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**The Vietnam Archive  
Oral History Project  
Interview with James Moran  
Conducted by Jonathan Bernstein  
February 27; March 28, 2002  
Transcribed by Jennifer McIntyre**

**NOTE:** Any text included in brackets [ ] is information that was added by the narrator after reviewing the original transcript. Therefore, this information is not included in the audio version of the interview.

1 Jonathan Bernstein: This is Jonathan Bernstein conducting an oral history  
2 interview with Mr. James Moran on the twenty-seventh of February, 2002 at  
3 approximately two o'clock Central Standard time, three o'clock Eastern Standard. Mr.  
4 Moran can you I guess start of by giving us a brief biographical sketch of yourself  
5 growing up?

6 James Moran: Well, I was born in Worcester, Massachusetts and grew up in the  
7 area. The first time I ever really left home as it were when I went into the Army in 1968.  
8 I was in my junior year at the University of Connecticut and had a modest disagreement  
9 you might call it with the dean of students over my academic standing. I was an English  
10 major and it was very difficult reconciling my conservative upbringing with what was  
11 happening on college campuses in 1968. Initially I had gone to try to join the Marine  
12 Corps, to get into their pilot program; I wanted to be a fighter pilot ever since I was a  
13 little kid. But just before I was sworn into the Marine Corps they changed their  
14 requirement to a minimum educational requirement of a bachelor's degree and even  
15 though I had an assigned flight class at Pensacola they decided they were going to send  
16 me to Quantico, Virginia to PLC and when I inquired as to what PLC was, they said  
17 "That's platoon leader's class." I said, "That sounds an awful lot like infantry Second  
18 Lieutenant and thanks, but no thanks." So I volunteered for the draft and was drafted into  
19 the Army. Whereupon I thought they'd make me a clerk or something of that nature

1 because I had three years of college but in the Army's infinite wisdom they made me an  
2 infantryman. One day, just on a whim I took a day off to take an examination for  
3 Warrant Officer Candidate School and I had absolutely no clue what a warrant officer  
4 was, other than the fact that it was an opportunity to take a day off. I had orders for  
5 Vietnam and those were cancelled and I was sent to Fort Walters, Texas for flight  
6 training. That's how I got into that mess.

7 JB: Now were pretty much all warrant officer candidates going to Walters for  
8 flight training at that point?

9 JM: During that period of time, yes and they came from various sources. There  
10 were some kids who, if I recall correctly and we were kids, eight and nineteen, twenty,  
11 twenty-one years old who enlisted directly into the Army for the warrant officer  
12 candidate program. As I recall, they took their basic training at Fort Polk, Louisiana and  
13 then were sent directly to Fort Walters. There were others who took a more circuitous  
14 route. We had guys in our class who already had tours as enlisted men in Vietnam in  
15 various capacities, some were infantrymen, some were helicopter crewmen, some guys  
16 like myself kind of meandered into it by a more circuitous route. So we came from  
17 various sources, at least among the warrant officer candidates.

18 JB: Now, how was the training at Walters, basic helicopter?

19 JM: Well, the syllabus changed over time. When I went through and classes prior  
20 to me, we went directly into the warrant officer candidate companies. There were four  
21 weeks of absolute hell; real live warrant officers chased us around, made life fairly  
22 miserable for us for about a month. We took academic classes, military and officer  
23 development classes, then we went into the flight program, which lasted approximately  
24 twelve weeks, primary training. Subsequent to the time I went in, the candidates would  
25 go into what we called the Snowbird companies before they came into the warrant officer  
26 candidate companies and they'd spend four weeks in the Snowbird companies getting  
27 what we got for four weeks and then they went right into flight training.

28 JB: Did you have any flight experience before entering the Army?

29 JM: Other than having an interest in aircraft and in particular military aircraft, no,  
30 in fact I didn't even know how a helicopter operated. I had absolutely no clue until I got  
31 to Fort Walters.

1 JB: Now the warrant officer instructors there were a large percentage of them  
2 Vietnam veterans or do you know?

3 JM: As far as I knew all of the military instructors were Vietnam vets. There  
4 were some civilian instructors and I never had contact with civilian instructors. Later on  
5 when I went back to Walters as a TAC (Tactical Air Controller) officer in the warrant  
6 officer candidate companies, Southern Airways, a civilian contractor was doing most of  
7 the initial training.

8 JB: Now, I guess getting into flight training, what type of helicopters were you  
9 flying, what were the academics like—?

10 JM: Well, academics took up half a day. During primary helicopter training, it  
11 was basic navigation, basic aero dynamics, this is what makes a helicopter work types of  
12 things, safety, heavy emphasis on emergency procedures.

13 JB: Auto rotation, etcetera?

14 JM: That, it just ran the gamut, I recall I flew in the TH-55A which was a  
15 Hughes, four cylinder Lycoming engine, not very heavy, pretty frail looking. As I recall  
16 one of the most feared situations you could get into in a TH-55 was what they called  
17 ground resonance and I never experienced it but essentially the aircraft just vibrated itself  
18 into a scrap heap. I don't recall what caused the situation but I remember it was like,  
19 "You don't want to experience this."

20 JB: How would you counteract that?

21 JM: I don't recall right at the moment. I don't think there was any way of  
22 recovering once you got into it, other than dumb luck. Some of the bigger guys—we  
23 smaller fellows, 5'9, 5'10 and under flew the TH-55s. But we had some big galoots who  
24 flew the Hiller OH-12 Raven and the Bell TH-13 Sue, at least initially. When I came  
25 back from Vietnam, the warrant officer candidate class that I had was taking its primary  
26 training on OH-58 Kiowas. I don't know if they were the first class to do it, and that was  
27 in, I want to say March or April of 1971. At the time I recall the Army had pretty much  
28 gotten rid of all the Ravens and Sues, at least for primary training and they were sending  
29 a lot of TH-55s to Davis-Monthan Air Force base for cocooning. I remember flying a  
30 couple of those ferry flights, most uncomfortable flight I've ever had in my life. Well,

1 take it from Mineral Wells, Texas to Phoenix, Arizona; it was quite a long trip for a TH-  
2 55.

3 JB: How many times did you stop on the way?

4 JM: I lost count; I know it was a two-day trip.

5 JB: So how long was the training at Walters and then I assume you went on to  
6 Rucker after that?

7 JM: At Walters initially was sixteen weeks and I believe Rucker was the same.

8 JB: And Rucker you were transitioning into Hueys?

9 JM: Well, Rucker was the most interesting training. By the time we got there we  
10 had a fair amount of flight time under our belt. Initially we were put in TH-13s for  
11 instrument training and that was a lot of fun as I recall—hard work but a lot of fun. That  
12 was augmented with a number of hours in Link trainers, which they were rather primitive  
13 simulators.

14 JB: They didn't actually have more modern simulators at that point?

15 JM: No, we were using the Links, using Link trainers. It was more difficult flying  
16 that thing, we called them the Blue Canoes because they were painted blue—that was  
17 more difficult than actually flying and the H-13 was very stable and forgiving as far as an  
18 instrument platform went. But we'd do max performance takeoffs from the ground  
19 totally blind, under the hood, fly for an hour to an hour and a half, total instrument flight  
20 rules, never saw the outside of the aircraft, would take ground controlled approaches to  
21 minimums and then the instructor pilot would take over or we would be allowed to look  
22 up and kick the hood back and make a visual approach the remainder of the way.  
23 Sometimes they would do it just to scare us, if we were really screwing up and off in the  
24 woods somewhere. So we went through that and then it was transition into the Hueys. I  
25 think that was for all of us in flight school at the time, that was the rite of passage. Once  
26 you got into the Hueys, you pretty much knew you were going to make it unless you did  
27 something of a disciplinary nature that got you washed out. That was a big thrill, when  
28 you got of those little bubbles and you're really sitting inside something that was  
29 substantial and we're all a little intimidated by it and a little amazed by it. One of the  
30 first time the instructor pilot let you have the controls to pick it up to a hover, and you  
31 didn't kill yourself. It was kind of like, "Hey, I can do this."

1 JB: What was it like learning to hover?

2 JM: Well, the first time and I'm sure there are some films available of it. But the  
3 instructor would, first thing he would do is he'd take up to the hover and somewhere on  
4 the stage field where there was plenty of room and just let you have the pedals and he'd  
5 just say, "Keep it pointed at that tree." Of course we'd overcorrect, start moving a little  
6 bit, the next thing you knew the helicopter was just yawing back and forth, ninety degrees  
7 in either direction. Once you sort of mastered that, he'd just give you the stick, the cyclic  
8 control and tell you to keep it over this spot; of course we couldn't do that. Then he'd  
9 give you the collective and say, "Okay, maintain this altitude," and we couldn't do that.  
10 It progressed until you've have all three controls, you couldn't keep it in the county and  
11 as days went by, it was amazing. Now you could keep it not only in the county but in the  
12 town and then you could keep it within the confines of the stage field and then you could  
13 keep it within a twelve by twelve box and before you knew it, you could hover. If you  
14 had any kind of coordination at all, you could handle it. It was interesting.

15 JB: Definitely not like fixed wing from what I've heard.

16 JM: Oh, no we used to look down on fixed wing pilots. We'd say an airplane;  
17 unless it was controlled by a total incompetent would pretty much fly itself. But the  
18 helicopter, that was a beast of a different nature, just hundreds and hundreds of parts  
19 flying in formation trying to rip one another apart.

20 JB: Now, once you graduated, did you immediately go to Cobra transition school  
21 or did you head for Vietnam first?

22 JM: In my class, there were a number of us who were given the opportunity based  
23 upon some subjective criteria who could go on to more advanced training. If I recall the  
24 choices were AMED (Army Medical Department), which was Medevac school; multi-  
25 engine, which at the time was Chinooks and Cobra transition. I went to Cobra transition  
26 immediately from flight school.

27 JB: And that was at Fort Hunter?

28 JM: That was at right, Fort Hunter, Hunter-Stewart in Savannah, Georgia.

29 JB: When was the first time you saw a Cobra?

30 JM: I saw one when I was in flight school. Somebody, a transient had flown into  
31 the main heliport at Walters and of course everybody wanted to see it. That was the

1 Cadillac of airplanes and it was beyond our wildest dreams that we'd ever be able to fly  
2 one of those things, that was something that John Wayne did, not mere mortals.

3 JB: Definitely a sexy aircraft. All right, so I guess transition training to the  
4 Cobra, I guess describe that.

5 JM: It was, by that time we had I think somewhere around two hundred hours of  
6 flight time in training under our belt and Cobra transition was just learning the  
7 idiosyncrasies of the Cobra versus the Huey. In autorotation you didn't have that nice big  
8 flat belly to help decelerate you in a flare, a Cobra tended to want to keep on flying right  
9 into the ground. Cobras were like flying a brick when you lost power. The flight  
10 controls—in a Huey, you kind of led your turns as I recall, I could be wrong, but you led  
11 your turns with a cyclic, in a Cobra you led your turn with pedals. It just flew a little bit  
12 different and of course it was a little bit faster than a Huey, so approaches were a little  
13 different. You had a little more power, so just flying it was a matter of just staying a little  
14 bit more ahead of the aircraft until it became second nature and you didn't have to think  
15 about it. As far as flying characteristics, same problems you encountered in a Huey, most  
16 of the components were from a Huey anyway, the drive train and all that.

17 JB: So when you were training on Hueys, were those Charlie models or Bravo  
18 models?

19 JM: No, we had a mixture. We had A models, come B models and some D  
20 models. Advanced training at Hunter was split into two tracks, once you went through  
21 Huey transition and you've gone into what was called tactical training, it split. Some  
22 students flew transport, if you will, Hueys and others of us went the gunship track and  
23 that's what happened to myself and some others. We flew old beat up B models, had  
24 some gunnery training, learned how to fire the mini gun and fire rockets and the forty  
25 mm grenade launcher.

26 JB: So they were basically fitted out as gunships?

27 JM: Yes, they were.

28 JB: How easy was it to transition from the Huey to the Cobra?

29 JM: It wasn't that difficult, it was just, I know one of the things that I recall I had  
30 a problem with was my approaches were too shallow, the approach angle was too shallow  
31 and that got cured in Vietnam. It didn't make one of those nice long, slow, gradual

1 approaches. You learned, in training you kind of wanted, you tired to finesse your  
2 control movements, once you got to Vietnam and you really got comfortable in the  
3 aircraft—and it was the same with the Huey, you'd make gross control movements. You  
4 didn't mind, in a Huey you made nice slow, standard turns. In Vietnam slow, standard  
5 turns were a recipe for disaster. You bent it over and I can remember watching Hueys  
6 just do big corkscrew approaches into LZs (landing zones), probably at the lowest power  
7 settings possible, just pretty much controlled crashes until they got within fifteen, twenty  
8 feet of the ground. I was always amazed that some of them didn't crash. The same with  
9 the Cobra, you didn't fly in straight lines, you didn't fly parallel to any terrain features,  
10 you didn't fly low level across a big open field or paddy area out in what we called Indian  
11 country. You changed course, you changed altitudes, you didn't do it with any finesse at  
12 all.

13 JB: Now, I guess you get your orders for Vietnam—well actually, did you know  
14 at that point, I guess you had to have known you were headed for Vietnam?

15 JM: Oh, absolutely, well in fact, in kind of an ironic twist, the flight class that I  
16 graduated with at Fort Rucker, the only ones of us who got orders to Vietnam were the  
17 folks who went on to advanced training. All of the other guys got assignments to  
18 Germany, I remember a few got Hawaii, some stateside assignments, they did not go  
19 immediately to Vietnam but eventually they did. For those of us who went on through  
20 advanced training, our orders were cut to Vietnam and we were TDY (temporary duty) to  
21 whatever transition school we were going to.

22 JB: What month was this?

23 JM: When I went to Vietnam?

24 JB: Well, graduation?

25 JM: I graduated in November of 1969 from flight school, went directly to Hunter  
26 Stewart and I got out of there, middle of January. We had a two week, or ten day  
27 Christmas hiatus where we just pretty much hung around and did nothing because we all  
28 had leave before we went to Vietnam.

29 JB: And when did you arrive in country?

30 JM: In country? On February 18, 1970.

31 JB: Now at that point did you know what unit you were going to?

1 JM: No, we flew in—at least the bunch I went in with—we flew out of Travis Air  
2 Force base in California with a stop in Fairbanks, Alaska and a stop in Japan and then  
3 into Saigon was where we landed at Tan Son Nhut. I don't recall the details but I do  
4 remember we were sent to a replacement depot if you will at Long Binh.

5 JB: Right, Ninety-eighth Replacement?

6 JM: I don't remember the designation but that sounds rights. From there, once we  
7 were there we were in processed, paperwork and all and then we were farmed out to  
8 various divisions and I remember being delighted that I was assigned to the First Cav. So  
9 we got our division assignments from Long Binh, those of us who were assigned to the  
10 First Cav went to Bien Hoa, which was division headquarters. We were in processed  
11 there, officers and enlisted went through a two or three day "Cav" school and I remember  
12 we had to rappel off a tower and shoot an M-60 machine gun, just in country and division  
13 orientation. From there we got our individual battalion assignments.

14 JB: Now at that point were you aware of the different types of missions that  
15 Cobra were flying?

16 JM: Yeah, at least in the First Cav, I was aware of what was going on.

17 JB: So, I guess headed to the Twentieth Aerial Rocket Artillery, what were your  
18 impressions of that?

19 JM: Initially I was terribly disappointed because every gunship driver in the  
20 world who was assigned to the First Cav wanted to fly with the Air Cav troops, First of  
21 the Ninth. And so I was assigned to the Second of the Twentieth and I knew they were  
22 the ARA (Aerial Rocket Artillery) battalion for the Cav, knew nothing of their history.  
23 We were given a demonstration by two ARA Cobras at Bien Hoa, just to show how they  
24 were used. From Bien Hoa I was sent to battalion headquarters at Phuoc Vinh, which  
25 was called Camp Gorvad at the time. I remember—I don't recall how long I was there  
26 but I went up with a couple of fellows that I was not too pleased with, I'd gone through  
27 flight school and I didn't like them, put it that way. One of them was a gung ho type who  
28 paraded around at Hunter-Stewart in a green beret with all kinds of combat decorations,  
29 he was a wannabe and I just wasn't too pleased with him. Another guy was okay but our  
30 personalities didn't fit, we clashed and when I got to Camp Gorvad I guess my attitude  
31 came out because when assignments came out I remember those guys got to stay at



1 Phuoc Vinh because they had demonstrated military bearing and an attitude that was  
2 more becoming an Army warrant officer and I was sent to Charlie Battery which was up  
3 towards the Cambodian border, I guess that's where they sent bad boys. When I got  
4 there, it was like, "Oh what have I gotten myself into?" And it turned out to be the  
5 greatest bunch of guys I have ever spent any time with in my life. They just had a spirit  
6 and the day I landed, I went up, landed at Quan Loi, LZ Andy. It was just an air strip  
7 carved out of an old rubber plantation with a perimeter around it and out in the middle of  
8 nowhere and when I landed there were all kinds of smoke grenades going off and I  
9 jumped off the helicopter not knowing what to expect and a captain ran out and took my  
10 duffle bag, told me to lose my cap and escorted me to what they called their club, their  
11 officers' club, which was a bunker dug into the ground buried in sandbags, that was it.  
12 And they had a party for me. I guess they hadn't gotten any new guys for quite a long  
13 time and within the space of three or four days there were three or four new guys who  
14 came in and of course all the pilots were happy as hell to see us because that meant fresh  
15 meat and they could get a day off. It didn't take long, two or three days and we were  
16 flying combat missions.

17 JB: Now, were you flying front seat, rear seat at that point?

18 JM: Front seat. My very first mission I flew with my platoon commander, a  
19 fellow named Ray Mulcahy, he was a captain. And it was a four ship formation and we  
20 were going on what was called a hellfire mission and that was going up against anti-  
21 aircraft weapons and I was scared skinny. I went through the whole mission and I didn't  
22 see a damn thing, I saw nothing.

23 JB: Didn't take fire or anything?

24 JM: I wouldn't have known if we did. As I recall we didn't. I expected to see  
25 these anti-aircraft emplacements, I had no idea what to look for, we came in for four  
26 different directions, they ripple-fired the entire load, we broke off and went back to base.  
27 I just sat there going like, "What happened?" And they said, "Congratulations newbie,  
28 you just survived your first combat mission in Vietnam." "What did we just do?" I had  
29 no idea, no clue.

30 JB: I guess you could never really get used to it, but how long did it take you to I  
31 guess get used to flying combat missions, being able to see what was going on outside?

1           JM: I was pretty fortunate because at that time in early 1970, February, March,  
2 there really wasn't a lot going on, so we kind of eased into it. The Second of the  
3 Twentieth had a host of different missions. We look at the 227<sup>th</sup> and 229<sup>th</sup>, D Company  
4 of the 227<sup>th</sup> and 229<sup>th</sup>, their primary mission was to support their battalion lift elements.  
5 First of the Ninth, their Cobras went out on hunter-killer missions, go out with little bird  
6 and a red bird and look for bad guys. The Second of the Twentieth had a whole bunch of  
7 different missions. We would go out on what were called GAPs, ground assault plans  
8 and basically our job was to provide pre-insertion artillery suppression of the area around  
9 landing zones and then the lift ships would come in. As the lift ships went in, their  
10 gunships would escort them in, we would break off and climb to altitude. Once the lifts  
11 was out, their gunships would take the lift ships out, their job was done, we would stay  
12 overhead, make contact with the ground elements until they secured the LZ and we were  
13 released by the ground commander. Or as it turned out a number of times, they requested  
14 close air support, each time we'd stay, that was one mission. The second mission and  
15 primary mission of the ARA was close air support for First Cav division ground elements  
16 and in that capacity we were on twenty-four hour alert, where D Company of the 227<sup>th</sup> or  
17 229<sup>th</sup> or the First of the Ninth would have the opportunity to be pre-briefed for a mission,  
18 Second of the Twentieth, we did not have any clue what we were going to do until we  
19 were airborne. A claxon would go off, it was actually an air horn and we had two  
20 minutes to get to our aircraft, fire up and be airborne, within two minutes. At that point  
21 we would contact our tactical operations center and they would give us the mission, tell  
22 us where we, typically, the first thing they'd say, it was either a GAP, a fire mission or a  
23 Medevac escort, that was our third. And then they'd say, "Your contact is," whatever the  
24 call sign was, they'd give us a coded frequency, a direction and a distance and then  
25 they'd give us a coded location of contact and we would just take off in the direction that  
26 we were given and try to find where we were going on the map, decode the frequencies  
27 and make contact with whomever we were supposed to make contact with. On a GAP it  
28 would be the lift ship flight leader initially and then it would be the ground commander  
29 once the lift had departed the LZ. On a fire mission it would be whomever the ground  
30 commander was, that could be anything from a battalion commander down to a squad  
31 leader. If squad were in an ambush or needed support, than we'd be scrambled to support

1     them. And the third mission was the Medevac mission and that was Medevac escort and  
2     our job there was to get them in and get them out.

3             JB: How often would you stand alert?

4             JM: With the Second of the Twentieth, we had a commitment for four sections  
5     everyday, eight aircraft, we always traveled in sections of two, there would be a hot  
6     section, a yellow section, a blue section and a standby section. The hot section, when the  
7     claxon went off immediately scrambled and went out and then everybody moved up one  
8     slot. When you came back from a mission, refueled, rearmed, you immediately if you  
9     were the hot section, you immediately went back to the hot section and everybody else  
10    dropped down a slot. The following day you'd go from the hot section to the standby  
11    section and then you'd go the blue, yellow and hot again. There was no regular  
12    scheduled time off. When I first got there, we flew our ass off because they had so many  
13    aircraft commanders who people scheduled for rotation in the next three or four months.  
14    I remember myself, Jimmy Nabors—I'm trying to think who some of the other guys  
15    were—George Tebets, we were constantly flying because they needed to get the hours  
16    and experience under us. In fact we got there; we started doing the transition and work  
17    up to aircraft commander in April. It was fast. It was fast. Jimmy Nabors I think was the  
18    first of us to get his AC (aircraft commander) orders, George Tebets and then myself.  
19    And I got my AC orders in the early part of June so I was there for four months.

20            JB: Now, standard weapons load was always four nineteen round rocket pods or  
21    did you vary it all?

22            JM: No, not standard, we had two different configurations. The heavy  
23    configuration was the four nineteen sharp rockets pods, but we never carried nineteen, you  
24    couldn't get it off the ground with nineteen, not there and not carry a fuel load that would  
25    take you anywhere. So, I think we normally carried maximum, sixteen or seventeen per  
26    pod. Then you had some aircraft that were configured with two mini-guns in the turret,  
27    some with a mini-gun and a forty millimeter grenade launcher. We had other aircraft that  
28    were configured with two nineteen shot pods in board and two seven shot pods outboard.  
29    Normally when you carried the seven shot pods outboard, those you carried nails, the  
30    flechette rockets, nasty little things.

31            JB: Didn't realize those existed.

1           JM: The flechette rockets, great area fire weapon. If you were in a situation  
2 where you didn't have to get real close to ground troops or if you were doing an LZ prep  
3 and the ground were dry and you didn't want to start a lot of fire you nailed it. These  
4 things carried twelve hundred one inch finned nails, wrapped nose to tail, it would go  
5 about four hundred meters and then an explosive charge would blast the nails out. You  
6 could see a little red puff of smoke to let you know that the nails had detonated. So you  
7 carry fourteen of those and multiply that times twelve hundred. That's a lot of stuff and  
8 that would definitely clean out an area. Not good for use against bunkers but in open  
9 areas or lightly treed areas, they were very effective. Great weapon to bust up LZ  
10 attacks, especially the human wave type of things that the NVA (North Vietnamese  
11 Army) were fond so under certain circumstances. You put two gunships out there with a  
12 load of nails on them, stop it cold.

13           JB: Now, selecting armament, would you do that yourself, would that be done  
14 with the alert sections, how did that work?

15           JM: Initially, every day at military time, sixteen hundred hours, we'd go in and  
16 get our assignments for the following day, aircraft assignments, crew assignments,  
17 section assignments, then we'd go out and pre-flight our aircraft. They were always  
18 armed at that time, so you took off whatever load the last crew put on it. Then depending  
19 upon the mission or what was going on, you'd come back in and you could select the  
20 load. Sometimes like with the two nineteen shot pods, we had seventeen pound and ten  
21 pound warheads. Well, if you had a real hot day, you weren't going to carry a full  
22 seventeen-pound load. You'd carry ten pounders, a combination of ten pounders on the  
23 outboard, seventeen pounders on the inboard. Then when you got to the target,  
24 depending upon what you needed, you could select inboard and outboard. You could  
25 also select the number of rockets you wanted to fire. You could get one pair, two pair,  
26 seven and shoot the whole lot. But they didn't shoot all at the same time, ripple fire  
27 because of the folding vents. Sometimes you'd have a malfunction and they'd all go at  
28 the same time and that just created rockets going off everywhere. There was a guy, a  
29 maintenance pilot who occasionally flew combat missions, a guy named Fred Clemmons,  
30 came back one day and had a problem, salvoed and one of the fins of the rocket came  
31 back right through the canopy, damn near got him right between the eyes. That was

1 scary. Other times you'd come back and a fin or part of the rocket had come off and hit  
2 the rotor blades or embedded itself in part of the airframe, it was dangerous. That and  
3 hang fires, when a rocket hung up in a pod and wouldn't release and that would just  
4 throw the aircraft totally out of trim and burn the pod rear-end right off unless the rocket  
5 released fast enough.

6 JB: Was there any way to get them out?

7 JM: You prayed that it would come out.

8 JB: Divine intervention I guess in a way.

9 JM: That was it. There was no way of getting it out, once it hung up, it just had  
10 to make up its mind to go. There might have been some sand or something, grit that got  
11 into the tubes and it took awhile for the thrust of the rocket to work up to get it by that or  
12 who knows, it didn't happen too often but when it did it got your attention.

13 JB: Were there any twenty mm birds in there yet?

14 JM: Near the end of my tour we did get some twenty mm birds and everybody  
15 used to fight over flying those because, well if you got into a situation where you had .51  
16 caliber anti-aircraft in the area, in a normal configuration Cobra had to get well within the  
17 range of that .51 cal in order to engage it. With the twenty mm, you could stand off,  
18 thumb your nose at them and blast the hell out of them and you didn't even have to keep  
19 the aircraft in trim, just wherever you stuck that pipper, that's where those twenty mm  
20 rounds were going to go. Great weapon, only problem was you could only shoot twenty-  
21 five rounds bursts because the airplane parts would start coming off.

22 JB: Yes, I've seen a number of pictures of it in First of the Ninth, the extra harbor  
23 on the side.

24 JM: Yeah, they beefed up the structural panels on the forward part of the fuselage  
25 and strengthened some of the fasteners. There was a cooling fan on the port side right  
26 behind the canopy and the door for that used to come off all the time, that and in the old  
27 Cobras there was a battery compartment in the nose and there was an access hatch there  
28 and that always used to come off. Once they put the battery back in the hellhole, that's  
29 where we used to keep our lunch. Throw a couple cans of soda in there and take it up to  
30 thirteen thousand feet for ten minutes; it would be ice cold when you get back on the  
31 ground.

1 JB: October, '70, the aircraft combat brigade was organized, Second of the  
2 Twentieth was in direct support of that. Were you flying missions I guess supporting  
3 their operations?

4 JM: Yes, that was about the time that things started changing, Vietnamization was  
5 kicking in, I remember our battery moved to Quan Loi to Camp Bearcat, in between  
6 Long Binh and Saigon. We were supporting brigade operations throughout the eastern  
7 part of the area of operations. Initially we were up around An Loc, Loc Ninh, Bu Dop,  
8 when we were out of Quan Loi and then we moved farther south for a period of time, at  
9 least from October of '70 until I left in February of '71, then things changed after that.  
10 Cambodia II, if you will, happened, other things. Then of course the breakup, the Cav  
11 came home and left a brigade separate there. That happened later in '71.

12 JB: Now, I was reading something earlier about a prisoner liberation mission in  
13 1970, did you have anything to do with that?

14 JM: No, that was farther north and I don't know that the First Cav had anything to  
15 do with, they may have but it wasn't anything I was familiar with.

16 JB: Because supposedly it was in the razorback vicinity of War Zone C, First Cav  
17 assets participated in that, it didn't say whether or not the Second of the Twentieth did or  
18 not, but I know the First of the Ninth was there.

19 JM: If the Second of Twentieth was involved at all, it would have been on a  
20 standby basis. That almost sounds like a First of the Ninth mission, where their Scouts,  
21 Cobras, and Blues, their ground element would have been involved, but I don't know that  
22 we were.

23 JB: Okay, I was just wondering, it sounded interesting, sort of a precursor to the  
24 Son Tay Raid, anyway, going into Cambodia, you were involved in that?

25 JM: Yes, that staged out of Quon Loi.

26 JB: Was that still at that point sort of the forbidden mission or had you been given  
27 permission to do that at that point?

28 JM: The public incursion into Cambodia, that happened on May 1, 1970 and I can  
29 remember being in our quote, unquote, "officers' club," when our battalion commander  
30 came in with a map and his aide and flipped back the thing and he said, "Gentlemen, this  
31 is what we've been waiting for. We can go get them." And we all just kind of like wet

1 our pants, we knew they were there because we'd had contact with, in spite of what Jane  
2 Fonda and Ramsey Clark had to say about the issue, we knew there were bad guys there  
3 and we had been chasing them for a long time, in what you call missions to the red line,  
4 but there was no red line on the ground, kind of thing. We had been there, primarily  
5 supporting Special Forces operations into Cambodia.

6 JB: Really, did you do a lot of that type of missions?

7 JM: Not a lot but periodically we'd be called upon, we called them Sneaky Petes,  
8 they were from the Seventy-fifth Rangers and they weren't supposed to make contact or  
9 be discovered so periodically, they might be discovered, come under fire and we'd have  
10 an emergency extraction where we'd provide the close air support and the escort for the  
11 aircraft that were going to snatch them. During the Cambodian operation, the first day  
12 that staged out of Quan Loi, where Charlie Battery, Second of the Twentieth was  
13 headquartered and we had a full, it was a full effort. The first lift that went in, I think the  
14 entire battery escorted it, but I don't think we ever fired a shot. There was no LZ prep  
15 because the assault went in next to a town called Snoul in Cambodia, S-n-o-u-l or  
16 something like that and we were told we could not engage targets within the village,  
17 except the night before the bullshit bombers went in and dropped leaflets, telling the  
18 civilian population that we were coming. I don't know who the genius was that figured  
19 out all these civilians could read those.

20 JB: Sounds like standard Army propaganda.

21 JM: Yeah, it was like, "Okay." And so the only fire we took on the initial assault  
22 came out of the village but it wasn't heavy that I recall.

23 JB: So, you couldn't fire back even though you were fired on.

24 JM: That's right.

25 JB: Now, which aircraft, were you assigned a specific aircraft to fly, or just  
26 whatever you drew the night before?

27 JM: When you became an aircraft commander there was kind of a ceremonial  
28 thing you were assigned an aircraft, but it really wasn't yours, it belonged to the crew  
29 chief. Most of the crew chiefs let you know in no uncertain terms that it was theirs and  
30 you were just—it was on loan to you. But you didn't fly your regularly assigned aircraft  
31 because of the maintenance schedule that went on. If your aircraft had five more hours

1 before it had scheduled maintenance, you didn't want that aircraft in the hot slot, you  
2 wanted one that had twenty-five hours until scheduled maintenance because it wasn't  
3 uncommon to fly it twelve hours or more in a day, especially during the Cambodian  
4 operation.

5 JB: Now that would be divided up into several sorties?

6 JM: In Cambodia I can recall one day flying, I believe it was seventeen hours  
7 during a sixteen hundred to sixteen hundred hour shift, spending seventeen hours in the  
8 air and at one point maybe eight hours never shutting the aircraft down, just hot refuel,  
9 hot rearm and go and that's when flying was not fun in those situations.

10 JB: Now, which aircraft was yours?

11 JM: I remember the initial aircraft that I was assigned to had the last three tail  
12 number on it was 720. It was an old, tired chunk of tin.

13 JB: I've got the Army records of the C battery; I've got it right here.

14 JM: Seven-two-zero was the first one I was assigned to, but the crew chief used to  
15 take care of that thing like it was a Corvette. He shined it, I mean literally waxed it,  
16 thinking I guess that it would make it go faster, I don't know. It was just impeccably  
17 clean, but it was old. After that one I was assigned to, it was 540 I believe or 520. So I  
18 remember my copilot, a kind named Neil McMillan painted, Sound of Silence, on the  
19 side of it, totally unauthorized. We weren't allowed to put nose art on it, but you know  
20 Charlie Battery we just said, kind of like, "What regulation?" And he painted, Sound of  
21 Silence, on the side of it. Big blue letters outlined in white, gothic letters, it was  
22 beautiful. After that we did Mean Mr. Mustard, Murder Incorporated, The Iron Butterfly  
23 and then I left so they might have had some after that. There aren't many with billboard  
24 nose art too.

25 JB: Excellent, do you happen to have any picture of that?

26 JM: I believe I've got a few, yes.

27 JB: Excellent, I've love to see that.

28 JM: It was kind of cool. I think that was five-four-zero were the last three on that.

29 JB: Excellent. I'm looking here, seven-two-zero had the most time in the unit, it  
30 had 2275 hours.



1 JM: It was one of the first aircraft I think assigned to the unit. As I recall, in early  
2 '69, Second of the Twentieth became the first all Cobra unit in Vietnam, maybe not the  
3 first one to receive Cobras but it was the first one to convert entirely to Cobra inventory  
4 and 720 was one of the old timers.

5 JB: Were there any missions that really stand out in your mind?

6 JM: A whole bunch of them. The first one that would really stand out was  
7 significant was in Cambodia and it was significant for the entire battery, it happened on  
8 May 24, 1970. I'd have to check with George Alexander who was my aircraft  
9 commander at the time, Alex and I led a section on a mission to escort Medevac Two-  
10 One, which was crewed by Lieutenant Wadica and Carbuot, to pick up six wounded  
11 South Vietnamese who had gotten themselves into a predicament up in Cambodia and as  
12 we approached the LZ it was our standard procedure high to leave one Cobra high and  
13 one to go in with the Medevac and do real tight orbits around them, to draw any fire that  
14 might be directed towards the Medevac. This mission, they could take it to the ground,  
15 as soon as they got to about tree level, all hell broke loose. We were surrounded by  
16 bunkers and I remember looking and actually seeing the slits in the bunkers and being  
17 horrified because it was the first time I had ever seen tracers in the day time, they were  
18 that thick. To make a long story short, the Medevac is shot down, crashed, a medic who  
19 was going back to his unit, who was assigned to that South Vietnamese unit, a Sergeant  
20 Rocco was thrown clear, came back, went back into the aircraft, rescued both pilots and  
21 one of the crewmen, one crewman was killed in the initial crash. He spent the night with  
22 them. They tried to get another bird in to get them out, they couldn't get them out. The  
23 next day we went back with eight Cobras and lost three more aircraft in the LZ rescuing  
24 the crews. That Sergeant Rocco earned the Medal of Honor for his actions that day. I  
25 could send you the names of the individuals involved in it. A pilot from our unit, Mac  
26 Cookson, Chief Warrant Officer who led the rescue mission the following day was  
27 awarded the Silver Star for his efforts. George Alexander and I on the first day, got shot  
28 up, took some rounds through the tail boom and the rotor blades, second day was rough.  
29 As far as I know, the only U.S. casualty involved, there was another Medevac pilot who  
30 was wounded, not seriously, and a few other Medevac crewmembers were wounded, but  
31 I think the fatality on the first bird that went in was the only fatality amongst the air crew

1 involved in the operation. On the ground I couldn't tell you, it was a mess. It was a  
2 mess, they assaulted First of the Ninth—it was either First of the Ninth, Blues or  
3 elements of the Eleventh Armored Cavalry regiment in there, but when they got out, there  
4 were concrete bunkers, dug-in anti-aircraft emplacements, and the South Vietnamese  
5 troops just stumbled onto something that was really much bigger, I'm surprised they  
6 weren't wiped out, much bigger than they were equipped to handle but they fought pretty  
7 well.

8 JB: Were there any Cobra losses during that mission?

9 JM: No, not during that mission.

10 JB: Were there losses while you were there?

11 JM: Yes.

12 JB: Heavy, light?

13 JM: On June twenty-sixth, my wingman was shot down on a pretty routine  
14 mission in Cambodia, just providing security for some engineers who were blowing a  
15 weapons cache. He lost his tail rotor and one second I was looking at him, a second later  
16 he was gone. It took us hours to find him. They rescued him alive, his copilot had  
17 broken legs and Jimmy Nabors was a good friend over there, had suffered head injuries in  
18 the crash and he died a few days later in the hospital.

19 JB: Were they able to determine the cause of the crash?

20 JM: Catastrophic tail rotor failure, either mechanical or from hostile fire but the  
21 aircraft was unrecoverable. In fact we tried to blow it in place, but what they could  
22 determine I think that was the final determination. It had to be something like that  
23 because he went down damn fast. I had just turned around I had said, "We better clear  
24 the area, they're going to get ready to blow this thing and I don't want to be around when  
25 it goes off." Because you don't know what's going to come up at you and I looked back  
26 at him and he was off to my left side, back about half a mile and then I heard a mayday  
27 call on guard and when I heard his call sign, I snapped around to look and he was gone.  
28 It was that quick, he was gone. So, it had to be something like that. Then that very same  
29 day, two pilots from B Battery, Denny Bro and Doug Vergomini were on final approach  
30 to a nasty little stinking scab in the jungle called Bu Gia Map and they flew into a

1 helicopter ambush, shot down the aircraft disintegrated in the air and they were both  
2 killed.

3 JB: Did you have much contact with the other batteries?

4 JM: Off and on depending upon what was going on. During the Cambodian  
5 operation B Battery came up to Quon Loi and we had to set up tents, they lived in tents,  
6 we lived in little hooches with tin roofs, sandbags around it. I remember we used to park  
7 the aircraft nose into the revetments and if you started them all up at the same time the  
8 rotors would overlap, so you had to start up alternate aircraft, make sure they were parked  
9 that way. B Battery was up there, then we'd swap off lager sites at a place called Fire  
10 Support Base Buttons at Song Be. We'd go up for three days and then A Battery or B  
11 Battery would send three ships up, depending upon where activity was taking place, we'd  
12 send a section up just so we were that much closer to the ground troops. Now, if you can  
13 cut off fifteen to thirty minutes of flight time; sometimes that can mean the difference  
14 between life and death to the guys on the ground.

15 JB: Now, here's an odd question but what kind of uniforms did you wear, where  
16 they the Nomex flight suits or where you still wearing the other ones?

17 JM: We wore Nomex flight suits for the whole time that I was there.  
18 Occasionally some of us brought along the cotton one piece flight suits that we wore at  
19 advanced training at Fort Rucker and those were pretty comfortable just to slip on if  
20 you're doing mortar patrol at night but they weren't really authorized for flight operations  
21 any more, they were just comfortable.

22 JB: Had you gotten the new ballistic helmets or were they still the APH-1s?

23 JM: We had the ballistic helmets. We weren't forced to wear them. I remember  
24 for a long time I wore the APH-4 because I didn't like the ballistic helmet because it was,  
25 the ear flaps worked too good, you couldn't hear anything. You didn't know you were  
26 getting shot at until they started banging on the airplane.

27 JB: I guess I'm out of questions at this point. Anything—we've been going for  
28 over an hour now, anything you'd like to add about your experience there?

29 JM: No, any help you need, if you're coming up into the area.

30 JB: Actually I'll be back in two weeks.

1           JM: The New England Air Museum, I've got hundreds of slides here you could  
2 use or not use at your discretion

3           JB: Yes, I'd love to take a look. You mentioned the New England Air Museum;  
4 actually I wanted to ask you, do you know anything about the Cobra that is there?

5           JM: No, I don't.

6           JB: Because it appears to be a G Cobra but it's got a sensor turret in the nose, I'm  
7 wondering if you had any idea if that was one of the Smash Program Cobras or anything  
8 like that.

9           JM: I really don't. I know that the Army Aviation Heritage Foundation has been  
10 thirsting for a G nose. They've got a, I think it's a TH-1P or something like that; it's got  
11 an oddball nose on it. Do you know what kind of canopy this one at the New England  
12 Air Museum is?

13          JB: I think it's not the flatfoot, I think it's the smooth canopy.

14          JM: It's the smooth, that's got to be one of the original, what they call the AH-1S,  
15 but I think was later changed to—I used to know all of this stuff, I've got it written down  
16 because I'm an avid modeler and I was trying to model every version of the Cobra there  
17 is out there but I know the AH-1S went through a couple of incarnations.

18          JB: Right, there is the F model and the P model.

19          JM: Yes, the P model and then it got changed and the flat plate canopy came in, I  
20 have no idea what that is down there.

21          JB: Actually, I have gathered my wits about me and come up with a couple more  
22 questions. When did you head home?

23          JM: February 17 or 18, 1971.

24          JB: Okay, this is before the re-designation.

25          JM: Right.

26          JB: Heading home, what was that experience like, I guess going from, how soon  
27 before you headed home did you stop flying missions?

28          JM: About a week.

29          JB: So you did have some cool down time?

30          JM: I don't remember much of it because I didn't stay very sober I don't think.

31          JB: Was there a lot of drinking going on?

1 JM: Not what you would call, there was nobody who was constantly inebriated.  
2 When you were flying like that you wanted a clear head, but if you got a day off, you  
3 spent it at the club. It was like any other community, you had some teetotalers and then  
4 you had some guys that were serious two-fisted drinkers. When you're twenty, twenty-  
5 one years old, twenty-two, you think you're immortal. I was twenty-three and I was one  
6 of the older guys. We had a kid, Bob James, I think he was nineteen when he got there,  
7 couldn't have been much older than that. You have to remember most of the warrant  
8 officer pilots came right out of high school, graduate seventeen, eighteen years old, go  
9 directly into the Army, spend thirty-two weeks in flight school. It's possible that some of  
10 these guys could have come out of flight school at nineteen years old. I don't think you  
11 could get anybody my age to do that. When you stop and think about some of the things  
12 we did back then, damn foolish. At the conference I spoke with Georgie Alexander for  
13 the first time in thirty years a couple nights ago and we were talking about some of the  
14 stupid things we used to do, turning all your lights on to attract anti-aircraft fire so your  
15 wingman could get in close blacked out and blast them, that was real smart.

16 JB: Did it work?

17 JM: It worked real good, it worked real good. Fortunately your depth perception  
18 is screwed up at night and so most of the time they were shooting behind and below us  
19 but you never know when you'd run into one that had, didn't understand all of that stuff.  
20 But most of the time we'd send one of them up high, turn all the lights out, flash bright,  
21 turn on the landing light sporadically and intermittently and see if you can get them to  
22 shoot at you. It worked very, very well. Alex taught me that one. Stoozing around,  
23 doing doughnuts right over the trees, trying to draw fire from Medevac, that was very  
24 noble but pretty stupid.

25 JB: Now, I guess was most of the flying at somewhat of altitude or did you do a  
26 lot of map of the earth as well?

27 JM: It all depended, we were by SOP, we were required not to break fifteen  
28 hundred foot minimum altitude. Well, put a dive angle on that when you're shooting for  
29 ground troops who are, the good guys are on one side of a log and the bad guys are on the  
30 other side of a log. We're shooting unguided missiles, not too damned accurate so you  
31 got in as close as you could. I think sometimes we got in so close that the rockets didn't

1 have a chance to arm and we probably stabbed the enemy to death rather than blowing  
2 them up. I can remember shooting within; on one particular mission they were so  
3 desperate, getting in close enough where we were probably shooting within twenty-five,  
4 twenty meters of friendly troops, maybe even closer.

5 JB: Were you able to see the friendlies you were supporting?

6 JM: Most of the time no because of the triple canopy jungle and just the density of  
7 the foliage. They'd mark their positions with a smoke grenade and then they'd give us a  
8 distance and a direction from the smoke, just like adjusting artillery, we'd fire a marking  
9 pair and then they would adjust from the marking pair. Some pilots were more adept  
10 than others for getting closer and then there were others that they would do what we'd  
11 call strategic carpet rocket shooting, didn't let them get in close.

12 JB: How effective was the 275 as a weapon, because it was unguided, was it  
13 really just overly effective?

14 JM: Well, it did what it was intended to do. Most of the time and we all wanted  
15 to say, "Well we went out there and did this and that." Our job wasn't to kill the enemy,  
16 our job was to get them off the back of the ground troops and you did that, you either  
17 kept them pinned down so the ground troops could break contact if they were  
18 outnumbered or at a tactical disadvantage or you blocked the path of the enemy troops, if  
19 they had a superior numerical advantage, get them out. Sometimes, especially at night if  
20 it were a mission where you were trying to just get the good guys out, especially a LRRP  
21 (Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol) team or something like that, you just wanted to  
22 make a whole lot of noise and create confusion so you didn't have to get in real close and  
23 be really accurate, with nails especially I think. You wouldn't shoot within a hundred  
24 meters of friendly troops with those things. They were definitely an area weapon, but ten  
25 pound, rocket, you could get within twenty-five meters if you were confident and knew  
26 what you were doing. The aircraft had to be at pretty good trim, you had to know the  
27 wind directions and speeds, there were just so many variables with those things. After a  
28 while you shot so damn many of them, especially ARA pilots. I tried to figure out one  
29 day how many actual combat missions I was on, I had eleven hundred flight hours and  
30 the average mission was an hour to an hour and half in duration. So figure out how many  
31 missions you had and we never came back with ammo. We used it up. We used it up, so

1    how many rockets did you shoot, that's a lot of rockets and a lot of practice and you do it  
2    every day.

3           JB: Did you have R&R (Rest and Relaxation) and stuff while you were there?

4           JM: Yeah.

5           JB: Where did you go?

6           JM: I went to Hong Kong for a week, spent a lot of money.

7           JB: Really.

8           JM: Oh, I bought custom made suits and shoes and shirts, tried to drink all the  
9    beer in Hong Kong in seven days.

10          JB: I guess while you were back in combat operations, did you ever encounter any  
11   SA-7s?

12          JM: No, but the Second of the Twentieth, well in their later reincarnation as F  
13   Battery of the Seventy-ninth, which inherited the Boom Ax call sign, they did. There is a  
14   very famous incident and it's commemorated by a painting, I forget who the artist was  
15   called *Missile, Missile, Missile* where the two guys survived and I do know a bunch of  
16   guys from F Seventy-ninth who remember that incident and the goings-on around An Loc  
17   during the Easter Invasion in '72.

18          JB: Yes, actually I have a copy of the history of F Battery from February of '72 to  
19   July of '72 right here. So what was your overall impression of the Cobra, I know there  
20   were some problems early on with tail rotors etcetera?

21          JM: Well, initially what would happen is because of the high and hot flight  
22   conditions, you'd run out of left pedal when you're pulling a lot of power so they  
23   switched the tail rotor from the port side to the starboard side, put a little camber in the  
24   tail fin and that seemed to solve that problem. If it had, we always wanted more power,  
25   more power, but that was just Vietnam when it got really, really hot and humid, and it  
26   just seemed like you'd suck the guts out of it and you couldn't make it go, but the Huey  
27   pilots had even more problems than we did. I remember some of the stupid things I did  
28   one time is sometimes when we were bored we'd try to ambush an O-1 Birdog or a lone  
29   de Havilland Otter, those were our favorites. One time myself and another guy tired to  
30   ambush a CH-47 Chinook, we didn't know they could go faster than a Cobra. He left us  
31   standing still, he did, he left us just sitting there like dopes and I'm glad that he didn't

1 know our radio frequency so he couldn't make fun of us. That 47 could, not  
2 outmaneuver, but boy in a foot race he could beat you.

3 JB: What was the top end on a Cobra?

4 JM: Well, loaded as I recall we use to cruise at somewhere between 110 and a 130  
5 knots but I think it redlined at a 180, but you couldn't get that unless you were in a really  
6 steep dive. I don't recall ever trying to go that fast. Empty, again we never flew them  
7 empty. We always had something like twelve hundred pounds of fuel and a max  
8 ordnance load and it was a job hovering that thing without over torquing it under normal  
9 circumstances and I can recall some days when you had a tired bird and you screwed up,  
10 you put on a little too much fuel or a little too much in the way of ordnance, having to  
11 make a running take off and literally using the runway to get it off the ground. We  
12 loaded them up; they were maxxed out when we took off.

13 JB: Well, okay, I'm done. I guess I'm pretty much tapped out of as far as  
14 questions go but let me just officially end this, just hold on a second. This will officially  
15 end the interview with Mr. James Moran on February twenty-seventh.



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**The Vietnam Archive  
Oral History Project  
Interview with James Moran  
Conducted by Jonathan Bernstein  
March 28, 2002  
Transcribed by Jennifer McIntyre**

1 Jonathan Bernstein: Okay, this is Jonathan Bernstein conducting an oral history  
2 interview with Mr. Jim Moran. It's the twenty-eight of March, 2002 at approximately  
3 9:00 AM in the morning. I am in the interview room at Texas Tech Special Collections  
4 Library and Mr. Moran is in Ashburnham, Massachusetts. All right, Mr. Moran, I guess  
5 start off where—

6 James Moran: At the beginning.

7 JB: Yes, at the beginning, we're discussing May twenty-fourth.

8 JM: I've put this together from eyewitness accounts, the Medal of Honor citation  
9 for Louis Rocco and an excerpt from a book, *U.S. Army Air Ambulance* by Mark Huff. It  
10 was published by Vader River Publishing of Bellevue, Washington in 1999, so some  
11 excerpts were taken from that. But basically what happened, during the Cambodian  
12 operation an ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) airborne unit and I believe it was  
13 a company size unit, established contact with North Vietnamese troops, northeast of  
14 Kontum, Republic of Vietnam. That contact was initiated on the twenty-third of May and  
15 a medical evacuation had taken place on the twenty-third and the LZ was "cold," in other  
16 words there was no ground fire. On the twenty-fourth of May, at about sixteen hundred  
17 hours a Medevac was scrambled through Quan Loi, it was Medevac Two. It was crewed  
18 by Steve Madika, who was the aircraft commander, and 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Leroy Carburot, who was  
19 the pilot/copilot. Along with that two AH-1Gs were scrambled from C Battery, Second  
20 of the Twentieth ARA at Quan Loi and those aircraft were crewed by 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. George  
21 Alexander, aircraft commander, pilot was WO1 Jim Moran. The second aircraft was  
22 crewed by CWO Paul Garrity, the aircraft commander and WO1 Jimmy L. Nabors in the

1 front seat. We dispatched to the area and as we approached we made contact with the  
2 American advisors on the ground and they reported that the LZ was cold although they  
3 had eight wounded ARVN troopers on the ground. I don't know how you got a cold LZ  
4 with eight wounded troopers but that's how it was. But we took their word for it.  
5 Standard procedure was the Medevac would set up on approach to the LZ; one Cobra  
6 would go low with him to act as a screen and give him close support as he was going in  
7 and one Cobra would stay high, covering the two birds that were going into the LZ. Med  
8 Two approached on a southeasterly heading, trying to keep the sun at his back, not much  
9 wind so it wasn't a down wind approach. Alexander and myself went down with him.  
10 As we approached the LZ, we could see troops on the ground, we didn't get any fire, but  
11 as Med Two decelerated all hell broke loose and he just, we could see tracers in the  
12 daylight which was unusual. We started to break across his nose and we saw him get hit.  
13 When he went down, Wadika was hit in the chest armor by two rounds and he took a  
14 round in his left thigh. Carburot noticed that, he tried to recover the aircraft, not realizing  
15 that the engine was disintegrating and the tail boom had severed. Because of the rotor  
16 RPM that was still left, the aircraft rose off the ground a little bit, but it rotated on the  
17 axis of the rotor system because he'd lost tail rotor control obviously, with a severed  
18 tailbone. The aircraft landed hard, rolled over, the fuel cells ruptured and it caught fire.  
19 As that was happening Alexander was breaking left around the front of him, we saw the  
20 fire coming out of the southeasterly side of the LZ and he broke really hard right to avoid  
21 the fire, we could see it and as we looked down we could see bunkers. Apparently what  
22 had happened was this ARVN company had stumbled into an NVA bunker complex. We  
23 were later told that those bunkers were concrete reinforced, which counts for the fact that  
24 we shot a whole lot of rockets at it and really didn't do much damage to them. We went  
25 back to help—Garrity was screaming for us to get the hell out of the way so that he could  
26 put some rockets down on the bunkers where most of the fire was coming from.  
27 Alexander and I went back to altitude and we set up our daisy chain with the American  
28 advisor on the ground putting down suppressive fires, trying to knock out some of these  
29 bunkers. At about that time, a Huey from B Company, 229<sup>th</sup>, its call sign Killer Spade  
30 Four came on the scene, had heard what was going on and volunteered to make an  
31 attempt to go in and pick up the downed crew. He got the short final and he took heavy

1 fire, disabled his aircraft but he was able to fly it out a short distance away, land and  
2 another aircraft from the 229<sup>th</sup> picked him and his crew up and evacuated them. They  
3 kind of, as it were flew off into the sunset and we never heard from them again. Some  
4 real gutsy guys and they're not mentioned at all in any of the accounts that I have been  
5 able to find of this particular incident. After he left, we were getting low on ammunition  
6 but Medevac One—that was commanded by Capt. Henry Tuell III—that's T-e-u-l-l—  
7 also from the Fifteenth Medical Battalion. He came in, Alexander and I went with him  
8 and tried to insert him into the LZ and that was a no go. His aircraft took heavy fire, as  
9 did we, but we had the advantage of having a little air speed and being able to maneuver  
10 where the Medevac was just a sitting duck decelerating into the LZ. Tuell did not crash,  
11 he got out, landed a short distance away and his crew was picked up during this whole  
12 thing. No, he flew it out, he was not heavily damaged, I'm sorry, correct myself, he flew  
13 it out looking at the notes here. He made it out of there heavily damaged. While all of  
14 this was going on, we were getting low on fuel and low on bullets. We scrambled  
15 another section of Cobras out of Quan Loi. I'm having a little trouble putting this  
16 together. I do know that CWO Mac Cookson was the aircraft commander and section  
17 leader. WO1 Gary White was in one of the aircraft; we're trying to determine who the  
18 other crewmembers were. We've got a pretty good read on it, but we haven't been able  
19 to determine that yet. They tried to get another Medevac in that was piloted by 1<sup>st</sup> Lt.  
20 Tom Reed, that aircraft was damaged and the fuel cells were pierced. They landed a  
21 short distance away and they were picked up by another aircraft and evacuated. A fourth  
22 attempt was made by CWO Ray Zepp, Medevac Two-Three to get his aircraft in but he  
23 was shot down, managed to get it away from the LZ but his aircraft was disabled and he  
24 was also picked up. By that time it was getting a little dark, we had one aircraft already  
25 destroyed, three down and two damaged. Teull's aircraft and the Cobra that I was in, we  
26 took hits in the tail boom and rotor system.

27 JB: How bad of damage was it?

28 JM: It wasn't bad; in fact, as I recall when we got it back they changed the rotor  
29 blades and put duct tape over the bullet holes. That was how you repaired sheet metal  
30 real quick. We could not get anything in there at night; it would have been suicide to try  
31 to go back in at night. The following day we put together a planned rescue attempt that

1 involved several Medevac choppers which had to be borrowed from other units because  
2 Charlie Company—which was supplying all of these Medevac choppers on the first  
3 day—had run out of airplanes. They just didn't have anything that would fly. Mac  
4 Cookson led two heavy fire teams of three Cobras each up to the LZ and we did a very  
5 heavy rocket prep before attempting to get aircraft in for the rescue. Several of those  
6 aircraft were disabled but all the crews were rescued. The final bird in was the command  
7 and control ship and they evacuated the rest of Modika's crew. We put the whole thing  
8 to bed on the twenty-fifth.

9 JB: Now, when I guess, stepping back to when it first started, what altitude were  
10 you operating it, any idea what altitude you were at.

11 JM: What altitude? We were approximately, I'm going to say, to get that close,  
12 we were anywhere from, at various times from fifty to two hundred feet above ground  
13 level. Air speed going into the LZ probably no more than fifty knots. We were  
14 decelerating with the Medevac to shield him as he went in. We would normally slow  
15 down with him, we tried to time it, as he made his landing, we would break across his  
16 front at low speed to shield him and then we would take up a low level orbit, using the  
17 turret weapons, the mini-guns which I did fire ineffectively, just trying to make some  
18 noise. We didn't know how many bad guys were down there, but they were all over the  
19 place. Somebody said later that artillery was impacting in the area and we're saying, "I  
20 don't remember any artillery," and I don't know that it would do any good because the  
21 NVA were in the perimeter, it was just people all over the place. It took a while for the  
22 ARVN to establish any kind of concerted defensive positions and settle in for the night.

23 JB: Now, that ARVN company that was there, they'd been inserted the day  
24 before, any idea why they didn't stumble into these bunkers at that point?

25 JM: Well, I think they realized in the area that they were in, in Vietnam you could  
26 be sitting on top of one of these things and not even know it, especially in the jungled  
27 area and the North Vietnamese were masters at camouflage. You could stand right next  
28 to one of them and you wouldn't know it was there unless you could smell him. I think  
29 the ARVN had discovered this and the area that they were looking at, whether the NVA  
30 came back in during the night and reinforced it, the bunker complex or whether the South  
31 Vietnamese had just stumbled on an unoccupied area because these bunkers surrounded

1 the LZ that we were working on. Whether the ARVN airborne troops had been inserted  
2 in there and the NVA let them come in. That bothers me because the NVA would never  
3 resist the chance of blasting a couple of helicopters that were sitting on the ground. I get  
4 the gut feeling that if there were any there when the ARVN were first inserted they  
5 weren't at strength and decided they weren't going to pick a fight right then.

6 JB: Did the ARVN on the ground have any role in the rescue attempt?

7 JM: They were fighting for their lives. During the night certainly they provided  
8 security for Madika and Carburot and Louis Rocco and the other surviving crewmember  
9 of Medevac Two. The gunner, a kid named Taylor was killed in the crash when the  
10 aircraft rolled over on him, in the Medevac crew.

11 JB: Now, the aircraft you were flying that day, was that zero-four-nine?

12 JM: We have not been able to determine the serial numbers on the aircraft  
13 although I have sent a request in to the National Archives, their Southeast Asia division  
14 looking for after action reports or daily journals which were kept of aircraft assignments.  
15 I'm trying to find those. Nobody has been able to recall which aircraft were involved.  
16 We thought we could get something from the Army Gold Book because it kept records of  
17 dates and battle damage to certain aircraft and we thought well, at least the one Alexander  
18 and I was in, we knew we had battle damage but it was repaired at unit level,  
19 consequently we think no report went in of it. Those Gold Book records are highly  
20 inaccurate, I've found just with Second of the Twentieth we found numerous reporting  
21 errors and I think some of it was made up to tell you the truth. I don't place a lot of faith  
22 in those. I have photographs of aircraft with clear tail numbers and they're not listed as  
23 having ever been served with Second of the Twentieth. I don't know what happened. In  
24 talking to the people at the National Archives, they did mention that there was a period of  
25 time where the First Cavalry Division did not keep good records or erroneously destroyed  
26 records. For example Louis Rocco was awarded the Medal of Honor but not until some  
27 time after he got out of Vietnam because the recommendations for the citations were lost.  
28 So had to enlist the aid of Congressman and other people to get it for him. In fact I talked  
29 to Paul Garrity a short time ago and he was surprised to hear that Louis had gotten it  
30 because Garrity had written up a recommendation for the citation as did George  
31 Alexander, Steve Modika and Leroy Carburot and all of that stuff was lost. So Garrity

1 was extremely happy to here that Rocco did get the award. What's really strange about  
2 the whole thing is Garrity and Alexander were written up by the Medevac crews and the  
3 recommendations for them were lost, consequently they were not decorated for their  
4 actions that day. Not that they cared about it, but they stuck their necks out, had they not  
5 offered themselves up as targets it could have been a lot worse, a lot worse. I didn't have  
6 much to do, I had to go where Alexander went, I spent the whole time in the front seat  
7 trying to hide in my helmet. That was scary and when you're sitting in the front seat of a  
8 Cobra, it's like having balcony seats at the opera; you're just hanging right out there.  
9 You think everybody in the world is looking at that target painted on your head.

10 JB: I guess what they call a high pucker factor?

11 JM: There you go. You couldn't wait to get in the back seat because you could  
12 hide back there. When I made aircraft commander there was a little guy in the unit, a  
13 short squat fellow named Neil McMillan and I said, "I'll take him." And they said,  
14 "What do you want him for?" I said, "Because he's going to wear a chicken plate and if  
15 they put anything through the chicken plate, him, and the instrument panel I deserve to  
16 die."

17 JB: I was looking through your slides and there were two shots of Medevac bird,  
18 would that happen to be one of the aircraft involved, do you know?

19 JM: Those photographs were taken later, probably not one of the aircraft involved  
20 but if I remember correctly the aircraft commander of that particular Medevac ship was a  
21 guy named Cecil Montgomery Halcom, he was Medevac Eight, he was flying right seat  
22 for Hank Teull on May twenty-fourth, he was not yet an aircraft commander.

23 JB: I'm looking at the notes right now and it looks like on the right hand side, it  
24 says Medevac Eight.

25 JM: If it says Medevac Eight or Angel of Mercy, that was Halcom. He was flying  
26 right seat for Hank Teull. That was the second Medevac bird that tried to get in to rescue  
27 Madika and Carbuot. What other slides do you have there?

28 JB: Actually I've got them all right here. I pulled the ones of the individuals who  
29 were involved. I've got the shot of Cookson and Teull right here; it looks like he's at  
30 some party or something.

1 JM: That photograph was taken at our “officers’ club” at Camp Bearcat.  
2 Probably, we had a big party—if Cookson is wearing a blue paisley smoking jacket that  
3 was his going away party.  
4 JB: No, he’s wearing the standard Nomex flight suit.  
5 JM: Standard Nomex, that was a party, where we got a day off. We invited the  
6 Medevac to cruise in; I think we were christening the club because Modika was at that  
7 party too. He’d recovered from his leg wound and was back but I think he was just  
8 about; in fact it may have been a going away part for Modika and Teull now that I recall.  
9 They left shortly after that party, Cookson went home in I want to say November or  
10 December of ’70.  
11 JB: Yes, Teull, I’d rather not look at him. Cookson is wearing; it’s looks like an  
12 Australian—  
13 JM: That’s an Australian bush hat that he picked up on R&R (Rest and  
14 Relaxation) in Australia.  
15 JB: Did you head down there as well?  
16 JM: I wanted to, but no, it took me along time to get R&R and I ended up going to  
17 Hong Kong. Garrity went to Australia, spent the whole week in bed.  
18 JB: That sounds pretty cool. Now, at any time during the mission did you feel  
19 like you were going to get shot down? Was the anti-aircraft fire that heavy at you?  
20 JM: I thought, I don’t know, initially when we saw the tracers there was a wall of  
21 them, had Alexander not broken hard right we would have been tattooed good. He saw  
22 them, they were coming up in front of us and had we continued our left hand turn we’d  
23 have flown right through it. When he broke right he put a lot of tin between those guns  
24 and us and came back the other way and struggled to just get out of there. Garrity came,  
25 while we were moving out, Garrity was in a rocket run and he started putting them in. He  
26 was a little off with his first pair or two and then he just put a whole load of them right on  
27 the bunkers, so that saved our necks too. They just had all kinds of stuff there. The hits  
28 that we took were .30 caliber, there weren’t .51 cal, you get hit by a .51 cal, you’d know  
29 it. Literally it would tip the airplane over there. They packed a punch.  
30 JB: Now, were your rocket runs and the mini gun having any effect on the enemy  
31 positions, where you aware of that?

1 JM: We don't know, there were just a lot of people down there in as I said  
2 concrete reinforced bunkers. Obviously they weren't giving up because every aircraft  
3 that tried to get in there got shot up. In fact, on that first day, the only aircraft that were  
4 not damaged were the ones that Garrity, Cookson, and Cookson's wingman were flying.  
5 Every other aircraft that got within the perimeter of that LZ got hit. The aircraft that were  
6 at altitude did not get hit. Probably because the fire was coming from the bunkers and  
7 they probably couldn't bring their weapons to bear on anything that was at altitude but as  
8 soon as we got down below tree level, they blasted everything.

9 JB: I'm trying to come up with other questions.

10 JM: That was a situation if we had had something like the SS-11s or some wire  
11 guided missiles or something like that, or even a twenty millimeter cannon with armor  
12 piercing rounds we may have been able to do some damage to the bunkers but those 2.75  
13 inch HE (high explosive) rockets, it was like throwing tennis balls at them unless you put  
14 one right through the aperture or the concussion if you hit them real heavy with multiple  
15 rounds the concussion might kill the occupants or you might get some shrapnel that  
16 would splash through the aperture but these guys were not amateurs.

17 JB: They were definitely NVA?

18 JM: Oh, absolutely.

19 JB: Now, any idea what type of weapons load you had for that day?

20 JM: What load we had?

21 JB: Yes.

22 JM: Standard would have been seventeen pound HE and if we were in a heavy  
23 hog configuration, two tubes would be carrying approximately fifteen seventeen-  
24 pounders each and then we would load the outboard tubes with ten pounders. If we were  
25 in a light configuration with the nineteen shots in board and seventeen shot rockets  
26 outboard we'd either load up the inboards with ten pounders and the outboards with  
27 seventeens or put a reduced load of seventeens on the inboard and a full load of  
28 seventeens on the outboard.

29 JB: Was there any difference in effectiveness between the two tanks?

30 JM: The seventeen pounders made a louder bang. The ten pounders were a little  
31 more accurate. We got to the point where we could stick those things through the



1 window of a truck if we had to. I've fired as close as fifteen meters to friendly troops  
2 with the rockets. But you got in close. I believe they had to go four hundred meters  
3 before they would arm and we had a standard operating procedure was we did not break  
4 fifteen hundred foot AGL (above ground level), that's what the book said, in a rocket run.  
5 But I don't remember except on my AC (aircraft) check ride of ever pulling out before I  
6 hit fifteen hundred feet, that's where we started our rocket run. If you were firing  
7 hundred meters from friendly troops, that was kid's stuff. But in Vietnam most of that  
8 contact in the jungle, they were ten to twenty-five meters so if you were going to do  
9 anything you had to get it in close and they closer you got the more accurate you were  
10 going to be.

11 JB: Gives a whole new meaning to the term close air support.

12 JM: Danger close, danger close, when we got within those things at the end, we  
13 had to get the ground commander's initials and permission, but we always fired danger  
14 close. What the hell good—I can remember Air Force fast movers coming in, doing their  
15 “close air support,” what good is it to drop a 250 pound bomb, two hundred meters from  
16 the contact, that doesn't hurt anybody? It gets their attention, it makes a very loud noise  
17 but same with artillery. We'd use artillery for blocking fires. A lot of times we'd be on a  
18 mission and we'd want to trap the bad guys and maintain contact. We'd use artillery and  
19 fast movers for blocking fires to keep them bottled up but to get in close you had to,  
20 sometimes they'd bring in OH-6s with mini guns on them and they'd hover around in the  
21 tress. If you're dosing your research, you look at how many OH-6s were shot down,  
22 those guys were industrial strength stupid. They would just, the joke was over there, is  
23 LOACH (Light Observation Helicopter) pilots, you just strap that to the ass of a Warrant  
24 Officer One and tell him he's a hero and he'll try to win the war by himself. Scout pilots  
25 were crazy; you'd never get me doing that.

26 JB: Yes, I've spoken to a couple of veterans as well, mainly Air Cav, basically  
27 just sending the LOACH down low to have people shoot at him.

28 JM: Target practice and those guys had, pardon the vernacular but they had balls  
29 and they would get in there. I just could not believe the guts that those LOACH drivers  
30 had. They were crazy, stupid or the bravest people in the world, next to the Medevac  
31 crews. I had nothing but absolute respect for Medevac crews. Those guys never said no

1 and they never quit. They would go in the worst damn weather in the middle of night,  
2 hot LZ they just went. They went they never said no. Well, Medevac was a perfect  
3 example of it; they just kept feeding people into that thing. The bird in front of them  
4 would go down; they'd say, "Okay, my turn." Gutsy guys, really gutsy guys.

5 JB: Any idea what drove people to do that, to sacrifice themselves like that?

6 JM: They're, you've heard the cliché, after a while you weren't fighting for mom,  
7 apple pie, country or any of that, you were fighting for one another and it was just a  
8 dedication amongst the helicopter crews anyway. I was talking to Mac Cookson the  
9 other night about this and he said that during the time he was there, there was only one  
10 guy in the unit that he would not fly with and it was the same for me. There was nobody  
11 in that unit except for one guy that I wouldn't fly with in a heart beat and if one of your  
12 pals went down, you did everything to get him. We didn't care about the machines, the  
13 Army had tons of machines, we cared about the people, so we'd just go get them and you  
14 developed a rapport. We became very, very close with the Medevac crews. We had  
15 many, many aircraft shot up shielding those guys and we would literally just stick  
16 ourselves between them and the bad guys because they were defenseless. They were  
17 trying to, they got a medic and maybe the crew chief hanging out the door on a hoist  
18 trying to lug some poor grunt up through the jungle on a jungle penetrator or a rigid litter  
19 if he was seriously injured and everybody in the world could see them. The little people  
20 in the bushes with the AK, Uncle Ho put a big floral ribbon on their chest if they  
21 whacked a helicopter, that was a big deal for them. Get a helicopter; you were a hero, so  
22 that Red Cross meant nothing to them. In fact later in the war some dumbass, rear  
23 echelon type decided they should paint the Medevac choppers white. We had some  
24 people over there that weren't thinking right. They were primarily—one of the problems  
25 we had was people rotated through too quickly. You just got good at it and you went  
26 home. That was even with the commanders, by the time those guys got good at it, they  
27 sent them home. You take a look at the grunts, your platoon leaders, those guys would be  
28 out in the field for six months and then they'd send them to the rear. Heck, six months,  
29 you just figured out how to read a map and the same flying the helicopters. Standard  
30 procedure was after you had a hundred hours or three months in country, at least in our  
31 unit, they'd start working you up to aircraft commander. But if you had anything going

1 for you. During an entire tour you flew over a thousand hours and you really didn't know  
2 what was going on until you had about five hundred hours under your belt. So you get  
3 five hundred hours under your belt being stupid and then you start getting good at it and  
4 just about that time they send you home. So, that created a problem over there as far as  
5 experience went.

6 JB: Yes, it seems to be fairly universal; just about everybody I've spoken to has  
7 said the same thing.

8 JM: Of course we weren't unhappy when they sent us home, believe me. You get  
9 the last month you were there, you were walking on eggs. Mac Cookson got shot down  
10 on his last mission and he took the mission—he had already processed out of the unit and  
11 was supposed to go to Bien Hoa to process out and go home and I don't know who the  
12 pilot was in the unit, but he was sick as a dog, he was violently ill, so Cookson said,  
13 "Well, I'll take your flight, it's going to be a milk run." He went up and as he started his  
14 rocket run and pulled out, he got stitched right across the belly and the airplane started  
15 having bad feelings. The engine didn't like that and Cookson crashed in a daisy cutter  
16 LZ, crash landed and when he got back to the operations area, our operations officer,  
17 Capt. Marion Ray who was a great guy just looked at Cookson and said, "I'm not even  
18 writing that mission up, I'm not reopening your file, just get out of here." When he got  
19 down to battalion headquarters, the battalion commander said, "I don't know whether to  
20 kiss you or court marital you, but I'm going to tell you one thing, I don't want to see your  
21 face again, get out of here."

22 JB: Now, Medevac Meadow, was it on the Vietnam side or the Cambodian side of  
23 the runway?

24 JM: No, it was on the Cambodian side.

25 JB: I was just looking at a 1968 map.

26 JM: It was in the region called The Fishhook and it happened probably, it was  
27 northeast of Kontum and probably west of Loc Ninh. Loc Ninh was an interesting place.  
28 We used to do what we called loggers up there, where we'd just land on this little airstrip  
29 and hang around waiting to support troops in the area and we didn't know at the time but  
30 the North Vietnamese were digging holes right under where we were sitting. It was one  
31 of their, I think it was War Zone C or D, I'm not sure they were both up there, but Loc

1     Ninh was an area where there was a heavy concentration of NVA. They would do their  
2     thing and then slip back across the border and we couldn't chase them.

3             JB: So when did you become aware that there was a tunnel complex there?

4             JM: I didn't know it until after the war when they started finding all these things.  
5     Of course the North Vietnamese were, for propaganda purposes were crowing about it,  
6     saying, "You dummy Americans, you were sitting right on top of us and didn't even  
7     know it." George Tebets got mad at Alexander and I because we were flying one of the  
8     only aircraft with an air conditioner in it and we saw some NVA popping out of spider  
9     holes one day and so we racked it around and came in low level and were firing the mini-  
10    gun and the forty millimeter grenade launcher and one of them popped out of the spider  
11    hole and fired one of the golden BB they had us, and it hit the air conditioning unit.  
12    George Tebets wanted us persecuted for war crimes for that one. He said that was a war  
13    crime.

14            JB: I've been going through all the slides and various aircraft. Of course I  
15    emailed you the other day about 674, and my thoughts as far as it being Murder, Inc.

16            JM: I don't know, that's why I'm trying to get a hold of Jett Jackson. He'd be  
17    able to let me know on that. See there's an aircraft that's not even listed on the Charlie  
18    Battery inventory and it's obviously got the big red circle on the nose.

19            JB: Actually, there's another shot of it in Shelby Stanton's *Uniforms of the*  
20    *Vietnam War*. It's, I can't think of the guy's name, anyway, it's a right side shot of it and  
21    it had the name on both sides.

22            JM: Right, we put the names on both sides. In fact, you'll see when I send you  
23    the photos of 054; you'll notice the variation in the layout of the name from the portside  
24    to the starboard side. On one side the bottom silhouette is sort of convex and on the other  
25    side it's concave, slight variation, but you'll see it.

26            JB: Now, was 054 a twenty millimeter bird?

27            JM: No, that was a heavy hawk.

28            JB: Any idea how many twenty millimeters were in the unit?

29            JM: When I left I believe we had two. Now, there is a photograph, I'm trying to  
30    think of where I saw it, of the one that's marked Murder Inc. and that had the twenty  
31    millimeter removed. It still had the structural reinforcement on the forward part of the

1 fuselage. I don't know if it had the saddle ammo bays on it but obviously it had on the  
2 port wing, it was in a heavy hog configuration and that was after I left. The twenty-  
3 millimeter birds, we'd fight to fly those. It was a new toy, but you didn't have to be in  
4 trim or anything. To fire the rockets you had to fly the aircraft on a string. You had to be  
5 perfectly in trim and have a constant angle of attack or the rockets; they would  
6 weathervane if you were out of trim at all. But that twenty-millimeter, you're just  
7 punching pedal and wherever you put the pipper, that's where the bullets were going to  
8 go. We loved that thing. We could duke it out with .51 cal's because we could get  
9 standoff range, then it was a fair fight. Before that you had to get within the .51 cal's  
10 range and that wasn't healthy. In fact I did find for you, if you're going to use them, I'll  
11 send them out to you, I found photographs of a triangular helicopter ambush, so I'll get  
12 those off to you and you can sue them actually anywhere as an example of what they  
13 looked like and what the crews were up against. The Cobra pilots would have absolutely  
14 no qualms about duking it out with those damn things. Don't forget we were twenty,  
15 twenty-one years old. We really were naïve and we thought we were immortal. There  
16 was just something about flying those helicopters that made you feel invincible or  
17 invisible, one or the other I don't know. You're talking about some nutty kids out there.  
18 I wouldn't do it today, no way. I'd say, "No, I think I'll stay in bed, you go ahead, have a  
19 good time."

20 JB: Yes, it's funny how Dave Tilof pretty much said the same thing. It's  
21 interesting, hearing his take on things, but he said it was an awful lot of responsibility.

22 JM: Yes, think about it. The Huey crews, you could have two twenty year old  
23 kids in the front seats commanding a mission with another eight, ten aircraft behind them,  
24 each one carrying eight to ten troops and these two kids are responsible for their lives.  
25 That's amazing, that's not like—the next time you go to McDonalds, you take a look at  
26 the manager there, some young kid, now put that guy in a helicopter and you scratch your  
27 head and you go like, wow, that's incredible. It's astonishing, you get some twenty-five  
28 year old guy and we called him grandpa. How old are you?

29 JB: I'll be twenty-nine in September.

30 JM: You'll be twenty-nine; you were ancient back then, twenty-nine, my god. At  
31 twenty-nine imagine being a battalion commander, imagine being, at twenty-nine being a

1 company commander, commanding a whole company, eighteen Hueys and all the pilots  
2 and ground crews, you're in charge. You put that in the context of what we're looking at  
3 today and go, "Oh my god."

4 JB: Certainly put things in perspective.

5 JM: I think it was Paul Garrity one time tried to figure out how many dollars  
6 worth of rockets he fired when he was over there. A thousand hours average mission an  
7 hour and a half, we flew very, very few admin missions in the Cobras because we were  
8 on call all the time, training was OJT (on-the-job), so there were no "training missions,"  
9 so you could have six or seven hundred combat missions and we never came back with  
10 any bullets. We used them all, so figure an average, six hundred or seven hundred  
11 missions and you're dumping sixty rockets on each mission, that's a lot of explosives.

12 JB: Now, how effective were the turret weapons, I know we discussed the  
13 chunker last time, but how was the mini-gun?

14 JM: Mini-gun was a good suppressive fire weapon. We always used it if we  
15 were in a hot situation; the wingman would always use the mini-gun and throw out a  
16 spray of into the area just to cover the break of ship that was on a rocket run. Medevac  
17 Meadows, we used the mini-gun when we were low. We were taking fire, it was good  
18 for close in you could get pretty close with it and it would keep their heads down. Most  
19 of the time we never saw the people we were shooting at because the jungle was so  
20 dense. We were just pretty much being directed like artillery. We'd fire a marking pair  
21 and then the ground commander would adjust our fire. Most of the time they'd throw a  
22 smoke grenade out and then they'd give us just some direction from the smoke to the  
23 enemy contact. We'd shoot outside of it first just to get the marking pair down, make  
24 sure everything was working right, the foresight was good and once we felt comfortable  
25 with that, then we'd start working it in close. So if he told us initially that he had a  
26 contact at zero-nine-zero, twenty-five meters, we'd put the first rockets, fifty to seventy-  
27 five meters out and then if they went where we wanted them to, then he'd adjust us in and  
28 we'd move in closer.

29 JB: Now, what was the effective blast radius of the tens as compared to the  
30 seventeens?

1           JM: Boy, I used to know but I don't. What would happen too is, don't forget  
2 these weapons were fired at an angle so when the blast exploded, the shrapnel pattern  
3 would go in the direction of the rocket's flight, it wouldn't explode directly up, it would  
4 kind of splash out straight.

5           JB: Also, since our last discussion I've come across a lot of references to flechette  
6 rockets.

7           JM: Nails? Yup. Georgie Alexander used to refer to those as trump. You didn't  
8 use those in close, definitely an area fire weapon, probably one of the best examples of  
9 that and I wish you could talk to George Alexander because he's got a better handle on  
10 the story than I do. In 1971 after I left, Charlie Battery was going back into Cambodia in  
11 support of ARVN troops, this was 1971, a pilot in our unit who was a copilot when I was  
12 there named Joe Perez.

13          JB: Yes, actually there's a picture of him here.

14          JM: Joe, okay, Joe had screwed up, had gone back to rearm after a mission and  
15 they accidentally gave him a load of nails. As he got back up he caught several hundred  
16 NVA in the open and nailed them. When they assaulted troops in, they found something  
17 like 250 to 300 bodies. And what had happened was he had caught them in the open, it  
18 was the NVA pay call, they were getting paid and from what Alexander told me they  
19 found hundreds of thousands of piasters, which was Vietnamese money; he had actually  
20 caught these guys while they were getting paid. He got a Distinguished Service Cross for  
21 that mission. I haven't seen the citation, you'd have to talk to, Alex got the story because  
22 he stayed in the service later and he ran into some guys later on and they told him the  
23 story and it was amazing. Doug Foster, I should have you talk to him, he's up in Oregon,  
24 we called him Trapper, he was Trapper John before "MASH." Well, the reason was he  
25 was the vector control officer and that's the guy who's in charge of keeping vermin out of  
26 the camp, so he used to come up with all these bizarre traps to trap rats, so we called him  
27 Trapper John. Any questions on any of the photos that you are going to use?

28          JB: Let's see. Well, I've basically been going through them aircraft by aircraft,  
29 I've done a couple of sketches of profiles and stuff and I'm hoping, I was told I could use  
30 up to forty aircraft profiles. I would like to use four different aircraft. I am really  
31 intrigued by number six hundred.

1 JM: Six hundred was the twin mini-gun ship. That was crewed by a kid named  
2 Carlton, his last name was Carlton, C-a-r-l-t-o-n. It was one of the few—in fact see  
3 here’s a situation, I’ve got to get you to talk to Mac Cookson because Cookson was the  
4 armament officer and it was his idea to put twin minis in that aircraft and he got the idea  
5 when he went to armament officer school at Vung Tau. So, you’ve got to talk to  
6 Cookson, he’ll tell you about six hundred. He’ll also tell you about the black tail boom  
7 on zero-four-nine. That was a “clandestine” operation aircraft.

8 JB: Nobody knows who we are.

9 JM: No, nobody knows who we are. We’ve got the big blue cross on the pylon  
10 and we travel in pairs but nobody knows who we are. The Army brass after Cambodia  
11 decided that we would no longer be allowed to use our Blue Max call signs; they were  
12 going to change the call signs every two weeks. But we still left the Blue Max on the  
13 pylons and at one point they gave us a call sign of Supreme Capon. The battalion  
14 commander went absolutely berserk and absolutely refused to use that call sign. When I  
15 left Vietnam my call sign was Perkins Tank Six, Seven Charlie and we thought that was  
16 very appropriate because those dipwicks, rear echelon guys tried to use us like tanks.  
17 We’d go out and we’d make contact with the ground troops who were taking fire and  
18 we’d say, “This is Supreme Capon Six, Seven Charlie.” And they’d say, “We don’t want  
19 you guys, we called for Blue Max.” We said, “Well, damn it we are Max.” They’d say,  
20 “Where did you get that stupid call sign?” “Don’t worry about it; what’s your problem  
21 here?” It was bizarre. It gave the guys in the rear something to do I guess, I don’t know.  
22 I think the guys that came up with that are the ones that came up with the idea of painting  
23 the Medevac birds white. Just really dumb stuff.

24 JB: Actually, I’m looking at the slide of Murder Inc. right now and it is in a  
25 heavy hog configuration, that’s bizarre.

26 JM: Now, which photo is this?

27 JB: It’s the nose shot of Murder Inc.

28 JM: With the crew chief sitting on the—

29 JB: Yeah.

30 JM: I think that guy's name is Ray Winkle. I’ve got an email out to him but I  
31 haven’t—Steve Ray Winkle—I haven’t gotten a response from him yet. I’m going to



1 have to rattle his cage because I'm trying to get the tail number confirmed on it. That  
2 definitely had the twenty millimeter on the port side. I don't ever recall them changing it  
3 or whatever but unless the gun was pulled for maintenance and they just strapped a rocket  
4 pod on there. I don't know.

5 JB: Did you have any birds in the unit with the mini-gun pods?

6 JM: No, we were strictly rockets. The units that I think D Company 227<sup>th</sup> and D  
7 Company 229<sup>th</sup> had a lot of those birds in the Cav and I believe the First of the Ninth also  
8 had some birds with mini-guns on them.

9 JB: Yeah because from what I've seen that seemed to be an earlier rather than a  
10 later weapon.

11 JM: The mini-gun pods, yeah. I think it had a lot to do with the mission they were  
12 involved in too. When you're talking about, well for example D Company 227<sup>th</sup> and  
13 229<sup>th</sup>, their gunships would probably want to use mini-guns because they had to get in  
14 real close if they got in a situation where there as a hot LZ. So they'd want something  
15 that was fairly accurate that they could work in close.

16 JB: I've been having such a blast going through these slide, there's some amazing  
17 shots here.

18 JM: Have fun there's more coming.

19 JB: Great. Now, was 049 the only one painted with a black tail boom?

20 JM: Boy, you've got me there. I don't believe it was. I think we had a couple  
21 more, I think we had at least one more, in fact I've got to check some slides. I've got a  
22 photograph of Gary White hanging off the tail boom of one and it looks like it's got a  
23 black tail boom.

24 JB: I'm looking at the shot of the six hundred right now. I've seen a lot of them  
25 with just the empty red circles with no call sign lettering in it.

26 JM: Yes, as time went on the later birds did not have the number, if they were  
27 repainted or something to that effect, it was the older birds that had the call signs painted  
28 in the circle. For example, I think there's a photograph of myself there nest to Tango  
29 One, that was 720. The later aircraft that I was assigned to, 054 did not have Tango One  
30 painted in the circle.

1 JB: It's funny I've noticed everybody with these low-slung pistol holsters, sort of  
2 a cowboy-esque look.

3 JM: That was not an affectation. There was purpose for that, especially for the  
4 guys who liked to carry .45s. What you would do is if you were going into a hot LZ or  
5 something like that, you'd slide that around in front of the family goodies. You'll see the  
6 guys with .38s; the guys with .38s like to carry them in shoulder holsters on the left side  
7 near their heart. We were ordered to wear the chicken plates, but we never wore them.  
8 What we'd do is we'd take them out of the carrier and take them and get rid of the back  
9 plate because it was terribly uncomfortable and useless, but you'd take the chest plate and  
10 you'd stick it in the window between the seat armor and the canopy depending on which  
11 way you were going to break, gave you a little extra protection. A lot of times you'd tell  
12 the copilot if it was going to be a hot one to slide the chicken plate in under his should  
13 straps, but take it out. One of the things we didn't like, if you went down and you had a  
14 hard landing that damn thing had a tendency to ride up and hit you in the throat. At one  
15 point they came out with a division wide order that we would wear the chicken plates. So  
16 what we'd do is when we were taking off, we'd stick it under the shoulder straps and as  
17 soon as we got airborne we'd take it off and then when we were coming back we would  
18 put it back on, but we'd take it off. I didn't like it myself, so the Cobra crews, at least in  
19 our unit, very seldom did we ever wear the chicken plate.

20 JB: Yes, it's funny, the gentleman I am going to interview this afternoon sent me  
21 a photo of himself standing in front of Huey and he is wearing chicken plate and he is  
22 also wearing a flak vest, regular issue flak vest over it. It was amusing; I guess he really  
23 wanted to be protected.

24 JM: Well, there's a chance, perfect example, Steve Modika, Medevac Two took  
25 two hits in the chest and lived because he had his chicken plate on, but Medevac, you'd  
26 be suicidal not to put that thing on. I think they wore them in the carrier, they wore them  
27 but in the Cobras we didn't.

28 JB: Well, we've been going for about an hour and ten minutes, do you want to  
29 take a break?

30 JM: Sure, if you've got any other questions give me a call any time, once you start  
31 captioning photos or you decide what you're going to use, give me a call. I've got some

1 more stuff coming from Mac Cookson that I'll send to you, plus the three I'll pick up this  
2 afternoon. There is two shots of Sound of Silence at hover and then there is a shot of the  
3 crew chief sitting up in with the canopy open and it's got a very clear, large shot of the  
4 starboard side so you'll get an idea of what it looked like and that will be a pretty easy  
5 profile to do because the bird was freshly painted. It's a uniform OD, brand spanking  
6 new looking Sound of Silence in light blue with white trim, the Blue Max symbol on the  
7 pylon and just the red circle on the nose in standard position and 054 on the tail.

8 JB: Right now I've got about a dozen profiles set; I haven't wholly worked it out  
9 for that bird.

10 JM: Have you had any luck with Fourth of the Seventy-seventh?

11 JB: No, I haven't.

12 JM: I'm having a tough time getting anything out of those guys myself. I've sent  
13 emails off to two people and I've gotten no response.

14 JB: I've had some success with B Troop Second of the Seventeenth Cav.

15 JM: Nothing from the 229<sup>th</sup>?

16 JB: No.

17 JM: Nothing from the First of the Ninth?

18 JB: No, not yet.

19 JM: I'll get Jimmy Sugart, I'll light a fire under him, he was with E Troop, First  
20 of the Ninth. When they folded up the 229<sup>th</sup> and 227<sup>th</sup> a lot of those guys were farmed  
21 out to different units and they used a cadre of the Cobra pilots from those units to from E  
22 Troop, First of the Ninth. So, I'll get a hold of him. They had some pretty interesting  
23 birds too; some great markings on them, Leprechaun, Raid—had the Raid insect spray  
24 logo on the side of it. I'm trying to think of some of the others, but they had some pretty  
25 interesting nose art out of those units. I'll see if I can get Sugart, light him up and get  
26 something from him. Sugart and Fenwick for 229<sup>th</sup> and First of the Ninth, we should be  
27 able to get you something for those guys.

28 JB: Let me just officially end this. This will end the interview with Mr. Jim  
29 Moran and the twenty-eighth of March.