: Strange in a good way?

7 RM: Yeah, yeah. Had no idea what I was going to do. Had no job. I'd been
8 writing universities, looked pretty good to go to Arizona State and get my Ph.D. in
9 Business Management. That fell through. Michigan State offered me to go to their
10 Ph.D., but there was no money. There was a GI Bill, but there was not enough money to
11 raise a family on. There was no money for TAs or any of that stuff. Nobody offered me
12 that. There were no jobs; there just weren't any jobs.

13 RV: Let me go back to the airport greeting. What was it like seeing Maxine and
14 your son?

15 RM: Just wonderful. Well, you know, there was this image in my mind of I'd
16 seen the film—before I went to Vietnam, I had seen the original movie version of
17 *M*A*S*H*, and there was this great scene when Hawkeye comes home. He goes home
18 early from Korea, and he gets off the plane, and he walks down the stairs, and there are
19 all these people cheering for him, so that was lodged in my mind. Well, it didn't happen
20 that way. For one thing, there was no stairs to walk down because you go into...

21 RV: Jet bridge.

22 RM: A jet bridge, yeah, yeah, jet way thing, so there was nothing like that. And
23 there was no one there but my family, and I remember people just walking by looking at
24 me, not particularly saying hi. No one said hi or anything like that, other than my family.
25 There was a very caustic remark from one of my family members, not my immediate
26 family, but an in-law about, 'Let's get right on home and get him out of that ugly
27 uniform.'

28 RV: How did that strike you?

29 RM: Oh, it was terrible. I had a chest full of medals. I was really proud of them,
30 but no one knew what they were, and all of a sudden when I was in the civilian world, it
31 was like nobody seemed to be interested in anything that I said. I remember going to

1 breakfast, and there were a couple questions asked of me, and then I think I told you
2 earlier in the lecture—interview—that my wife’s family were very active in the anti-war
3 movement, all but her, and so when questions would be asked of me and I would start to
4 respond, I was always cut off before I could finish my sentences. No one wanted to hear
5 anything about what I’d done. Like I say, I didn’t have a job, and I remember—but I also
6 remember not being particularly worried about that. We didn’t have any money. My
7 salary would be cut off at the end of May, and then I think I had leave money for two or
8 three weeks, so maybe I looked at it like I probably had enough money to live through the
9 first of June, maybe the first of July. So I remember we bought a car, and we took a trip.
10 I needed to know my son; I didn’t know my son.

11 RV: How old was he at this point?

12 RM: He was 15 months, and when I left, he was three months, so you know, he
13 was walking and talking and that kind of thing. I remember going home to our apartment
14 after we ate the pancake breakfast with the in-laws, I remember going home to the
15 apartment and going in taking a shower and coming out, and I was black. I mean, my
16 hair was blonde, and my face was brown, and my skin was pretty much black, at least
17 from here and up because I never wore a shirt over there it seems like. And I was pretty
18 gross looking, probably, but I remember coming out of the shower with a towel around
19 my waist, and my 15 month old son looking at me and screaming and crying and
20 breaking into crying.

21 RV: Why?

22 RM: Well, I think I was the first man that he had seen in a towel in our apartment.
23 At least, I hope so. Didn’t know me, and I remember Maxine saying, ‘That’s daddy,’ and
24 he ran over the calendar, put his finger on the calendar because I was just a square on the
25 calendar because he had been told for so long, ‘That’s when daddy’s coming home.’ And
26 so, he put his finger on the calendar. That to him was what daddy was.

27 RV: Wow.

28 RM: And that’s better than being nothing, but I just broke down. It’s like, ‘Whoa,
29 we have some getting to know each other to do. We have some work to do here.’ And
30 all I could think about was, you know, I’ve been gone a year from him, but it’s not a
31 matter of me coming back into his life. It’s a matter of starting a life with him because he

1 didn't know the earlier part. And so we decided to take a trip, and like I say, we bought a
2 new car, and we took a trip to Myrtle Beach.

3 RV: Did you drive all the way down to South Carolina?

4 RM: Drove to Myrtle Beach and spent—I just wanted to spend nothing but time
5 with him. There was a party that—my parents had a party or my in-laws had a party for
6 me, and a lot of people came I think, and then we went to Myrtle Beach.

7 RV: Did anyone ask you, besides at the pancake breakfast, did they ask you about
8 Vietnam and the war and your experiences, and did you want to talk about them?

9 RM: I don't remember anyone asking me, and I don't know that I wanted to talk
10 about it anyway. I don't think I talked about Vietnam. I do remember I had taken all of
11 this footage, super eight footage. I probably had 20 hours of super eight footage, some
12 combat, mostly not, around the place. And I remember my father saying, 'Put that
13 together in kind of an hour long presentation, and we'll invite some'—my dad was an
14 officer in his company, said, 'We'll invite the president of the company and a bunch of
15 the people over, and we'll watch this.' And I did that, and I remember some people
16 asking questions about it, but I don't remember there being a great deal of interest. And
17 then, like I say, I had no job, and there was this organization in Detroit that was trying to
18 help Vietnam veterans get work and stuff. It was headed up by the President of
19 Manufacturers, National Bank, and somebody knew him, and they got me an interview
20 with him. And I remember interviewing to do that, but they didn't hire me. I literally
21 could not get work. I had an MBA, and I couldn't find a job. It was not a good job
22 market anyway, but I really had and developed, I think, a chip on my shoulder because I
23 went to so many interviews and couldn't find work. And I had been offered really good
24 jobs in 1968 when I got out of school. Had a good job offer in market research with the
25 Chrysler Corporation. Went back to see Chrysler, they didn't want anything to do with
26 me.

27 RV: Did you put on your resume that you had served in Vietnam?

28 RM: Yes, I did. I also grew my hair long, but a lot of people were growing their
29 hair long, but I grew it longer than that even, maybe.

30 RV: How long?

1 RM: It was shoulder length, but it was well manicured, I mean, I kept it trimmed.
2 Grew my moustache into a Foo Manchu but no beard. And I went on a lot of interviews,
3 and I didn't get anything. Finally my father got me a job at a gas processing plant in
4 Ypsilanti, Michigan, literally as a janitor's helper.

5 RV: With an MBA.

6 RM: I carried the toolbox for a janitor, and I cleaned up, and we changed spark
7 plugs in the generators and stuff like that. And I was hoping that I'd be able to start
8 school in fall at one of these places, either Arizona State or Michigan State—Arizona
9 State or Michigan State, yeah. So I took this job as a janitor, and then I got a call from
10 the Chief Financial officer of this big company that my father sort of worked for. It was
11 a sort of a [seriate?], wanting me to come in and work in the office, in the Finance office,
12 and I had been on the job there as a janitor for about a month, and I turned him down. I
13 said, 'You mean like wear a suit and tie and everything everyday?' and he said, 'Yeah.' I
14 said, 'Nah, I don't think I want to do that.' It wasn't that I was enjoying being a janitor,
15 but I just couldn't—I was so big companied or big institutioned out by the Army that the
16 last thing I wanted to do was to go have an ordinary job. So I turned him down, and I
17 didn't tell my dad.

18 RV: You did not tell your father?

19 RM: No, but then my father found out about a week later, and he called me up,
20 and he chewed me out. He said, 'You know, people are trying to help you out, and
21 you're turning them down?' I said, 'Dad, I'm just not ready for that.' I said, first of all, I
22 said, 'The money isn't that much better than what I'm making as a Union employee over
23 here at the plant.' He says, 'Yeah, but you gotta think about your future. You got a
24 family to feed,' and I said, 'Yeah, and I'll deal with it one of these days, but right now,' I
25 said, 'this is where I need to be is putting on that blue uniform everyday and changing
26 spark plugs.' It wasn't that I liked doing that, but I liked the people. They were kind of
27 like me it seemed like, you know, and my dad was so upset because my father was an
28 officer, Naval officer, and Naval officers and Naval enlisted men didn't hang out
29 together, and here I was an officer in the Army, but I was acting like I'd been an enlisted
30 man. That bothered my dad. So I just didn't want to go into that big office, so I didn't. I

1 stayed down there, and I worked all summer there, and then in the fall, my dad got me
2 another contact with a man who got me a job that sort of was in the office, and I took it.

3 RV: In Detroit?

4 RM: In Detroit, and then they moved me to Jackson—to Monroe, Louisiana and
5 Jackson, Tennessee. I was in the land department of this big company, and I did that and
6 spent 27 years with that company (laughs).

7 RV: What company was it?

8 RM: It's a company called American Natural Resources. It was the parent
9 company of Michigan Consolidated Gas, which is a big gas distribution company in
10 Detroit. And after spending 15 years there, they transferred me to Houston, Texas in
11 1985 as an assistant vice president, and I ultimately became senior vice president of that
12 company. So I made the right decision, I guess, to stay in, but I still always had that—I
13 put the Ph.D. thing on hold for a while. 27 years. And I did well in the company,
14 financially and everything and status-wise and everything, but those first years I just
15 don't remember wanting to—I just didn't want to take on any big responsibility. It's the
16 same reason I didn't want to stay in the Army, I think. I just was done being responsible
17 for something. I wanted to do something else.

18 RV: You were responsible for a lot in Vietnam. You'd been through, you know,
19 from directing the Cobras in the middle of a ground attack to just watching over your
20 Montagnard, your Jarai troops. I mean, there was a tremendous amount of responsibility
21 on your shoulders, and yours alone, in many, many situations. Do you think that played
22 into that?

23 RM: I think so. I just wanted some time off. I remember not even thinking about
24 security for my family. Looked like my wife was doing okay, apartment, little old one
25 bedroom apartment, kid was healthy, bought a new car. I don't even know how I did
26 that, must have saved some money. I think we paid cash for something. Maybe my dad
27 helped us; I don't remember. But I don't remember thinking, 'Oh, I better go out and get
28 some money here.' That was never it. It was not even a goal to make money.

29 RV: You needed down time.

30 RM: I think so. I remember everything I did that summer being I did things for
31 fun. I got these guys that I was with, that was working with, I loved them, but I

1 remember two or three days a week going after work to the topless bars and drinking beer
2 and getting drunk and you know, driving home not in very good shape. But I don't
3 remember that bothering me, and when I think back on it, it really upsets me because I
4 had a wife and son that that was two hours I wasn't with them.

5 RV: Did you tell Maxine where you were, what you were doing?

6 RM: Yeah. She didn't like it. And I did that for the whole summer, and it was
7 almost like I deserve this. I deserve this time with my buddies, even though I'd been
8 away from her and Alex for a year. When I think back on it, it really bothers me, and
9 when she reminds me of it, it bothers me (laughs).

10 RV: (laughs) She doesn't let you forget that time?

11 RM: She doesn't let me forget that. But I don't think she felt that she could
12 criticize me because if I said I deserved it, she probably knew I did, but she didn't
13 understand why I'd want to be with my buddies.

14 RV: (someone over intercom speaks in the background) Sorry. I'll edit that out.

15 RM: I don't think she understood why I'd rather be with them than with her and
16 Alex, and I, looking back on it, don't understand it either. But I did, I was just a—I
17 wasn't a very good husband that summer... or a father for that summer. But I was sort of
18 trying to enjoy life, I guess.

19 RV: Did Maxine ask you about Vietnam? Did you talk to her about it?

20 RM: She asked me—I had nightmares. I woke up a few times, and I think she
21 asked me about those.

22 RV: Did you tell her?

23 RM: Not much.

24 RV: Why?

25 RM: I don't know, don't know. I really got the feeling that nobody wanted to
26 hear it, and so I just clammed up. Didn't even talk about it. When I went to work for this
27 company and I started rising through the ranks as I did fairly quickly, I found that most
28 people—I didn't even know any Vietnam veterans. It was almost like I was the only guy
29 that went to Vietnam. None of the people that were above me, almost all of my bosses
30 and supervisors were four or five years younger than me and were over me status-wise,

1 and I took that to mean they had successfully avoided being in the Army, and therefore
2 while I was in the Army, they were able to get ahead, and therefore, they were my boss.

3 RV: What do you think about that?

4 RM: It bothered the hell out of me, but they were still my boss. But I don't
5 remember, I mean, it seems like I run into more Vietnam veterans now in my later life
6 than I did then, and I've always wondered, well, maybe no one wanted to—maybe no one
7 wanted to admit they were Vietnam veterans. I know it was part of that because I don't
8 think I ever took it off my resume, but I don't remember ever bragging about it. I didn't
9 wear pins; I didn't do any of that stuff. I don't think I would have ever told someone I
10 didn't go to Vietnam, but I do remember a lot of people that—I mean, I just don't
11 remember meeting anyone that said, 'Oh, yeah, I went to Vietnam, too.' Nobody, and I
12 was in a big industry with a lot of men. It was a men's industry. Nobody had gone to
13 Vietnam, and even to this day I think that's so strange, you know, that there was so few
14 people that actually ended up going.

15 RV: This is in '71 and '72?

16 RM: This would have been '71 and '72.

17 RV: There should have been people.

18 RM: Oh, yeah. I guess, you know, Detroit, Michigan, maybe just didn't, just a lot
19 of people were able to stay out.

20 RV: It's a huge city.

21 RM: Oh, yeah.

22 RV: I don't think so.

23 RM: I'm sure some did but not in my industry. Not the successful businessmen
24 type. They would probably had stayed in school with deferments, school deferments for
25 a long time. I did, so maybe they just—maybe there were just fewer.

26 RV: When did you first start talking about your Vietnam experience?

27 RM: Probably post '82.

28 RV: After the wall.

29 RM: Yeah, yeah. I don't remember ever—I do remember I mounted the knives
30 that the Montagnards had given me onto this really nice plaque, and I displayed those, but
31 I never displayed my medals until about six years ago.

1 RV: What brought that on?

2 RM: Oh, I don't know for sure. Probably what brought it on is my wife had them
3 put into a shadowbox and gave them to me for Christmas, so I don't know that I did it. I
4 think one of the things that changed my attitudes, '82 helped. The wall helped, but in
5 about 1993, I started riding motorcycles again. I'd ridden them there in the Army. I
6 started getting into Harley's, and I started going to biker rallies, and I started going to
7 Sturgis, and then I started seeing all kinds of Vietnam veterans.

8 RV: And you were able to talk with them?

9 RM: Yeah, yeah, and then all of a sudden, it became like there was this other side
10 of the world that Vietnam veterans were actually sort of displaying and being proud of
11 what they had done. So maybe I should rethink this hole that I crawled in, not that I ever
12 think—I don't remember saying, you know, being embarrassed exactly, but I just sort of
13 felt like no one cared. But then there was this whole group of guys with beards and long
14 hair and wearing leather vests and wearing their CIBs, and this was before I went back to
15 school. I was still a senior vice president of a large oil and gas company, but I started
16 acting like them. And then I think when I left the business and got into academe, and
17 then I could do anything I wanted, but I don't ever remember thinking a big deal out of it
18 until I got back into riding.

19 RV: Was it easy to talk to these gentlemen?

20 RM: Oh, yeah, yeah, really easy.

21 RV: Is it still easy to talk to these folks?

22 RM: Yeah, yeah, I enjoy being around veterans now. My wife and I have this,
23 kind of this funny thing, we talk about the stereotypical Vietnam veteran, and she'll point
24 them out to me. She says, 'See that guy over there? I'll bet you he served in Vietnam,'
25 and you know, there's only about 10 percent that actually look and dress like that, but it's
26 just kind of funny, I think. But yeah, I enjoy being around veterans.

27 RV: Let's go ahead and stop for the day, Ron.