

Interview with Ron Milam
Session 3 of 7
June 30, 2005

1 Richard Verrone: This is Dr. Richard Verrone. I'm continuing my oral history
2 interview with Dr. Ron Milam. Today is June 30, 2005. It's approximately 1:18 pm
3 Central Standard time, and we're in the same place, in the interview room of the Special
4 Collections Library. Ron, let's continue with where we were. We had been discussing
5 parachuting and your good times there at Benning, but your first day of OCS was not
6 such a pleasant memory, and you described that in detail. And then you had five weeks,
7 and you went home, and you went back to Detroit, I presume or—

8 Ron Milam: Back to the Detroit area and enjoyed my Christmas vacation and
9 packed up a few things into a U-Haul trailer as I recall and drove down after January 1st,
10 sometime in there, January 7th or 8th or something, I don't remember exactly—with my
11 wife and set her up in the apartment in Columbus, Georgia, knowing that I would not get
12 to see her very much, but I wanted her to be there. And then I reported to my OCS class.

13 RV: Okay. How did your parents react to you? You described it, when you went
14 home before, just briefly- your mother kind of being shocked at your language a little bit.
15 Were you as salty when you went home for these five weeks?

16 RM: I was worse.

17 RV: You were worse?

18 RM: I was worse because I had just become an airborne trooper, and I was really
19 full of myself. All of the college graduate, MBA intellectual was gone. I was probably
20 physically at the top of my game because airborne will do that to you. But more so than
21 just physically, I was mentally tough because the confidence that you gain by doing
22 something that others haven't done, getting enough nerve to jump out of a plane, and
23 maybe for some people, they didn't take it that way, but for me personally, it was real
24 challenge to have enough bravado to do that. So I was pretty full of myself, and I'm sure
25 I demonstrated that to anyone that would listen.

26 RV: What did Maxine think?

27 RM: Oh, I think she was kind of proud of me, but I think she saw that I was a
28 different person a little bit.

1 RV: For better, for worse?

2 RM: Well, I don't know.

3 RV: In her eyes.

4 RM: It had been five months since I left home, and in that time I'd gone through
5 basic, AIT, airborne training, become a much bigger specimen than I was, I'd gained, like
6 I say, 25 pounds or so. I don't know whether she saw it as better or worse. Different,
7 certainly different.

8 RV: Okay, well tell me, going back down to Benning and getting into OCS, what
9 was it like? What was that first day back like?

10 RM: The first day back was real hell. It was almost as if these TAC Officers, the
11 Tactical Officers that were going to be running our company, none of them were Vietnam
12 veterans. They were all second lieutenants who had just graduated themselves, at the top
13 of their class and had been held over to be TAC Officers as their first duty station. They
14 would be TAC Officers for four to six months; usually they let them go through one
15 complete class, and then they go to Vietnam. That was to be their training. But they
16 were the best that the previous companies had.

17 RV: And you're there for your Officer Candidates School for six months?

18 RM: Six months. It's 24 weeks, yes.

19 RV: And this is in January?

20 RM: I began in the middle of January and graduated the middle of June.

21 RV: Okay.

22 RM: And it was almost as if they were out to prove not only their worth because
23 they had graduated at the top of their class, they knew the system, they knew the
24 importance of different things that we would do, but in addition to that, they were going
25 to take it out on us that we were airborne qualified, something that they didn't get an
26 opportunity to do because they went right from their class to being a TAC Officer. They
27 would have all liked to do that, but they didn't get a chance, at least that's the story they
28 told. And so they set out to make us feel really small, the first thing being, 'take off those
29 wings, you'll never get to wear those again.' And that's pretty much unheard of because
30 you think of any officer or any enlisted man that ever becomes airborne qualified, his
31 wings are just about the most important thing he wears, other than a CIB perhaps. That's

1 very important. We weren't allowed to wear them on our fatigues; we weren't allowed to
2 wear them on our caps. We weren't even, as I recall, when we would go through things
3 like the 8-week party, the 12-week party, the 18-week party, some of those social events,
4 we weren't allowed to wear them, and we certainly were not allowed to blouse our
5 boots—blouse our pants into our boots, that was not allowed. They really tried hard to
6 break us down. Now I'm sure there was a certain element of that with all Officer
7 Candidate classes. Officer Candidates School is designed to break you down. It's more
8 so than basic training; the plan there in OCS is to try to make it as stressful as they can
9 get, the closest thing they can get to combat. It's modeled after Beast Barracks at West
10 Point, and it's a very tough program. My recent research for my dissertation showed that
11 it had the highest attrition rate by far, of any Army school. 30%, consistently 30% from
12 '62-'72. Ranger was only 20, so it's 30% of the people that start don't make it through,
13 and over half of all those that don't make it through, don't make it through for leadership
14 reasons. So it's very tough, both peer reviews and superior reviews.

15 RV: Were you all made aware of that high percentage of drop outs? Not
16 specifically, obviously, but were you told, 'A lot of you here are going to do okay, but
17 some of you aren't going to make this'?

18 RM: As I recall, we were told that, but I never knew the numbers until I went
19 back and investigated at Benning, and I went through and looked at all the various classes
20 and things. No, we were told that a lot wouldn't make it, and we could see that. They
21 had a—it was a very good program in that sense that starting at about the fourth week,
22 every week as I recall, it may have been less frequent than that, but we had to—we had to
23 name the five members of our platoon who we would refuse to go into combat with, that
24 we would refuse to follow into combat. In other words, it had three names, it was called
25 a peer review, or it was called a bayonet sheet, or as most of the guys called it, a 'fuck
26 your buddy' report. And it was designed to—the theory being that the best people to
27 know whether someone is a good leader are those that serve with him everyday. And so
28 it was just simply one question, 'Who would you refuse to go in combat with? Name
29 five.' And as a result of that, cadets were recycled for failure in leadership.

30 RV: That's tough.

1 RM: It really was. And then you get pushed into another class, and if you get
2 pushed in another class, you come in with two strikes against you, so it's hard to ever
3 catch up if you get recycled for leadership. And of all the reasons that soldiers were
4 recycled, leadership was the number one. Academics was not all that difficult, I mean,
5 most everyone in our class was a college graduate, so the academic part was not that
6 difficult. The deprivation of sleep and things like that was pretty tough. But basically,
7 they're trying to break you down; they do that for about the first eight weeks, and then
8 they start to build you back up. By the time—once you become, once you get through 18
9 weeks, then you become a senior and you become a true candidate, and the last six weeks
10 are physically difficult because you start going out on range of problems and things like
11 that. But the mental toughness part is the first eight weeks; if you can survive the first
12 eight weeks, I think you start thinking that, 'Just maybe I might make it through this
13 program.'

14 RV: Were you all aware of these kind of timeframes, if you get through the first
15 eight weeks?

16 RM: Yes, yes. At 12 weeks there's a social function, and you get involved in
17 parties and having to—learning how to become an officer. Not necessarily becoming a
18 platoon leader, a rifle platoon leader, but become an officer in the strictest—in the officer
19 and the gentleman sense of the word. So you get to all that kind of training too, in
20 addition to the academics, which like I say, I thought were very good and very well
21 taught.

22 RV: Tell me what kind of academics were taught.

23 RM: Well, everything from the typical small unit tactics to armor. We did have
24 helicopter training; we had weapons training on all the weapons, and not just going out
25 and firing the M16, but learning about the M16, learning about the technology behind the
26 M16, in addition to all of the standard weapons that we had learned to fire in basic
27 training. Now we were learning about the weapons themselves.

28 RV: So when you say academics, you mean there is some classroom—

29 RM: In a classroom, in a big classroom, just like at a college.

30 RV: But you're also out in the field—

1 RM: But you always—you usually have four hours of academic training during
2 the day, and then four hours of field training, everyday, six days week. Five and a half
3 days a week, Saturday mornings I guess. And then you have—your nights were spent
4 studying; you were supposed to study for two and a half hours every night. In addition,
5 you've got all the typical spit and polish, cleaning everything, keeping the place looking
6 STRAC. And then we had training, such as we had nuclear training. We learned to fire
7 the Davy Crockett. 120 mm cannon and a nuclear warhead. We learned CBR, Chemical
8 Biological Radiological warfare. We had a lot of classes on leadership. We had not only
9 leadership training, which had been much, much like what I had in graduate school on
10 management skills, but basically learning how to run a platoon. Then we had those from
11 the classroom who—for those into practical field exercises on problem solving exercises,
12 where one person would be in charge, and you had to figure out how to put this log up on
13 top of that. Those typical kinds of things like that. And so that was probably for the first
14 18 weeks. The last six weeks were spent more out in the field, demonstrations of
15 weaponry. We would have F4s come in and put on a demonstration. We'd get a chance
16 to call in air strikes and call in napalm and seeing all of these things demonstrated out in a
17 great big field, sitting in bleachers, watching these things take place. And then the
18 culmination was the Ranger problem, as it was called, which I believe was 10 days long
19 at the very end of our training. And after you went through the Ranger problem, then you
20 were allowed at that point, to live off-post. It was the last two weeks of school, and you
21 were allowed to live off-post. That was the only time you could go off with your family.
22 Up until that time, we were only—varying times during the 24-weeks, the first eight
23 weeks you could see your wife on Tuesday night and Thursday night for a half an hour,
24 the first eight weeks.

25 RV: Where?

26 RM: In the laundry room—in the day room, she would bring me my laundry, and
27 then she'd take my laundry, and then she'd take care of all that. And she'd polished my
28 belt buckles for me, and do an extra pair—I had about four pair of boots, oh, she was
29 terrific.

30 RV: Wow.

1 RM: She'd do all this for me, bring it in. The singles guys didn't have it nearly as
2 good, I mean, I was so glad I took her with me, just from that standpoint. It wasn't
3 obviously a companionship situation.

4 RV: How much does she understand what you were entering into?

5 RM: Oh, I don't think she had a clue as to what it was going to be like, but she
6 found out very quickly because she was a member of the—they had an OC Wives club,
7 and the TAC Officer's wives were in charge of that. So she had to learn to become an
8 officer's wife. She was no longer Maxine Milam; she was Mrs. Lieutenant John R.
9 Milam, and she even had cards like that. She lost her identity as a person; she became the
10 officer's wife, or the potential officer's wife, perspective officer's wife.

11 RV: Can't wait to talk to her about that.

12 RM: (laughs) Yeah, she's got some stories. And they would do things like on
13 Tuesday nights, they knew that the wives were due at seven o'clock, and we'd all be
14 anxiously waiting for them in the dayroom, and then at 7:01, they would—or, at 6:59,
15 they would figure out a way to make sure that if your wife was coming, that you were
16 going to be late. And they would do things like force you down in front of them to do 10
17 push-ups or to hang in a pull-up position on a bar as they berated you in front of your
18 wife. They brought them right into the process, and some of the TAC officers were
19 incredibly mean and rude in all respects, getting a little bit of sadistic pleasure out of that;
20 I'm pretty much convinced that some of them enjoyed that process.

21 RV: Did you experience any of that personally?

22 RM: Oh, yeah, yeah. I was very fortunate; I had a very good TAC Officer. Each
23 platoon had a TAC Officer, and then there was an XO of the company, and then the
24 company commander was the captain. But each platoon had a TAC Officer, and the
25 TAC Officer for the 4th platoon that I was a member of was a man by the name of the
26 Lieutenant John Urliccson. A very fine, intelligent—I think he'd been drafted; I think he
27 had attended the University of Rhode Island or UMass, or some place back east, and I
28 think he may even have been an Art History major or somebody like that. He had a real
29 sense of good liberal thinking, but yet he was an Army officer, and he was a good Army
30 officer.

31 RV: Meaning, liberal arts thinking?

1 RM: Yeah, liberal arts thinking. Very much a humanitarian, not exactly an
2 engineer or business background kind of thing like I was. I just thought the world of him,
3 and he designated me in the very beginning, he wanted me to be his typist; I guess I had
4 an MBA, why not? So I was kind of his typist, and I couldn't type worth a damn. So I
5 spent a lot of time in his office, and we'd developed a relationship that was very solid.
6 So when he would have to go through his public berating of me, it was always with a
7 wink of an eye. And I really did appreciate that; it kind of helped me get through.

8 RV: Did he literally wink or kind of just—

9 RM: I just knew it was there; I just knew it was there. He was just a real fine
10 officer, and I don't have any idea whatever happened to him.

11 RV: How old was he, and you were what, 23?

12 RM: I was—by this time, I was 20—yeah this would have be '69, so I was 20—I
13 was 23, I would be 24, I guess. 24, I would be 25, I guess. When I was commissioned
14 was 1969, so yeah, I would turn 25, I guess, that year. And he was probably 22 or 23, a
15 couple years younger than I was, but he was just sharp as he could be. We would have
16 long intellectual discussions, not about the war so much, but about Andrew Wyatt
17 paintings and thing that were just a little bit beyond what most of my other colleagues
18 were doing. I just really appreciated the man, and he was so—he was the only one in the
19 entire company, the other TAC Officers were in many ways—I'm not sure how many of
20 them were even college graduates. We had an unusual class. Out of 160 of us, I guess,
21 140 were airborne qualified, and of that 160 class, I'll bet 150 were college graduates. So
22 we were unique.

23 RV: That's an intimidating class for the TAC Officers.

24 RM: For a TAC Officer it was, absolutely. And I don't think it was particularly
25 unusual during that period of time because of this College Option program that they had
26 put in; they had a lot of college graduates. We, for instance, had the editor of the Harvard
27 Law Review as a second—they were trying to become a second lieutenant in the infantry.
28 Brilliant guy. We had people like that that were just really good, good men, and I think a
29 cut above all, except Lieutenant Urliccson, as far as character, intellect, education,
30 everything else, compared to the TAC Officers. And I think they have sensed it a little
31 bit. We were a good class; we were a damn good class in all respects.

1 RV: Was it just coincidence that you wound up with Lieutenant Urliccson or
2 Erickson?

3 RM: Urliccson. I think it was U-R-L-I-C-C-S-O-N.

4 RV: Okay, but it was just chance?

5 RM: Yeah. Yeah, and then he selected me to be his administrative guy. I was
6 terrible at it; I mean, I was terrible at the skill power of it, but I got to keep track of all the
7 records for our platoon, you know, and these bayonet sheet things, I was the one that kept
8 track of it. So I was kind of his counselor in a lot of sense. I think after awhile that
9 helped me in a lot of ways. And then after eight weeks we were allowed to see our wife,
10 between eight weeks and 12 weeks, we could see our wives on Sunday—in additional to
11 the Tuesday/Thursday, we could go to church on Sunday mornings between 8 and 12
12 with them. Well, you go to church for an hour, you can do anything else you wanted for
13 three hours. And those are some stories.

14 RV: I'll ask Maxine about that. She'll just stare at me quietly. Smile, probably.

15 RM: And then I think after 18 weeks, we were allowed to actually get off at noon
16 on Saturday and stay out until six o'clock on Sunday night, and then the last two weeks,
17 we moved off-post. So that was about it as far as personal life was concerned.

18 RV: That's a good description of all of OCS. I have some specifics, if you would,
19 if you don't mind taking the time to comment on what you thought. OCS or Benning or
20 the Army or the TAC Officers or what you all saw as the cloud over you that was a good
21 leader. What defined, in their eyes, in the Army's eyes, you know, people who set this
22 program up, what was a good leader, and then what would lead to someone getting the
23 bayonet sheet?

24 RM: Well, first of all, let me just say, I think the Army's OCS program during the
25 Vietnam War, that which I experienced, was very good, very well organized, the training
26 was excellent. I think they prepared—of the three branches, and part of this is me now
27 looking back, part of it's my research and my dissertation—I think OCS produced the
28 best officer for combat in Vietnam. No question. I think they produced a better officer
29 than the West Pointers and the ROTC people. And some of that is born out by interviews
30 that I did, some of it's born out by research that's been done, and some of it's born out by
31 the evaluations that were done during the Vietnam War by liaison teams that were

1 dispatched from Benning. Benning sent liaison teams every six months to Vietnam to
2 interview generals, field-grade officers, peers and NCOs about the leadership—about the
3 leaders they were producing at Benning because they wanted to know whether they were
4 getting it right or not. So they would have these teams go out, and they'd spend a month
5 to six weeks in the field interviewing, so they could make changes to the program to
6 make sure they were getting it right.

7 RV: Was anybody else doing this that you know of?

8 RM: Well, I don't know whether the other OCS classes—it was Benning, Sill, Ft.
9 Campbell for armor and Ft. Belvoir for engineers, so I don't know if the other ones did or
10 did not. My research was strictly about Ft. Benning and about infantry, but they sat down
11 and went through. And so I read the evaluation reports from all these liaison teams in
12 Vietnam, and the one thing that they kept saying, and this is probably a way to answer
13 your question, 'What did the Army see was a good leader?' The best part about an OCS
14 graduate was they had been an enlisted man, and as a result of having been an enlisted
15 man for one year, that would be their basic, their AIT, and six months in OCS, they had a
16 year behind them in the Army. And as a result of that, they tended to understand the
17 enlisted man's problems, more so than the West Pointers who had been college students
18 for their entire four years or the ROTC students who had been college students and
19 ROTC on the weekends or in drill situations. So what the generals and the field-grade
20 officers were saying during the war was that the OCS guys were the most ready to
21 command. The ROTC people were next, and the West Pointers were [last], and it was an
22 arrogance; it appeared to be an arrogance. So I think what Benning saw as the most
23 important element of leadership was somebody that could instill in their soldiers the
24 importance of the mission, or, if the mission was stupid, if the mission didn't make any
25 military sense, could explain why they were going to do it anyway or put it into their
26 terms. It's a really tough thing in a war that as it went on, the military necessities started
27 getting smaller and smaller, and that was evident to everyone.

28 RV: I wonder if that was a product of the time, post-TET, if you will.

29 RM: Oh, absolutely.

30 RV: Versus '65.

1 RM: Oh, absolutely, absolutely. When I teach the Vietnam War, one of the things
2 that my students are required to do, we do a lot of film work, and they're required to
3 compare Hollywood's version of the soldier in 1965 in *We Were Soldiers* to *Platoon* or to
4 *Full Metal Jacket* or to *Hamburger Hill*. And you'll see the difference... *Full Metal*
5 *Jacket*'s really good in that sense because you'll see the difference in the training, but the
6 unit—sending units over together instead of sending them over as repos. Yeah, I think it
7 is a matter of the time, but we were unique in that we were late in the war, and yet we
8 were—because of this, the TET, coming right after TET and with the changes in taking
9 away all of these Non-Combat Arm Officer Candidates Schools, we were all forced into
10 the infantry. I would say of my class of 140, 160 men, there may have only been 20 or
11 30 of us that would have wanted, as our first choice, to have been in the infantry. We
12 were all finance guys; we were all, you know, logistics experts because that's what we
13 did in school. We were going to be a supply officer, and all of a sudden now, we're in
14 the infantry. But I think my class may have been unique compared to say, a year before,
15 but I don't think we were unique to the battalions of Officer Candidates Schools at that
16 time because I think they all of a sudden had all these college graduates. But that was
17 also the period of time when the 2S deferments were going away; it was quite [before]
18 lottery, that comes a little bit later, but it was at a time when you got out, you'd given
19 them your word that if they'd let you finish your graduate degree, you'd go in. And so a
20 lot of guys were going in, and infantry seemed better than being an enlisted man. So I
21 think we were unique in that sense. But I think the Army did a good job, and I think the
22 Army cared to make sure—they wanted to make sure they were doing a good job with
23 this training, and so that's why these liaison teams were going to Vietnam so frequently.
24 And that's a lot—I mean these teams would be 20 men, and they'd go for, like I say, a
25 month to six weeks, and all the records are at Benning.

26 RV: I'm wondering as a historian myself and then looking at your personal
27 experience and how you're describing the Army, the Army sounds very good, like they
28 did a good job, you just used a word that they care. What do you have to say about those
29 Army veterans of the Vietnam era, who say the Army didn't care, and the Army really
30 did a lousy job of preparing us for Vietnam? And of course, that is going to vary with
31 personality, it's going to vary with age, maturity levels, it's going to vary with the time

1 during the war, lots of different variables in there. But in general, when I hear that, as a
2 historian, when I'm interviewing Army veterans, what would you say about that?

3 RM: Well, I believe, first of all, that the Army did the best job that it could with
4 the manpower demands that were placed on it by the politicians. First of all, let's keep
5 that in mind. I do think that there is something inherently wrong with training men for
6 eight weeks and then training them for another eight weeks and then sending them out to
7 kill people. That's hard to teach people in four months. Think of the training that we
8 gave to World War II soldiers, how much longer it was. I mean, there were units started
9 training in 1941, went into combat in '44. I mean, it was a much longer training exercise.
10 We sit here today, and we're critical of the Iraqis not being able to learn to fight in the
11 amount of time that we've given them to learn to fight. We tried to do it four months.
12 I'm not sure that we did a great job of that. We tried though. In other words, the training
13 was as good as it could be under the manpower demands of the ramp up of forces that
14 were necessary to meet the 19—May 1965, and then they replace us. I mean, it was a
15 huge ramp up, that you know. 100,000 to 500 in a short period of time. So I do have that
16 concern, but in terms of what we did produce with those parameters, I think we did a
17 pretty good job of it. I don't believe, and I studied as a historian of the war after and
18 within the last five or six years, I studied at length the RAND reports, the BDM reports,
19 the personnel, the volumes on personnel that try to lay the blame for America's defeat at
20 the hands of the soldiers, and I just don't buy it. I don't buy it on the officers or the
21 enlisted men. You want to put the blame for it on some of the strategy, and I will get into
22 that when we get into the war. I'm very critical of the war preterition. So I have some
23 strong beliefs about that, but in terms of the kind of soldier that we produced with the
24 amount of time we were given to do it, I think the Army did a good job of it. I really do.

25 RV: Do you think that your experience at Benning with OCS, and we haven't
26 really—we have more to talk about there—was enhanced because you were an
27 intellectual, and you're saying a lot of people in your company were intellectuals; they
28 were college graduates, but I don't think, personally, college graduates equal
29 intellectualism, but you in particular. You're able to sit and talk paintings with your TAC
30 Officer, that's unusual. That is a unique experience, and how much did your—I don't

1 want to say brain power, but how much did your ability to intellectualize and articulate
2 those thoughts shape your experience?

3 RM: I think it did to a certain extent. I think it also helped maintain sanity. So
4 much of what you do in the Army is absurd. I happen to believe that not just among
5 Americans, I think in any society, teaching men, and now women, but teaching men then
6 to kill people is hard. It's not natural. There's something kind of strange about going to
7 school for eight weeks to learn how to do that well, and then going for another eight
8 weeks to learn how to do it even better. And we know that the training we gave soldiers
9 in World War II was difficult for that reason; we know—I don't buy all of S.L.A.
10 Marshall *Men Under Fire*, but I buy some of it, you know, it made a lot of men refuse to
11 pull the trigger against Germans and things. We don't seem to have had that problem as
12 much in Vietnam, but it's very unnatural. The average person just doesn't take to it, so
13 you have to be good to train people to be able to do that. But it's kind of crazy when you
14 think about it, that you as an adult would take time out of your life at the 18, 19 or 20
15 year of your life to go learn how to kill. And that's what infantry soldiers do. All of the
16 other things that we teach people to do in the military, like fly airplanes, flying airplanes
17 has a civilian application. Okay, maybe dropping bombs doesn't, but that's pushing a
18 button. Artillery maybe so, but you never see the enemy; he's so far away. Engineers,
19 you can build bridges, or you can blow bridges up, but combat engineers kind of do both.
20 Driving a tank is kind of like driving a big SUV—well, you have SUVs, but driving a big
21 truck. Infantry soldiers learn to kill people and look at them when they kill them. That's
22 what we train them to do. So it's not natural, so the Army has to be really good at what it
23 does. As a soldier trying to learn how to do that, or as a leader trying to motivate people
24 to do it later on, as we would try to do, it becomes—you almost look for things to grab
25 onto to keep your sanity, to laugh a little bit about what it is you do. Part of the way you
26 do that is you sort of think, 'Well, maybe it'll never happen, maybe I'm just doing this to
27 learn this skill, but I'll probably never really use it.' Well that's fine if you're in the
28 National Guard; that's fine if you're in the Reserves—back then, not now, but back then.
29 But now it's getting closer. Certainly if you're in the 7th week of AIT, and you're 19
30 years old, and you're at Ft. Polk, you know that them teaching you that hand-to-hand
31 combat may be something you're going to use in the next month. As an officer, you start

1 all of a sudden paying attention. 'Maybe I'm going to really need to know how to put
2 that bangalore up underneath that concertina, or maybe I'm going to have to know how to
3 use that LAW, maybe I'm going to have to know how to convince my troops that
4 carrying the M79 really is important and taking the sights off, so they don't catch on
5 jungle vines.' It's important for them to know how to do that. You start really thinking
6 about that. It's still absurd; for someone that's just been through college, and somebody
7 that's planned on becoming an accountant or something, oh, my gosh. You learned how
8 to kill people in this other school, and you knew that you probably wouldn't need that for
9 a long time, but now all of a sudden, you're going to have to learn to teach those men, in
10 Vietnam when you get them, how to kill more efficiently. It's very strange, so I think the
11 intellectual level that we all possessed, on the one hand it's a detriment because you sort
12 of see through it. But what I tried to focus on is these pedagogical skills that these men
13 have in order to get us to do those things and to learn it and to want to learn it because we
14 are motivated now by the survival that's going to be required in a few months for us to
15 learn.

16 RV: That right there is... you're saying that during that time, you saw through all
17 that stuff, and maybe a lot of your company did. But your experience was, 'Okay, I'm
18 going to be a future teacher of this.'

19 RM: Absolutely.

20 RV: 'I'm going to have to practice this, and so hence, I need to really pay
21 attention and learn this.' Did you see your peers being this analytical about it?

22 RM: The 4th platoon was a great platoon; we were the best platoon, too.

23 RV: Of course you were.

24 RM: Something unusual about us in that sense. We had a professional boxer; we
25 had some interesting people, and I loved every one of them. We got rid of all the ones
26 that we didn't think could do it, I guess. I don't know that I set myself aside or apart in
27 that sense. I don't remember that I felt that way at the time. I think we had all just sort of
28 accepted our fate and just tried to learn to do it as best we could. I know we laughed
29 about it a lot; at night when everything was quiet, we would talk about some NCO that
30 we had had that day that was teaching us about booby traps, for instance, and we'd say
31 things like, 'Geez, you think they really have those things over there like that? You think

1 that we're going to really see that stuff?' And I think as the time went on, we got more
2 serious about what we were learning. In the beginning it was maybe—and in basic and
3 AIT, I think it was silly, I think we wrote it off that way. But as it got closer to that
4 commissioning date, I think the Army did a good job of as you got further down the
5 training, you started realizing the seriousness of it.

6 RV: Were you still thinking that you weren't going to be, you know, necessarily
7 going to Vietnam immediately, and you still had that chance the war was going to end, or
8 was this—

9 RM: No, I'll tell you what. About the 18th week when I had made up my mind
10 that I was going to accept my commission because there was guys talking about turning
11 them down. You know, as I said, if you turned them down, but that time you only had a
12 year to serve, you could turn them down—you could go do your year in Vietnam and be
13 out of the Army. But I was starting to say, 'No, I'm going to do this; I'm going to take
14 this commission.' And I also knew by that time I wasn't going to end up in the top three
15 of my class.

16 RV: How'd you know that?

17 RM: My skills, I mean, my grades. My grades were good, but they weren't that
18 good because the infantry OCS is based on ability to lead and be measured to lead.
19 Anyone that can score high enough on the leadership skills in infantry OCS sure as hell
20 isn't going to choose the Finance Corps. There's something special about having that
21 kind of skill, and the three guys that graduated at the top of the class were the best
22 leaders. They were just as gung-ho as they could be about everything.

23 RV: But was it gung-ho-ness, or...

24 RM: I think it was gung-ho because the graders for the leadership part of the
25 course would have been career officers, mostly field-grade, and that's what they were
26 looking for. Gung-ho is not an easily term to define, whether that means screaming and
27 yelling or whether it means showing the skills in a fire-and-maneuver exercise. It's hard
28 to put your finger on what leadership is. You know, the Army has FM100-4, or whatever
29 it is, that defines what leadership is. The problem is it was based on World War II
30 strategy and tactics, so it never got updated for guerilla warfare, at least not that I ever
31 saw. But I think that by the time I got to that point, about the 18th week, I said, 'Yeah,

1 this is going to happen. I'm going to be commissioned in the infantry. Maybe I'll get
2 lucky,' and I think I thought maybe I'd be a TAC Officer; I think that was what I was
3 thinking would be a good thing, I think, 'I could do this, I could do it like Lieutenant
4 Urlicson did it, not like those other yahoos,' but he would be one that I would have as a
5 role model. And so I was thinking that might happen, and then I get commission, and I
6 get my orders for the 82nd Airborne Division. I was ecstatic; I really was. It was just a
7 primo assignment.

8 RV: I guess we could go on and on about this time, but does your ability back
9 then to analyze but still play the game, still see the absurd, as you say, but also play the
10 game and... does that hurt you, or I guess, on the way of asking is does an individual's—
11 and I'd like you to comment on yourself—an individual's analytical skills, if they're high
12 enough, does it get in the way of the gung-ho-ness?

13 RM: I think you can play the gung-ho part and understand when you need to turn
14 it on and when you need to turn it off, just like you would in a classroom, you turn it on
15 and turn it off sometimes or in any other life's applications.

16 RV: Could you do it?

17 RM: Yeah, yeah, I think I was pretty good at that. I look back on it now, and I
18 say that I think I studied hard to learn the skills that were necessary to do the job in
19 Vietnam because I started to realize about the 18th week that it was going to happen.

20 RV: Did you tell Maxine this?

21 RM: Well, we didn't see each other very much, and I don't believe we talked
22 about it that way. I think what we said was, 'We've got probably six months.' I
23 graduated in June of 1969, and I think we believed that we had six months before I'd go
24 to Vietnam, and that would include leaves on either end of it. See, the Army had a four
25 month requirement. You had to have four months of troop-training before they could
26 send you to Vietnam, and so that translated into about six months of time between you'd
27 actually show up. And I think we were just saying, 'Okay, it's inevitable. Let's make
28 sure that these next six months are the best times of our lives. Let's really enjoy it.'

29 RV: Were you inside or outside externally saying, 'Okay guys, let's keep
30 negotiating over there in Paris; let's keep going.'

31 RM: Yeah, we paid attention to that a little bit, but mostly we tried to have fun.

1 RV: What did you do to have fun? Would you say that the most fun of your
2 life—I do have a couple other questions about OCS, but as far as the PG-13 version, what
3 did you do to have fun?

4 RM: Well, the first thing we did is we took two weeks off, and we went to
5 Virginia Beach, Virginia. Drove up from Benning, but the more amazing thing than that,
6 I guess, is that two weeks that I told you that I was going to get to live off-post, Maxine
7 got pregnant. We didn't know it at the time, but when we went then to Virginia Beach,
8 we were body surfing, and we were just hanging out there and doing all kinds of things.
9 And she was at least six weeks pregnant at the time; we didn't have a clue.

10 RV: Wow.

11 RM: And so by the time that I reported to the 82nd Airborne Division, well into I
12 guess we must have gotten in there in July or so, she was pregnant. And so we were—
13 but even that, we still had a great time. The 82nd Airborne Division was a wonderful
14 assignment for a young junior officer like I was, and I was the Executive Officer of the
15 Headquarters Company of the 1st Brigade. And it couldn't have been a better assignment
16 because Headquarters Company includes all the staff officers and the line officers of the
17 whole division—of the whole brigade, excuse me. And so I got to rub shoulders with all
18 the bigwigs, and I was in charge of things that were important to the brass, you know,
19 inspections, IG inspections and the United Fund and all those kinds of things. But I also
20 got to jump a lot; I got to go out on jumps anytime I wanted to pretty much. I had—it
21 was essentially an 8 to 5 job.

22 RV: How long did this last?

23 RM: I was there until January, middle of January, so from middle of July to
24 middle of January. I got my orders for Vietnam, however, in October.

25 RV: Before we go there, if you would bear with me, any other comments on
26 leadership according to the Army? You mentioned that one- being able to explain the
27 importance of the mission, regardless of what the mission is.

28 RM: And I think really empathizing with your troops, that can't be overstated
29 enough. You have to understand what it's like to be an enlisted man. And example
30 would be, in Vietnam, officers were supposed to only serve six months in combat, and
31 enlisted men served 12, and understanding that it's different for them because they don't

1 have all the opportunities that an officer has, even though the officer has a lot of
2 responsibilities that they don't have in terms of that. So I think that's the second most
3 important thing, is understanding and empathizing with the plight of your men. And
4 being willing to do anything, absolutely anything that they do... knowing all the skills
5 that are necessary to do what they do and doing them and letting them know that you're
6 doing them

7 RV: Was this who you were in Vietnam?

8 RM: Well, it's who I would have been if I hadn't have been an advisor. I'm sure
9 of that. I guess it was to a lesser extent with my team, the small team that I had, and I
10 think to a certain extent my allies, the people we were advising.

11 RV: Do you regret that today?

12 RM: That what?

13 RV: That you did not have the opportunity to show—

14 RM: You know, in some ways I do. I think I would have liked to have been a
15 platoon leader in a major American unit division, but I say that having studied it. I'm
16 sure at the time I didn't feel that way. Being advisor was a great job.

17 RV: In what way?

18 RM: Well, let's see, how can I put this so it doesn't sound—well, it is, it's an
19 ethnocentric as it can be because all of the combat that I was in and all the death and
20 destruction I saw, it was not Americans being killed; it was Vietnamese and
21 Montagnards. As sad as that is, it wasn't Americans. So I was a mercenary, in a sense.
22 And as bad as I felt, it's different; I had one of my men killed, only one, in that sense.
23 And it would have been a lot more if I had been in an American unit.

24 RV: Sure. That's a very good point. Did you ever communicate your admiration
25 for Lieutenant Erickson—Urliccson?

26 RM: Yeah, I sure did. When I was commissioned and I saluted him, of course, he
27 was still a second lieutenant, too, and I became his peer, I told him that and shook hands
28 with him; he was a wonderful man.

29 RV: Why haven't you followed up with him? It is just something that just time
30 has taken over you?

1 RM: I haven't followed up with hardly any of my buddies from OCS or Vietnam.
2 I don't have an explanation for it.

3 RV: Okay. Did Maxine's pregnancy change your outlook on going to Vietnam?

4 RM: It sure did. Absolutely. We were so happy because there was some thought
5 as to whether we should let that happen, in the sense that once you know you're going
6 and in that '69 period with the casualties being what they were, and even back then
7 before Hollywood got a hold of us, with the issues of junior officers, the story of the
8 second lieutenant—second or first lieutenant's life span being 15 minutes was pretty well
9 known. We knew that officers die a lot; captains died at the greatest rate of any rank as a
10 percentage, and first lieutenants were right behind them. So we knew that, and we talked
11 about, 'We should have a kid because that will be something to leave behind if I don't
12 come home.' So we talked about it pretty openly. My wife's a very positive person, and
13 she never believed it. I mean, she believed I was going, but she believed I was coming
14 back.

15 RV: Is that wishful thinking, or is that—she really did—

16 RM: I think it was a little bit of both. I don't think she ever really had a grasp on
17 the war until I came home and started talking about it. She didn't watch a lot of
18 television, I don't think, while I was gone. It bothered her a lot. But I think we also said,
19 'Hey, you know, if I'm going to be over there, then you having'—we didn't know it
20 would be a son, of course, didn't have those great things, be able to know whether it was
21 a boy or girl, but we were very happy that we had a son and that she was able to spend
22 totally 12 months of her life with him and only him. So I think we were glad that that
23 happened, but it did change my perspective. But I also don't remember having a son
24 being—having that become the most important thing because the most important thing
25 was getting ready and training to go over there and surviving. So I trained hard when I
26 went to my training for Vietnam, but first, like I say, first we wanted to enjoy life, and we
27 had a good time. I remember getting my orders, and the orders, like I say, it was October
28 that I got my orders, but my orders were October—in October, I get orders to go to
29 Vietnam in May, so it's way out there, as opposed to guys that got orders to go to
30 Vietnam next week or next month, I mean. So that was—we even looked at that as a
31 positive thing, said, 'Wow, that's really nice that we've got that much time together.'

1 That meant I'd be home for my son's birth, that means I'd be home for three months of
2 his life, and that was important.

3 RV: That's huge.

4 RM: And I remember—I don't remember sitting around being depressed about it.
5 Not a bit. I mean, not that I wanted to go, but I don't remember letting that drive my life.
6 I remember saying, 'Hey, that's what's going to happen, that's in May, this is October,
7 let's enjoy it.' And we just enjoyed the heck of our time with the 82nd, all respects.

8 RV: Have you, again, you don't have to comment on this at all, but have you gone
9 back and taken a look at that process more from an emotional level? Not that you
10 weren't at the time, but as an end, we are able to compartmentalize and kind of block
11 some stuff off and check boxes. That is an extraordinary attitude to have. I'm not
12 passing judgment; that is a unique attitude and a very positive one. How do you account
13 for that? Is that your personality?

14 RM: Well, it probably is to a certain extent, but I think also you look at what your
15 options are, and your options are to fight it and be miserable all the time or to enjoy the
16 moment, and I think we've always lived our lives, I've always lived my life that way, to
17 enjoy the moment. No matter how bad it is, find something in it that you enjoy, that you
18 can get out of it and that brings you satisfaction. In that case, I think it was looking
19 forward to the birth of our son, focusing on my job at the 82nd. Because I had this kind of
20 weird job as an XO of a Headquarters Company, I was the Pathfinder Platoon leader.
21 And so when we went on operations, like we jumped into Turkey—I don't remember if I
22 talked about this yesterday or not? But we jumped into Turkey on the Bulgarian border
23 in Operation Deep Furrow, and I was the Pathfinder Platoon leader, so I was the first man
24 out of the door. I got to set up the drop zone and watch the 82nd Airborne Division and
25 all those Greeks and Turks with them jump into Turkey. That was exciting, and I got to
26 serve coffee to General Westmoreland. For the next three weeks, I didn't have anything
27 to do while the operation took place, then I went to Istanbul and redeployed the entire
28 82nd Airborne Division back to Ft. Bragg. A lot of responsibility for second lieutenant.

29 RV: Absolutely.

30 RM: And a lot of fun. And that was in November, November of '69.

1 RV: So tell me, kind of map that out for me, your time with the 82nd there, before
2 you deployed to Vietnam. You're there at Headquarters, you're taking care of logistics—

3 RM: Yeah, yeah, it was just kind of a crazy job. I had a captain who was a two
4 tour Vietnam Green Beret. Nice guy, Jim Kennedy. And he was younger than I was; he
5 was 21 years old and was a captain and had two tours. Yeah, he was—OCS guy. Nice
6 man, and we always got along real well, got along with him. You know, I don't
7 remember too much about the actual job. I remember I came in everyday, and I sat at a
8 desk, and I had Lieutenant Milam on my name thing there. And I shuffled papers and
9 everything, and I looked good, and I broke starch everyday. And then I'd go over to the
10 building and hang out with the majors and the lieutenant colonels and make sure they had
11 whatever they needed. And then when we would plan an operation, like this huge
12 operation, I was very much involved in all the planning of that. But it was more like
13 being a, not a clerk, but it was sort of like being a low-level manager in your first job out
14 of college. I was able to use my business skills; in fact, I really used those because I was
15 in charge of all the administrative things of the company, so I had payroll. I was the pay
16 officer, so every month I had to strap on the ol' 45 and go take out about 100,000 dollars
17 in cash and pay all the men. They'd all whip that salute on me, and I'd pay them and get
18 them to sign. And then I'd get my driver, I had a driver, and we'd drive into Fayetteville,
19 and we'd go to the jails, and there were so many of our guys in jail. And we'd have to
20 pay them, give them their pay. Both the county jail and the city jail. And then, usually
21 on payday, I was also the officer of the day, and I'd have to go into town. And I'd have
22 to—I'd be the OD in town, and we'd end up going to bars, and guys would get thrown
23 out of bars and get arrested, and we'd have to go sign for them and all this kind of stuff.
24 It was a heck of a job. Really exciting in a lot of ways. We were there, we were at Ft.
25 Benning—I mean at Ft.—

26 RV: Bragg.

27 RM: Bragg when the McDonald murders happened.

28 RV: Oh, right.

29 RM: They were there, yeah. So we had that little bit of excitement. Like I say, I
30 went on Operation Deep Furrow to Europe

31 RV: That was a NATO exercise?

1 RM: Yeah, NATO exercise, and it was wonderful; I just enjoyed every minute of
2 that.

3 RV: What did you think of Turkey?

4 RM: It's interesting you ask. I thought at the time that Istanbul—I'd never been
5 out of the United States, it was my first trip out of the country. We flew to Milan and
6 staged, and remember this is Cold War, we flew like below radar all the way from Milan
7 to across Greece all the way into above Turkey and then came up to about 1400 feet and
8 made our jump. Guys were getting sick; it was really pretty rocky ride, but I was platoon
9 leader of 30 men is all we had, and we had all these signs in bright orange and red and
10 green, and our job was once we landed, to spread out all over this drop zone and put these
11 down because those were the designations for the division which is in the air behind us.
12 Deuce and a halfs, jeeps, everything, we're dropping everything in on this drop zone; it
13 was really something to watch. So it was exciting; it was just as exciting to me. Left
14 Maxine home, it was the first time that I'd been away from her in that sense, I guess,
15 other than when I was in basic and stuff, so that was exciting. But I was on orders, like I
16 say, for Vietnam, but my next duty station was going to be staying—and this was another
17 nice thing—was going to be staying at Ft. Bragg and going to the John F. Kennedy
18 School for Special Warfare.

19 RV: How did you get that?

20 RM: Well, that's because I was going to be an advisor, and I was going to be
21 designated as a MACV advisor because MACV had taken over, by that time, MACV was
22 taking over all of the Special Forces Camps in Vietnam. They were bringing the 10th
23 Special Forces group home, or they were redeploying them because of Czechoslovakia.
24 That was the story, is that these guys were going to get involved in what was going on in
25 Europe. Truth of the matter is, I think the Special Forces were being redeployed because
26 some of the accusations and things that were going on with some of their atrocities and
27 things, as after My Lai. And so they're being redeployed, and we're going to take over
28 their camps. So it may have been that I would have gotten a Special Forces assignment.
29 I don't know that for sure; I'm guessing that when they drew it up, that's where I was
30 going to go because that's where I ended up going to the training camp for Special
31 Forces. But it was what they call the MATA course; it was a course for military advisors.

1 It was for 12 weeks, and it was four hours of language training everyday followed by four
2 hours of military training... and cultural things and learning about the history of the
3 Vietnamese people and the history of the war and all those things that you as an advisor
4 would need to do. And it was all grades. NCOs and all the way up through lieutenant
5 colonels, if you were going to be an advisor in Vietnam, you were going to take that
6 training course. And we had 12 weeks of that, and then we were to be assigned—I had
7 another 12 weeks at the Defense Language Institute at Ft. Bliss, Texas, which was a solid
8 12 weeks of language school, eight hours a day.

9 RV: Of Vietnamese?

10 RM: Of Vietnamese language. After having studied it four hours a day for 12
11 weeks at the MATA course. I guess I'm probably off by a month here when I think about
12 it because it was January, February, March, April and May, so five months. Somehow or
13 other the split somewhere of them. Five months total between MATA and DLI.

14 RV: Why don't we take a break for a minute, Ron? Okay, Ron, is there anything
15 else you want to say about your time at Bragg with the 82nd? I would like you to talk a
16 little bit about Special Warfare school.

17 RM: It was a good school; it was, like I say, a lot of history, of Vietnamese
18 people, a lot of cultural issues. We had Vietnamese women taught the language part of
19 the program, and then in the afternoons, we had, like I say, a lot of other stuff that had to
20 do with the country, the geography. In fact, one of the books that you have out here in
21 your showcase, *Handbook on Pacification*, that was one of our—was part of our
22 classroom materials.

23 RV: Interesting. Based on what you know now, just looking back quickly, were
24 they on target with cultural, geography?

25 RM: They were on target, they just didn't teach it to enough people. They taught
26 it to us as advisors; they should have been teaching it, in addition to teaching it to us, they
27 should have been teaching it to the officers that were going to lead American units, so
28 that the soldiers would have had some kind of an appreciation for the people. I think we
29 failed in that respect, but as far as being advisors, we got good training. We got good
30 training about the Vietnamese people.

31 RV: How difficult was Vietnamese for you?

1 RM: Real difficult. I'm not a real good language student anyway. I had gone
2 through my bachelor's degree and my master's degree, and I had never taken a foreign
3 language in college; I had Latin back in high school. So it was hard for me, and I must
4 say this too: I was not, for the MATA course in language and even at DLI, I think I was
5 probably not as motivated as I should have been.

6 RV: Why not?

7 RM: I don't know the answer to that. I think that once I got—particularly once I
8 got to the Defense Language Institute there at Ft. Bliss, I had decided, as had most of my
9 friends, that we were going to enjoy those last eight weeks in-country that we had in the
10 States, and we did. Played a lot of tennis, and we didn't do any homework; I don't know
11 if we were expected to or not. We went to parties all the time. I spent a lot of time with
12 my new son. Well, see, that's another story. We were scheduled to be done with—at Ft.
13 Bragg, we were supposed to be done, I guess, about the middle of February, middle of
14 February, and our son was expected to be born March 15th in El Paso, Texas. So, Maxine
15 went to the doctors and was checked out, and they told her that everything looked good,
16 and that Alex—well, our son, we knew it was a son—but he would be born right on time
17 in El Paso. So we loaded up all of our worldly possessions into a U-Haul, including my
18 motorcycle, and we started driving that thing across country, from Ft. Bragg to El Paso.
19 And we got to Meridian, Mississippi.

20 RV: On I-20?

21 RM: Uh-huh. And her water broke in the Howard Johnson, and our son was born
22 the next day, emergency basis. Everything turned out fine, so we spent five days in
23 Meridian and then drove on to El Paso with the new baby. So that was kind of exciting,
24 and I think after my son was born, I lost a little bit of interest in everything I was doing.
25 Knowing I was going to Vietnam, my big interest was him and her and my friends and
26 having a good time and going to Juarez and crazy things. I don't think I took the
27 language training as seriously as I should have. As it turned out, it didn't make any
28 difference because I was sent to a Montagnard village where no one spoke any
29 Vietnamese. So it's probably hurting me now more than it did then, but the Army tried
30 real hard. I think there was also sort of that, kind of that feeling that you get that, 'I don't
31 have to necessarily be good at this. I'm still going to Vietnam whether I'm good at this

1 or not, and I'll still probably be able to do my job whether I'm good at this,' because we
2 had heard that, you know, you would have interpreters whenever you needed them and
3 stuff like that. I did appreciate the culture issues, the culture things though.

4 RV: What were they telling you culturally?

5 RM: Well, surprisingly, they did some of the same things that we teach here.
6 They taught us about the relationship between the Vietnamese and the Chinese, and they
7 taught us about the strength of family, and they taught us about the respect for the elders
8 that the Vietnamese people have. And I can remember at the time thinking, 'If they have
9 such respect for the elders, why are we all moving them all in from the jungle into the
10 more pacified areas of the highways?' It wasn't the Strategic Hamlet Program; we
11 learned about that, too, but by that time, that was behind us. That was 1965, '63, '64, and
12 now we're in '70, so we're way beyond that, but we're still doing the same thing, we're
13 just creating free fire zones and all that stuff. So we questioned things like that. It was
14 good training, and that part was quite interesting to me, but I kind of lost interest in the
15 language part by the time I got to El Paso, I think.

16 RV: So the cultural stuff was hit both at Bragg and Special Warfare School?

17 RM: It was mostly at Bragg, yes.

18 RV: What did you think of Fayetteville, North Carolina. And the nickname in
19 North Carolina in the 1970s and '80s was 'Fayettenam.' What did you think of that?

20 RM: I liked it. We lived in Spring Lake, which is just north of Fayetteville, first
21 suburb north, out of town, out of the full post. And I had a motorcycle, and we used to
22 tool around all through North Carolina on that bike, used to go up to Raleigh-Durham. I
23 liked it; I liked it a lot. It was a military town, but I'll tell you what, we say this even
24 today, it was probably the best four or five months of our lives because here I was a
25 second lieutenant, I was a member of, effectively, a country club. You'd go to the
26 Officer's Club. Everybody on-post, every enlisted man saluted you. You could go into
27 the—virtually the whole place was airborne qualified, so there wasn't a matter of there
28 was legs and jumpers, wasn't like that. We went to bars and had a good time. It was
29 great, it really was. I liked everything about it. Even to this day, when you say Ft.
30 Bragg, I think of 82nd, I think of Special Forces; I love the place, really. I liked it better
31 than Benning. Benning as a town, Columbus, Georgia, as a town, because there's so

1 many people there for training, that's not their job. They're there to learn to do
2 something to go someplace else, so unless you're part of the cadre or the teaching units,
3 you know it's temporary. Whereas at Ft. Bragg, that's your duty station, you know,
4 you're company commander of a unit. So I think it has a little more permanence to it
5 than did Benning, but I liked it.

6 RV: Do you think that Lieutenant Urlicson had anything to do with you getting
7 that Headquarters job and kind of continuing on as that?

8 RM: I have no idea.

9 RV: Have you ever thought about that?

10 RM: I have no idea. I just don't know. There was just a handful of us. Out of
11 our company of 160 people, I think six of us got the 82nd Airborne Division, and it was—
12 now see, some people didn't want it. I mean, I had people say, 'Oh, man, that's terrible.
13 You're assigned to a TOE unit.' And I said, 'Yeah, but the best of the TOE units.' See
14 82nd had—I'd lived in Detroit during the 1967 race riot, and the 82nd had come there and
15 pretty much put down that riot with the best textbook case study of riot control in Detroit,
16 Michigan; 82nd Airborne Division, they still teach it. Excellent stuff. And so they had a
17 reputation that I was kind of aware of, plus I knew I'd get to jump some more. I felt very
18 fortunate, and I had a lot of other friends that got duties like Ft. Huachuca, Simacorp, a
19 lot of different places like that. But for an infantry officer, I didn't think I could be any
20 better. Now I had friends at the 82nd that were like platoon leaders, and that's not much
21 of a job if you haven't—the worst part about the 82nd for me was that the 1st Brigade was
22 getting a lot of the 3rd Brigade guys that were coming home from Vietnam. They'd
23 already been in Vietnam a year when the 3rd Brigade was sent to Vietnam right after
24 TET, that was Westmoreland. Westmoreland wanted the whole division, as part of his
25 206, he wanted the whole division, and Johnson gave him one brigade, and he gave them
26 the 3rd Brigade. The 3rd Brigade, they got them all over there, and they realized some of
27 these guys hadn't been home six months, and that was the rule: you had to be home six
28 months. Had to send them back. And so the 3rd Brigade, we started a year later, we
29 started getting some of those guys from Vietnam coming back, and virtually everybody
30 had two or three months left in the Army, and then they were out. And they were—they
31 had nothing to be a good soldier for; there was no reason for them to do anything but

1 screw up, and that's why we had so many guys in jail, and that's how many guys had bar
2 fights. It was so bad that if your unit were to go one whole month, 30 days without an
3 AWOL—

4 RV: (laughs)

5 RM: then your unit—yeah—your unit got the use of two helicopters for two
6 hours, and you could go out to St. Mere Eglise or to one of those nice drop zones, and
7 make as many jumps from a Huey as you could make in two hours. And then they would
8 have beer and steaks on the drop zone; your family could come and participate. It was a
9 real party atmosphere. And because we were a Headquarters group, we had maybe a
10 little better soldier than the other ones did. We had all the transportation companies, and
11 I was in charge of the motor pool for the whole brigade, and we had all that stuff. So we
12 had a little bit better soldier than a lot—we did have as many of the hardcore 11 Bravos,
13 perhaps, that had come home. And so we didn't have a lot of AWOL, so we got the use
14 of the choppers a lot, and that's why I got to make so many jumps. But it was an
15 interesting time and a good duty. I just enjoyed every minute of it, and we'd go to the
16 Officer's Club on Sunday nights for that buffet, it was like two bucks all you could eat.
17 Nice buffet, and you get to wear your uniform. Or you didn't wear your uniform. Either
18 way, you had to dress up though, it was kind of—and we had the big New Years Eve
19 party at the parachute packing shed and got to wear my dress blues. Only time I ever
20 wore them. It was just a nice—for a young man to have that responsibility in a real
21 STRAC unit like the 82nd Airborne Division, and your wife pregnant, even though I was
22 going to Vietnam, it was a good time. It really was.

23 RV: How long did that last when you got to Bliss? You've got Alex there, but
24 here you're counting down.

25 RM: We're really counting down exactly, and that probably lends itself to why I
26 didn't take it as seriously as I should have. I didn't ever study outside of what I did in
27 class. It was starting to become inevitable now.

28 RV: Did you talk to Alex about going to Vietnam while you're at Bliss? Do you
29 remember saying anything to him about that?

30 RM: I don't remember, but I suppose I did when I would baby-sit. Sometimes
31 Maxine would want to get away, and I'd just kind of sit with him. I remember watching

1 the—I remember watching the Final Four on the Saturday afternoon- Providence,
2 Jacksonville, St. Bonaventure playing. Must have been UCLA, too, I suppose. I
3 remember Bob Linear was playing for Providence—or for St. Bonaventure at the time,
4 and I remember—I think we probably talked about that kind of stuff, crazy kind of way.

5 RV: What about you and Maxine, what were you telling her? What were you all
6 talking about?

7 RM: I don't recall that we talked a lot about it while I was at Bliss; it was mostly
8 just have a good time and enjoy each other. We had a lot of parties. There were so many
9 of us that were going, we had parties every Saturday night. And we had—see this again
10 was kind of like MATA in that we had majors, and we had I think majors and lieutenant
11 colonels, so we were in class with them, so there was no ranks. I was second lieutenant,
12 and my best friend was lieutenant colonel, but we didn't even address each other that
13 way. We were in civilian clothes on the parties, and we had some great times with this
14 sort of thing. I can remember Maxine, we went to this one party, and she was dressed in
15 this—she had this belt, it was a belt with a bunch of peace signs on it.

16 RV: Oh, yeah?

17 RM: And I thought to myself, 'Well, I wonder how'—I forget the major's name,
18 but there was a major, I said, 'I wonder how he's going to react to that?' He was fine. I
19 think we all sort of—we were all going, and so the fact that we acted kind of crazy and
20 that we took it less seriously perhaps than we should. I don't remember there being any
21 discussions, political talk or anything like that. I don't remember us ever having a
22 discussion about whether we should or whether we should [not] be there or anything like
23 that, other than that was during the Parrot's Beak incursion, and when the Parrot's Beak
24 incursion happened, all of my friends all came over because Nixon was going to address
25 the nation that night and saying, 'We're going into Cambodia.' Not, 'We're going in—
26 we're there.' And I remember them all, all my buddies coming over, and we watched it.
27 And that was the first time we really talked about whether the war was being expanded
28 and whether that was a good idea or not. We all were much in favor of it because all the
29 things that Nixon said made sense to us, and that is, we're going after COSVN, and if we
30 get it, it's going to change the outcome of the war. We were kind of the opinion, 'Well
31 damn, let's do it, let's get them, let's get it over with,' you know? 'If this is a good

1 military strategy, then let's do it. Why didn't we do it a year ago,' kind of thing. But we
2 also knew, and as we were watching that show, we're watching Nixon talk, we knew the
3 units going in, and we knew that probably 75% of our OCS class were going in on
4 Parrot's Beak because the timing worked out just right. They weren't as fortunate as we
5 were to have had all that time training, and that would have been their units. So we were
6 concerned about our buddies and stuff. That's about the only time I remember ever really
7 saying, 'Man, this is war, and this is going to escalate it.' And then of course, Kent State
8 happened just a few days later, and I remember us talking about that.

9 RV: Do you remember what was said?

10 RM: Yeah, we were upset about it, I mean, we were upset about the deaths. We
11 were not in any way supportive or saying, 'They deserve what they got,' or anything even
12 close to that because we were all, again, remember who we are. We're all college
13 graduates; we were just on the campuses of our own universities, one year before that
14 we're getting out of school. So we're very sensitive to the turmoil on the college
15 campuses in America, and it was a really sad thing. And we also knew how scared you
16 can be as a National Guardsmen because I'd seen that in Detroit. I'd seen the National
17 Guardsmen at the race riot shooting people, you know, innocent people, while the 82nd
18 Airborne Division on the other side of town was putting the riot down with not even a
19 shot fired. So we knew that you start messing with National Guardsmen who are
20 weekend warriors, were scared to be there, and you're going to have problems. It was
21 inevitable there would have been something like Kent State, but we felt bad about it.
22 There was no feeling of, as maybe there was in some parts of the country, that they
23 deserved what they got. Nothing like that.

24 RV: What did you personally think about the anti-war movement, at this time,
25 before you went over?

26 RM: I respected their right to demonstrate, respected their right to be against the
27 war; of course, we had family members that were part of it. But I also had pretty much
28 made up my mind that... maybe it came a little later, it certainly came when I was first in
29 Vietnam, that I would never be part of it, as long as there were American soldiers still
30 serving. I was very upset with the Winter Soldier Investigation and those things that

1 would come in '71, February '71, while I was in Vietnam. I just made up my mind that I
2 would never be part of that. I don't know that I knew about VVAW at that time.

3 RV: That was my next question.

4 RM: I don't know that I knew it existed. I think I learned about VVAW, at least I
5 was conscious of it during the Winter Soldier Investigation of '71, which took place in
6 Detroit. And my wife was sending me clippings about that, so I knew about that. I don't
7 know that I knew about—I suppose *Stars and Stripes* may have carried some articles
8 about it while we were in Vietnam, but I don't really remember that much about it.

9 RV: Any thoughts on any other American turmoil going on domestically, and
10 then I have something in mind militarily I'm going to ask you about. But Civil Rights
11 Movement splintering, kind of going in different directions, the Stokely Carmichael
12 faction, what about all this other stuff going on? Did you all feel like the United States
13 was held together and we're still okay, yet there's this problem, or was there something
14 else going on?

15 RM: I was more aware of that sort of thing while I was in college. Once I got in
16 the Army, I think I was in my own world. And I think I—because all my friends were in
17 the Army at that point, I think—I can remember this, I'll give you an example. '69, in
18 November of '69, there was a big demonstration at the Veteran's Day, and my unit, the
19 82nd Airborne Division, was assigned to go to Washington for riot duty for the anti-war
20 demonstrations. And I didn't go because my unit, because I was in the Headquarters
21 Company, I didn't really have a platoon as such to go. And I'd just gotten back from
22 Turkey, and so they didn't send me. I stayed back as a—and then I was OD during that
23 time. And I remember it because it was right about the time that the University of Texas
24 played the University of Arkansas in the 1969 football game to determine the National
25 Championship. It was the game that Nixon went to, and after the game—Texas won the
26 game, and he went into the locker room and declared Texas the National Champion, even
27 though Penn State with their new coach Joe Paterno (laughs), that's sudden, was also
28 undefeated. But the President of the United States says, 'You're number one,' you're
29 number one, right? And I remember watching that, and my sister-in-law, Maxine's sister,
30 had been in Washington at the demonstration and was coming down to visit us. And I

1 remember her coming in the house there, and I was in my fatigues, and she looked and
2 saw my 82nd patch. And she said, ‘That’s the guys that gassed me!’

3 RV: (laughs)

4 RM: And I said, ‘Yeah, probably.’ And she was also pregnant at the time;
5 Maxine and her were both pregnant. We always say that’s probably why my nephew is
6 as strange as he is to this day.

7 RV: Because of the gas from the 82nd?

8 RM: Yeah, probably. My point on the football is I was more concerned about that
9 football game than I was that demonstration.

10 RV: I see.

11 RM: I was in my own world, and I couldn’t see beyond it because I think the
12 futility of seeing beyond it. What good does it do me to be so concerned about the big
13 picture when I am in the picture myself? I think that’s the way I felt.

14 RV: What about your parents’ feelings about you going over to Vietnam? What
15 did you talk about with them?

16 RM: Didn’t talk much about it. Well, for one thing, they came down to visit us in
17 El Paso to see their first grandchild, and my sister whose husband had served in Vietnam,
18 he left her right about the time my son was born, so she came down to visit us, too. That
19 was a good thing, not a bad thing, so we were not sad about that because he was a
20 complete jerk and went to jail, as a matter of fact. But he had served in Vietnam. I don’t
21 recall that when they were—they came to visit us, that we even talked about Vietnam.
22 We talked about them being grandparents, and we talked about how—and I think we
23 talked about, I may have said something to my father about, you know, making sure that
24 he set sin for me, so to speak, for the next year. That sort of sticks in my mind, but we
25 didn’t talk much about it. After Bliss, we’d had, I think I had two weeks before I had to
26 go to Vietnam, and so we drove back to Michigan from Bliss, and we stopped along the
27 way at my great aunt and uncle’s house in Oklahoma and at my grandmother’s house in
28 Missouri and showed off the new baby. And then had to get back because Maxine had
29 decided that she was not going to live with either parent, she was going to set up
30 household herself there in Michigan, and she’d be close by with the parents, but she

1 wanted to live by herself. So we had to do that, and then I left. It was a really hard time,
2 that part.

3 RV: Do you want to talk about that?

4 RM: Yeah, my memories of it are a little blurred, but I remember we didn't take
5 Alex to the airport; we left him home.

6 RV: You're flying out of Detroit?

7 RM: Flying out of Detroit. It was weird because we were walking down the
8 aisle, I mean, down the—towards the planes there, and I recall former Governor Romney,
9 who was now in the Nixon administration as the Secretary of Housing and Urban
10 Development. The first secretary of Housing and Urban Development was coming at us,
11 and I had worked for him on his campaign, I mean, I didn't work personally for him, but
12 I was a supporter of his. And he had just gone through, you know, he'd run for president
13 in '68, or tried to become president and hadn't. He got into this problem with having said
14 he was brainwashed by the generals when he went to Vietnam, and that pretty much
15 destroyed his campaign. He's a good man, a real good man. And I was in my uniform,
16 and he stopped and shook my hand and asked me where I was going, and my dad was
17 there. And my dad started talking to him saying, 'My son's on his way to Vietnam,' and
18 he wished me good luck and all this stuff and hated to see me go and all that thing. So I
19 remember that happening, and then I went on down, and I remember getting on the plane,
20 and the plane sitting on the tarmac for a long time. And I was sitting there, and I could
21 still see sort of through the window, that was back when the planes came very much up
22 the window. I would see through the window and see Maxine and my dad there, and I
23 remember thinking—they had these headphones, and I remember trying to, trying to feel
24 good about the moment, and I couldn't think of anything good. And I remember Bill
25 Cosby was at the top of his game as a comedian, and they had a CD—(chuckles) CD, an
26 album of his playing there, and I remember listening to him and trying to laugh. And he
27 was always a favorite of mine, but there was nothing funny about anything he was
28 saying. We were going to fly from—see, I was by myself; I was going to fly to San
29 Francisco and then fly out of Tan Son Nhut. But it was early in the morning; I think it
30 was the day after Memorial Day, or maybe it was the 25th or 26th of May, something like
31 that. Must have been about the 25th because I think I served 15 days less than a year, and

1 I came home on the 10th of May. But I remember it being real hard. I remember Maxine
2 and I slept down in my parent's basement the night before because they were going to
3 take us to the airport the next morning, and I think my mother stayed with Alex. I don't
4 remember saying goodbye to my mother in the airport, so I think I said goodbye to her at
5 home. It was hard. It was really hitting home then, and it wasn't about dying. We never
6 really talked about that; I think we both had it in the back of our minds, but it was not
7 about that. It was about being gone. I think I would have felt the same way if I was
8 having to go to Germany for a year and not get shot at and be away from my wife and
9 son. It was about being gone more than it was about the danger associated with it. I
10 think I had a lot of confidence in my ability, and I think Maxine had a lot of confidence
11 that I'd come home, but there was something really uncertain about it. But just the
12 misery of being away, saying goodbye to a three month old was hard.

13 RV: Yeah. Did you tell Maxine there at the airport, 'See you later.'?

14 RM: Yeah, we've never been good on goodbyes, so we just said, 'I'll see you
15 soon,' and I knew we'd get together in R&R. Didn't know when that would be. We
16 started talking about it and planning about it and writing about it almost immediately. I
17 was going to meet in California, I was going to meet a bunch of my buddies from DLI,
18 from the Defense Language Institute. Guys that I'd gone all the way back, some of them,
19 to basic training, so I knew a lot of them. And so that was going to be good, that we'd be
20 together on our way over, and that happened.

21 RV: Anybody say anything to you, good or bad, on the airplane from Detroit to
22 San Francisco?

23 RM: No, I don't remember anything on the airplane at all. I remember when
24 we... there was a road that ran between Oakland and Travis AFB. I don't remember
25 exactly too much about it, but I remember that there were demonstrators with signs on the
26 way to Tan Son Nhut.

27 RV: To Travis?

28 RM: To Travis, yeah, excuse me. Tan Son Nhut, that's next day. On the way to
29 Travis and those same demonstrators, not the same people, but the same demonstration
30 was still there a year later; I do remember thinking that, how unique that was.

1 RV: Were you still in your own world, or did you see this and take this
2 personally, or what did you think?

3 RM: I don't remember taking it personal. I don't remember that. I remember that
4 I—I don't remember ever being overly upset about that. I remember thinking how ironic
5 it is that some people do that and some people do this.

6 RV: Again, intellectualizing about it, analyzing it.

7 RM: Yeah, yeah. I don't think I carried it so far in my thinking to say, 'Oh, what
8 a great country to live in because they have the right to do that.' That's the next step.
9 You don't need to think that way; you just look at it. I think it bothered me more when I
10 came home. I know it bothered me a lot more when I came home than it did going.
11 Going it was just I was part of that world. I was about to enter a whole other world.

12 RV: What was it like leaving Travis, what was the mood on the airplane like?

13 RM: Oh, it was—when we first took off, I don't remember there was any big
14 feeling about anything. I remember we had, there was a Monopoly board, Monopoly
15 game on the plane, and we played Monopoly for like 10 hours or something. We flew
16 from Travis to Hawaii, and I remember in Hawaii, they kept us from—they wouldn't let
17 us in the terminal; we had to stay out of the terminal. They said that there was
18 demonstrators in the terminal. I do remember that, both going and coming. So we had
19 our own place that we had to be, and then we went from Hawaii to Clark AFB in the
20 Philippines. And I think it wasn't until the Philippines that it set in, what was going to
21 happen.

22 RV: To you? Set in to you?

23 RM: To us, yeah. They told us it was about a two hour flight from Manila to Tan
24 Son Nhut.

25 RV: What did you feel, do you remember?

26 RM: Yeah, I remember thinking, 'Oh, shit, this is the real deal now. This is the
27 real deal.' And I remember when they told us, 'You can look about and see the coast of
28 Vietnam,' I remember looking out and not seeing anything that looked any different than
29 anywhere else. I didn't see any gunfire; I don't know what I thought I was going to see.
30 We landed in the morning, I do remember that. I think it was around noon, and there was

1 no—we didn't land under a sea of bullets or any of that kind of stuff. It was just like any
2 other airport, except there were a lot of military planes around and all that.

3 RV: You knew your assignment as you were heading over there?

4 RM: I knew I was going to be MACV. I didn't know what in MACV. I knew I
5 would probably get a MAT team, but I didn't know where in the country that I would go.
6 And that took a lot of the time between Manila and Vietnam, we talked a lot about that
7 with each other, about what we hope would happen, where we wanted to go. Everybody
8 wanted to go to the Delta because the Delta in 1970 was pretty pacified. Nobody wanted
9 to go to I Corps, but chances of going to I Corp weren't that great anyway because the
10 Marines were still up there, and they were using their CAP teams and stuff, their
11 Combined Action Platoons. There weren't as many MAT teams up there. There was
12 also the possibility of getting a staff job in Saigon. MACV, what the heck? MBA!
13 Finance, hey, that's me!

14 RV: Right.

15 RM: So I was kind of holding out for that. We knew that the MAT teams, even
16 though we'd been trained, I knew the Army could screw up again because they could
17 train me and give me all that language training and then send me sitting behind a desk in
18 Saigon. So I think I was thinking that maybe that MBA would show up somewhere in
19 the database. But I don't even remember then, we landed, and we were in Saigon for a
20 couple of days waiting for assignments. We had some briefings and things, and we
21 looked good; we had our tan uniforms, and I remember it being so damn hot. Oh, my
22 goodness. Because remember, I'm leaving Detroit, Michigan at Memorial Day, so it's
23 still—snow's gone, but that's about it. It's still cold up there that time of year. I had
24 never experienced heat like that because even my time at Ft. Dix, I mean my time at Ft.
25 Polk was in the fall, my time in Ft. Benning was in the winter, my time at Ft. Bragg was
26 the summertime, but Fayetteville is not that hot, you know?

27 RV: It's hot, but it's not tropical Saigon.

28 RM: Right. So I'd never—I couldn't believe it, I got off that plane.

29 RV: Was that your first impression?

30 RM: The heat and the smell.

31 RV: Describe the smell.

1 RM: I can't even describe the odor. It was unreal; it was just like no smell I'd
2 ever smelled. A lot of writers, a lot of diaries and things about Vietnam talk about the
3 smell of death. Not in Saigon, not getting off the plane, I mean, it's the smell of
4 putridness. It's the smell of sewage. It's the smell of nuoc-man. It's all those things
5 kind of hitting a Westerner's nose. I just couldn't describe it. It was not pleasant, but
6 I'm not sure that it was necessarily unpleasant. I mean, it wasn't like, oh, what's that
7 beautiful smell? But it wasn't something that you say, 'Oh, my gosh.' I think the heat
8 was more repulsive than the smell, but I do remember the smell. And I don't have any
9 stories of looking out the window like Oliver Stone and seeing coffins with flags on them
10 or body bags. None of that.

11 RV: Nothing like that.

12 RM: It was nothing like that. We just landed, and we just—we went to the
13 barracks there in Saigon, in the MACV compound, and we waited around. And they'd
14 say, 'Okay, you don't have to be back until such and such,' and so we went into town. I
15 do remember going into town, still in uniform and just couldn't believe it, all those
16 motorcycles and mopeds and everything. It was pretty amazing. And I remember they
17 had American food for us; we could get burgers and stuff like that. They had an Officer's
18 Club, so we were able to go to the Officer's Club. All waiting for these assignments to
19 come down. And then I remember getting my assignment, and it said, 'Phu Nhon,' and I
20 had no idea where that was. Said, 'District Headquarters, Mobile Advisory Team, 38,'
21 and I was going to go there as the Assistant Team Leader. The two officers, the team
22 leader, there's two officers and three NCOs on each team. So you got the team leader,
23 who would be a captain, then a lieutenant, usually a first lieutenant, although I was still a
24 second lieutenant, second lieutenant assistant team leader, and then a heavy weapons
25 NCO, a light weapons NCO, and a medic. That was the team. And I didn't know where
26 Phu Nhon was, and someone said, 'Oh, shit, that's up in the Central Highlands, you don't
27 want to go there.'

28 RV: Who said that? Was that—

29 RM: I don't remember.

30 RV: Someone who had been there before?

1 RM: Somebody who knew the country. You still didn't want to go to the Central
2 Highlands. I didn't know much about it, except they said it would be cooler there; that
3 was kind of neat. And it was, I mean, essentially. But a bunch of my buddies got the
4 Delta, and we all wanted the Delta, and they got it, and I didn't. So that—

5 RV: Were you upset?

6 RM: Yeah, yeah, I was upset, but I didn't know why I was upset. I was upset
7 because somebody said the Highlands are a bad place to be. I knew about Kontum; all of
8 our, in OCS and everything, you'd talk about places like An Khe and Kontum and Ban
9 Me Thuot, I knew about Ban Me Thuot. And I knew about Pleiku. I said, 'Where's Phu
10 Nhon?' And they said, 'Oh, that's about 40 klicks south of Pleiku.' And I didn't like the
11 sound of that because I knew about Pleiku; I knew about the 4th Division. They said,
12 'Oh, that's over by Ia Drang, that's on the edge of the Ia Drang Valley.' I knew about the
13 Ia Drang Valley; I'd studied the Battle of the Ia Drang Valley five years earlier, you
14 know? Knew all about that, and that's where I was going, so I was not a happy camper.

15 RV: Did they tell you were going to be working with Montagnards at that time?

16 RM: Yeah.

17 RV: What were your thoughts on that?

18 RM: Well, that appealed to me. They said, 'You'll need an interpreter, they don't
19 speak Vietnamese.' And I thought, 'Well, I wasn't real good at that anyway (laughs).'

20 RV: (laughs) 'I didn't study that.'

21 RM: Yeah, so it didn't make any difference. And then they said, 'But before you
22 go to your assigned place, you're going to go to Nha Trang.' That was the II Corps
23 headquarters for USARV, not for MACV but for USARV. MAVC was in Pleiku. They
24 said, 'You're going to go there'—

25 RV: Could you spell that out, that acronym?

26 RM: USARV is United States Army Republic of Vietnam, and it's sort of like the
27 American part of the thing, and then there's the MACV part, and of course MACV's over
28 all of it. But they said, 'You're going to go to Nha Trang first, but before you even go
29 there, you will go to a place called Di An. D-I A-N, I saw it on your map there. 'Di An,
30 right outside of Saigon, not too far from Bien Hoa, Bien Hoa Air Base for advisor—in-
31 country advisory school.' And so we went there.

1 RV: All of your—

2 RM: For two weeks. All my buddies, all the guys going to the Delta, didn't mean
3 it was where you were going. We were going to have two more weeks of training in-
4 country. So we went to Di An. D-I—do you see it?

5 RV: I see it. Two words.

6 RM: Yes, two words. And it was a two-week program as I recall. We slept in the
7 barracks. It was reasonably secure they told us, even though they had guards at night and
8 all that. But they told us that we would have two weeks of solid training, and what they
9 did at the Di An school was they taught us all of the weaponry that we would be teaching
10 the Montagnards, the PSDF. And I guess the ruff-puffs—oh no, not the ruff-puffs, they
11 had M16s. I don't know—they taught us all those weapons even though not everyone
12 there was going to have the kind of assignment that I did. So they learned the Browning
13 Automatic Rifle, and we learned the M1 Garand, and we learned the Thompson
14 submachine gun.

15 RV: Was that weird for you?

16 RM: Yeah, absolutely. We're talking World War II weapons here. I'd never seen
17 any of these weapons. The Stevens Single Shot shotgun, the BAR, let's see, what else
18 did we have? I guess that was it. Oh, the M1 Carbine, small. And that these would be
19 the weapons of the People Self-Defense Forces, the PSDF, which was like you had to be
20 at least, you know 60 years old to be one of those guys or under the age of 12 or
21 something. I mean, it was like the far end of the extremes. Everybody else was in the
22 Regional Forces and Popular Forces except for those guys.

23 RV: Were you told this then? Did you know?

24 RM: Oh, yeah, we had a whole thing on what the PSDF was, and we studied
25 about the Montagnards and everything.

26 RV: What was your reaction to that?

27 RM: 'Whoa, this is going to really be some kind of an assignment because I
28 mean, what happened to the M16s, the M60s and the M79s?' My guys have got M1s and
29 M1 Garands. I remember having a heck of a time trying to learn how to field strip an M1
30 Garand because it just wasn't natural for me. I was pretty decent by that time at M14,
31 had M14 all through OCS. M16, was pretty comfortable with that, still not as

1 comfortable as I would get. So, I remember being there, and that was two weeks, and
2 that was pretty good duty. Pretty good duty, we liked that. And all of us were still
3 together, like I say, some of us went all the way back to basic and were still together.
4 And then we flew to—then we got our duty assignments, and I remember them flying us
5 to—I was by myself now. Nobody else was going to Phu Nhon; we all broke up. And
6 then I was put on Air Vietnam, and I flew to Nha Trang.

7 RV: Right there on the coast, and what did you do there? It's the headquarters.

8 RM: It was processing, processing. I spent about three days there. Oh, it was
9 beautiful. Went swimming in the South China Sea. My first taste of combat was that
10 night, although it was kind of—you had the 120 mm rockets, they rocketed the Officer's
11 Club, and everybody scattered, including me. That was kind of scary.

12 RV: Had they told you what to do in case of a rocket attack?

13 RM: Yeah, but they had told us where to go, and at the time, I was really scared
14 because we were getting shot at. But I noticed that there was a whole lot of other people
15 that didn't even pay attention to it. They said, 'Oh, those damn 120s, they never hit
16 anything with those.' And they were launching them off of the rockets, they'd lay them
17 on a bamboo runner and fire them off, and they don't know where the hell they're going
18 to go. That's what all these old guys that had been there awhile told me.

19 RV: What does it feel like there, that very first taste of combat?

20 RM: Well, it was nothing compared to what it would be, so at the time it scared
21 me. And I remember it was, this is a bookend for me because this was my first time
22 being shot at, and I was at the Officer's Club in Nha Trang, and I was watching a
23 Philippine band doing James Brown, *I Feel Good*.

24 RV: (laughs) Wow.

25 RM: It was actually pretty good, too, but it didn't—when the rockets came in, you
26 know, I was under the table. And I remember thinking at the time, 'Well, how do these
27 people put up with this?' I thought this was what combat was going to be. Little did I
28 know what it would really be, but it's a bookend because the same exact thing happened
29 when I went home a year later. I was in the Officer's Club in Nha Trang, only the band
30 was Korean.

31 RV: And not doing James Brown.

1 RM: Not doing James Brown, but doing something rock 'n' roll. I don't
2 remember, 'We gotta get out of this place if it's the last thing we ever do.' Popular songs
3 like that, and we were rocketed. And I didn't even move.

4 RV: I was going to say, what did you do?

5 RM: Didn't even move. Didn't want to get up, had a good seat, had my beer, had
6 a burger, and I didn't even move. And I watched all the new guys scatter (laughs).

7 RV: (laughs) Did you think back, 'Wow, that was me?'

8 RM: Oh, yeah, yeah, that was me a year ago. It was funny that way.

9 RV: What's it like to sit in a foxhole there that first night, or wherever you are?

10 RM: Got under the table, but it'd be like getting under the table over here at the
11 Student Center. It was a big Quonset Hut type building, you know, had pretty good size
12 to it. But yeah, I remember thinking, 'Well, I'm here. I'm here.' But I kind of relied on
13 the people, what were the guys that were kind of still not under the table saying, 'Oh,
14 don't worry about that, it's just 120s, they never hit anything.'

15 RV: Were you thinking, 'Wow, but one could, I mean, one could have my name
16 on it coming into the room?'

17 RM: Yeah, I don't know that I thought that, but I certainly, you know, that's true.
18 But no, it was not something that I enjoyed, and I thought, 'Well, we're starting now.'

19 RV: Had you been issued weapons yet?

20 RM: Yes, we were issued weapons in Saigon, so we took them to Di An with us,
21 so yeah, I had. But didn't have any ammo, just had an M16.

22 RV: An M16, 45?

23 RM: Yes.

24 RV: So from here, how long were you there in Nha Trang before you processed
25 out?

26 RM: Two or three days, and then they said, 'You're going to Phu Nhon, but you
27 gotta go to Pleiku first.' So I flew to Pleiku. One of those planes, it must have been that
28 one, and that may have been a Chinook. I may have ridden a Chinook from Nha Trang to
29 Pleiku because what I remember is that I was on a plane with a whole bunch of
30 Montagnard women with baskets and pigs and chickens on the Chinook. And it smelled
31 in that place, man, oh man. They were throwing up, sick. And I do remember that flight,

1 and then I spent a day in Pleiku, briefings. I think an overnight there. And then the next
2 day we flew from Pleiku on a Huey down to Phu Nhon.

3 RV: This might be a good time to ask you, and we can also stop in just a bit, but
4 did you understand or did you think about the bigger picture here? I know you're
5 concentrated on where you're going on your assignment and where your buddies went,
6 but did you think, you know, what did you think about the big picture? Southeast Asia,
7 the United States being there, were you there to stop communism? Were you aware of
8 these kind of thoughts, or did you have any of this going on?

9 RM: Didn't have any of it at that point. At that point, I become—I bought in
10 completely to my role. That was because it had been taught to me at MATA, it had been
11 taught to me at Di An, in Nha Trang the few days we'd had briefings at every stop. And
12 we were told that the American Advisory Effort in Vietnam was now going to win this—
13 enable the Vietnamese, excuse me, to win this war. And remember at this time, there are
14 less than 200,000 Americans in Vietnam, and there's only two or three units. The 4th
15 Division, which is the main division in this province, is there at Pleiku, and they're ready
16 to go home. They've already been announced, this is May, June, and they're going to go
17 home in October. Some of them have already redeployed, so they have told us that
18 within six months, there won't be any Americans in this whole province, and that's going
19 to be the way it is in all of Vietnam. There won't be any American units left before my
20 tour is up. And it's going to be up to the ARVN to do this, and you are going to be what
21 helps them do that. So I bought in completely to my role in that respect. It was almost as
22 if I ceased to be an American soldier. I could have been an Australian soldier in that
23 respect. I was going to take my training that I had learned so much, and I was going to
24 help them help themselves. And I bought into it, but I don't remember thinking of it as
25 being particularly an American thing at that point. It was more of, this is my job, and
26 now I'm going to go out and do it, I've been trained to do it.

27 RV: Had you heard any rumors or any talk about Vietnamization and it's success
28 or not success or, 'Wow, lieutenant, you're kind of fighting a hard fight here. This is
29 going to be difficult,' or what had you heard?

30 RM: No, never thought that it was going to be difficult because we were going to
31 n area that had good pacification in a lot of the areas. We had been told how to measure

1 pacification, results of pacification. We'd practiced filling out our little punch cards,
2 IBM cards, we knew how to do that. We knew the questions to ask to determine what
3 pacification would be or how we could determine whether or not a village was pacified.

4 RV: Can you explain that, what was that?

5 RM: Well, it was a series of questions about contacts, about how often the VC
6 had been there in the last however many weeks it was, about how long the village chief
7 had been in office or had been in power, crops, how the crops were doing, whether or not
8 you could go there at night versus during the day. A series of questions like that that you
9 had to go through a bunch of demographic things. Population and all that, and you had to
10 answer questions about sanitation and how many people were still... whether or not there
11 had been medical problems. Spinal meningitis was a real problem in the area, and you
12 had to kind of measure that and see how often that had been in. Whether your medic
13 teams, whether any MedCAPs had been through with the nurses out of the 37th evac there
14 at Pleiku, and they had those programs. So you had to answer all these questions, and
15 you had to then fill out these little cards because the cards would go into the IBM 360s I
16 guess they were and processed.

17 RV: And to all of you then, this was accurate? It made sense?

18 RM: No. No, I have to say—at this point, yes, I'm ready to go. As it turned out,
19 we did a lot of those card filling out—filled out a lot of those cards without ever going to
20 the village; it was too dangerous. And I use to say to people that wanted to know
21 whether it was pacified or not, I'd say, 'Would you go sleep there at night? Would you
22 go in that village and sleep at night? You want to know what's pacified?' I remember
23 Senator Harris came down; I remember Senator Harris, he was the Congressmen—
24 Senator from Oklahoma, and he was a real anti-war guy, and we got to take him around.
25 And I remember the colonel, who I didn't get along with very well up in Pleiku, saying
26 we were going to go to all these pacified villages and show Senator Harris. I say,
27 'Pacified?' They said, 'Well that's what the report said.' I said, 'Yeah, well, that's not
28 what I put in my report.' I said, 'Let's go there, you want to know if it's pacified? Let's
29 go there at midnight tonight. You want to go there?' And they didn't want to go there;
30 they didn't want to take the senator there at midnight because it wasn't pacified. The

1 difference between a pacified village and one that's not is whether you can sleep in it at
2 night; that was my rule because the VC would come around at night.

3 RV: Right.

4 RM: And during the daytime, everything's pacified. Well, not everything, but
5 most everything's pacified during the daytime, at least for the first six months of my tour.
6 So, I remember buying into what we were going to do, that we were going to measure
7 pacification, and then we were going to take people out, take the RPSDF troops, teach
8 them how to set up ambush patrols outside of their village. And we were going to do
9 some good things I thought.

10 RV: You believed at the time that Vietnamization was a good thing, that it would
11 work?

12 RM: Well, yeah, I sort of remember thinking, and this is where it gets a little
13 difficult because you know, I know so much more about the war now than I did then. But
14 I sort of remember thinking, 'Well, yeah, what do you mean Vietnamization? What a
15 silly term for a war in Vietnam.'

16 RV: Really?

17 RM: Yeah.

18 RV: What should have it been called?

19 RM: Well, it should have never have been called Americanization for one thing; it
20 should have been Vietnamization—it was Vietnamization in '62 and '63 and '64. We
21 made it Americanization in '65 and '66 and '67, but we should never have not been
22 Vietnamizing the war, I mean—

23 RV: Because it already was.

24 RM: Well, it should have been if it wasn't. It certainly was for the advisors; we
25 had an advisory effort through that whole period, so for me it was always Vietnamization.
26 I just thought it was kind of a silly term to be talking about like that. And I remember,
27 let's see, I'm trying to think of what I knew about Ap Bia or 937 Hamburger Hill because
28 that happened in '69; that happened while I was in—March of '69 while I was in OCS. It
29 happened right after Nixon was elected or right after he was inaugurated. We had heard
30 about Vietnamization, that was the—going to be the Melvin Laird, General Abrams idea,
31 and then Ap Bia comes along, and it made the news because Kennedy took it to the floor

1 of the Senate and criticized General Zais for his zealousness in trying to get his third star,
2 which was wrong. I mean, that was the wrong motive. So I sort of remember that, and
3 that sort of slapped down Vietnamization. They were saying, 'Well, if we're going to not
4 do it like we used to do it, and we got a new president and a new COMUSMACV, why
5 are we doing this? Why are we playing like we're going to hold geography and then
6 giving it back the next day and losing all these men in the process?' So I sort of knew
7 about that. But I do remember when I finally got flown down to Phu Nhon, I do
8 remember talking—I was going to replace Lieutenant Silver, and he was a first
9 lieutenant; I was still a second lieutenant. I was hoping to make first lieutenant soon.
10 And I remember knowing that he was my replacement, and so I sat down for a debriefing,
11 and he just scared the hell out of me.

12 RV: What did he say?

13 RM: Oh, he talked about all the contacts they had had. He'd served in Korea and
14 in Vietnam, so he had had—I always wondered how that happened, why he had served in
15 both places and he was only a first lieutenant; he wasn't a captain. He was ready to
16 DEROS. But he and his sergeant, his sergeant, and I have forgotten his name. But his
17 sergeant just scared the daylights out of me about all the enemy contacts that they'd been
18 on, on the operations that they'd been on. And he said, 'We got one'—this was like I
19 came in on—I may have my days of the week wrong, but it seems to me that I got in
20 there on like a Sunday night or something, and he said, 'And we're going out next
21 Tuesday, and you can go out with us.'

22 RV: In two days?

23 RM: Out in two days. Out simply meant, this was a district compound, district
24 headquarters surrounded by about 400 RF/PF troops, and then the PSDF were in all the
25 villages. But we had a—and then in the inside of that compound was an American
26 compound made up of two MAT teams, five men each and a district team, made up of a
27 major, an RTO, an S2 who was also the Phoenix Program.

28 RV: Okay.

29 RM: And then on each team you had what I described earlier: two officers and
30 two NCOs and a medic. So there was about 15 Americans and then this group of four,

1 around four, probably somewhere between 300 and 400 Vietnamese slash Montagnards,
2 mostly Montagnards.

3 RV: Did that make you nervous at all? Here you are, 15 Americans out in this
4 pretty remote place?

5 RM: Yes, particularly after—and we were right on Highway 14, right on Highway
6 14, midway between Ban Me Thuot and Pleiku. And right down there was an
7 engineering compound right east of us that was responsible for building, maintaining and
8 doing mine sweeps, morning mine sweeps on Highway 14. And when the VC would put
9 an anti-personnel or an anti-tank weapon and blow up a Lambretta full of Montagnards,
10 it'd leave a big hole in the highway, and the engineering unit would—American
11 engineering unit would come out and fill it up again and pave it out and asphalt it. We
12 built that highway. I say we built it; I think we built it originally, I'm not sure that the
13 French built it, I think we built it. And so after hearing Lieutenant Silver's stories, and
14 yeah, I was pretty concerned. That's where I would sleep every night, unless I was out in
15 the field on an operation. That's where we would leave from to go everywhere. We had
16 a chopper pad, we had a little Quonset hut, dayroom kind of thing where we all ate. We
17 had a Montagnard cook, we had house girls, we had a little hooch, we had the roof
18 sandbagged, but we had no defensive bunkers for the Americans. It was ringed by—
19 between us and the highway, on our side was open lands, open grounds. Behind us going
20 back east was where the, sort of a horseshoe, and we were the opening to the horseshoe,
21 and it wasn't even defended. I do remember thinking that, and right on the edge of our
22 inner compound was this single wide trailer that had a few sandbags, some 55 gallon
23 drums of sand around it and a couple sandbags on top, and that's where Major Major, our
24 major, our district advisor lived. Then we had a long, little hut thing where we all lived,
25 and we all had little rooms in there. And I remember thinking, 'We're not even
26 defending the entrance.' That was my first impression, that we're not even defending the
27 entrance. So I asked Lieutenant Silver about that because I was going to take his room
28 when he left, but they put me in another room for a few nights. I think he was going to
29 be there two more weeks. And I said, 'What about the entrance?' And he said, 'Well,'
30 he said, 'Most of the action, most of the fire fights, most of the enemy contacts take place
31 out, not here.' He said, 'We get mortared once or twice a week at night,' but he said,

1 'We've never really felt the need for anything at the entrance of the road coming into the
2 compound off of Highway 14.' And I made up my mind right then that as soon as he
3 leaves, that was my first order of business was to build a bunker above that trailer. We
4 would build it on the front and above, so we'd have an elevated firing position at the
5 entrance to the compound looking out over Highway 14. That was my mission; that was
6 what I was set to do.

7 RV: How big of an area, in general, was this entire compound would you say?

8 RM: Probably a mile square, I would say. It was probably, you know, like maybe
9 50 yards on the inner circle and then maybe another 100 yards out to the district and then
10 beyond that, another mile. You can see a picture of it if you log onto the Ron Milam
11 Collection, the very first five minutes of the video is that compound. It's shot from the
12 bunker that I built, and then there's a picture of me at about the six-minute mark, of me
13 on top of that bunker as we are building it, looking out over the compound.

14 RV: How many indigenous forces were there?

15 RM: About 300. Well, of the indigenous, I would call that the PSDF. Probably
16 none in the PSDF in that compound because the PSDF were confined to the villages and
17 the hamlets outside of the district. It was ruff-puffs in the district itself, and they all lived
18 in bunkers on the other side of this U with their families, with their women and children,
19 which will become a real problem in about nine months.

20 RV: Okay. Did Silver take you around and just kind of tour you, you know, show
21 you everything?

22 RM: Yeah, he was real proud of it. Took me around in the jeep. Had a pet
23 monkey.

24 RV: He did?

25 RM: He did, and the monkey had gotten real wild.

26 RV: You mean a real monkey had gotten real wild?

27 RM: It was a wild monkey that they had tamed, but it was starting to bite people,
28 as wild monkeys would probably do.

29 RV: Yes.

30 RM: And he, on either the first day or the second day, he said, 'We gotta get rid
31 of that damn monkey,' and I thought he meant take it back out to the jungle. And I

1 remember he drove me out to the edge of the—we had a landing strip, it was a dirt
2 landing strip for the Cessna 172s, we called them headhunters, that would fly in, and
3 whenever we went out on an operation, it was the MAT team leader's job to go out on the
4 night before the operation and fly where we were going to be operating from to see if we
5 could pick out terrain and this sort of thing and to also preplan our artillery fires and stuff
6 like that. So that was behind the compound on the backside. And so Lieutenant Silver
7 had been talking about this monkey, and he said, 'We gotta get rid of that damn monkey,'
8 and I just figured that meant let him go, and let him go back to the jungle. And he drove
9 me out to the edge of this, at the end of this runway, and the sergeant whose name I can't
10 recall drove up in another jeep with that monkey. And they took it out there, on a leash,
11 tied it up, and then shot it. I didn't understand that. I'd only been there a day and a half.

12 RV: What did you think?

13 RM: I thought, 'Damn, what's going on here?' I was almost—I almost felt like it
14 was to let me know that the world I'm living in now or something, I mean, I took it as
15 somewhat of a bravado action on their part. I didn't see it that way at all; I didn't get it. I
16 didn't know why, if you wanted to get rid of a monkey, you didn't just let it go, and let it
17 find its own way back into the jungle. He killed it. Blew its brains out... first day,
18 second day, whatever. Lieutenant Silver was something else. He used to talk all the time
19 about he couldn't wait to get back home, but he was sensitive to what was going on in
20 America, and as we all did in our last weeks in-country, we would talk about what we
21 were going to do when we got home. And Lieutenant Silver was going to buy a Mustang
22 Convertible; he was from New York, upstate New York, and he was going to buy a
23 Mustang Convertible. And he was going to get him a 38 Smith & Wesson and strap it to
24 the steering column, right down there where he could grab it because he didn't think he
25 could exist without a gun.

26 RV: And you learned about all this in your two weeks with him while you were
27 there?

28 RM: Yeah, I learned most of this in the first 24 hours. He was a talker, and those
29 are the impressions that I remember of him. I would go out on operations with him; I'd
30 have my first combat experiences with him, and he was pretty good, although his
31 sergeant was even better. But he was a warrior, he was a warrior, and he was someone

1 who I always wondered what kind of an adjustment he would make back in the States
2 because it looked to me like he'd been there—well, he had been there a year, but his
3 sergeant who was, oh, he was so good in the field in all respects. His skills were just
4 excellent, map reading, compass, calling in artillery, everything; he was on the top of his
5 game, but he was on his third tour in Vietnam, and he was young.

6 RV: And he was leaving?

7 RM: And he was leaving also, he was going to—both of them were leaving, yeah,
8 their both time was up. So we were pretty much starting over. My team would be a
9 brand new team from top to bottom.

10 RV: I had heard that a lot of lieutenants—heard veterans speak about this
11 numerous times, read about it—they relied heavily on their sergeants to relate to the men,
12 kind of give them a feel for the terrain, the job, the whole thing, and kind of break in—
13 break you in—

14 RM: Break in lieutenants.

15 RV: Break in lieutenants and break in the lieutenants for the men.

16 RM: Absolutely.

17 RV: So here you are, and this is on a typical American thing going on out there,
18 but here you are losing a lieutenant and a sergeant.

19 RM: Yeah, lost them both. Silver was... he was something else. Like I say, I
20 wonder whatever happened to him because he was scared to go home. He was scared
21 enough to when he got home, he had to have gun, and he didn't live in New York City;
22 he lived in like Albany or some place.

23 RV: Did he tell you he was scared, or you just—

24 RM: No, just, 'Gotta have that gun, man. I can't even imagine not having a gun
25 all the time.' And I don't even know if you could have a gun in upstate New York, but
26 he was going to have a gun strapped to his steering column with his Mustang.

27 RV: What did he tell you about your job? What did he say?

28 RM: Well, he was very... he loved the Montagnards, and he hated the
29 Vietnamese.

30 RV: Why?

1 RM: Because the Montagnards were really good soldiers, and the Vietnamese
2 weren't. It was pretty much that simple. His assessment of them, I think, was not
3 correct. I think after two or three months I realized that I thought the Vietnamese and the
4 Montagnards were good soldiers; I had no problems with them.

5 RV: Was it a function of leadership or in training them?

6 RM: Yeah. It was one of those deals where you sort of had to either like the
7 Montagnards and hate the Vietnamese or the other way around because they didn't get
8 along too well with each other, so you sort of felt like the Montagnards were better
9 soldiers. We had some great Montagnard leaders that were actually part of the ruff-puffs.
10 The Vietnamese were smart enough to know that the success of the ruff-puffs in that
11 province would be based on how many Montagnards were in leadership positions. And
12 as reluctant as they were to put Montagnards in those positions because of the way they
13 looked down on them, kind of like, you know, I mean, I don't know, it's a little different,
14 but kind of like Native Americans being in units in 1890 here. They were good soldiers,
15 but the Vietnamese I thought were pretty good too, the ones that I served with. He
16 didn't; Silver didn't like the Vietnamese.

17 RV: What about the sergeant? What did he say?

18 RM: I don't remember him having a particularly intellectual thought about them.
19 He was just a tough—he was young. He was not, you know, he wasn't the sergeant from
20 *We Were Soldiers* kind of thing. He was probably 22 or 23 but a hardened, combat vet at
21 that young age, and he loved, loved going out on operations and being in—he couldn't
22 get enough of it. And if there was an enemy contact, and a radio call came in, and
23 somebody was under attack down at Plei Djereng, that was a little village south of us, he
24 wanted to get in the jeep and go there. He was looking for action all the time, and he'd
25 been there three years. I mean, he'd been there three years with the time off in between,
26 as you're required, I think six months. And he would openly talking about he didn't
27 know how he was going to handle America, and he hoped he could get back here soon.
28 Silver didn't talk like that; Silver, I think, was getting out of the Army, but the sergeant,
29 he wasn't getting out. And he was just a matter of, would they give him something that
30 he could get through before he got back here? So I had these two guys both leaving, and
31 like I say, they were good, and I would have liked to have served longer with them

1 because I knew they were good and experienced, all of the things I wasn't. But then it
2 was just like a revolving door with new guys coming in.

3 RV: New Americans coming in?

4 RM: New Americans. Now, they were combat experienced. I had two new, once
5 I took over the team when he left in two weeks, I ended up with an African-American
6 light weapons man and an older sergeant, heavy weapons man, and a medic that were all
7 pretty good, but that were all on their second tours of Vietnam and were all older than I
8 was. They were all, I would say, probably close to 40 years old.

9 RV: Was that an issue?

10 RM: You mean for me being new and young?

11 RV: Yes, well, an issue on either side, was age a problem?

12 RM: You know, it helped a little bit that I had time before they got there. They
13 were a little more combat experienced. By the time they got there, I was Phu Nhon
14 experience, and I had been shot at a couple of times, and I'd been ambushed on the
15 highway a couple of times. So I had combat experience, but I didn't know the extent of
16 their combat experience because they were wearing 101st Airborne Division on their right
17 shoulder and then MACV on their left, and one guy had an 82nd patch on his right
18 shoulder, and one guy was with the 173rd, the Thundering Herd. So I knew the Herd had
19 been in—he'd been in Operation Junction City, and so I knew about that probably they
20 had had good combat experiences. I had had small, by the time they got there, I had been
21 shot at a few times, and I'd been in one fire fight, but basically it was small potatoes
22 compared to what I figured that they had been through. So I think that helped me, that I
23 at least had been shot at; I had my CIB within the few weeks I was there, so I could wear
24 that, and they could see that, and so I wasn't looked upon as being as green as I would
25 have been otherwise. But they were pretty good men, but they weren't like Silver and
26 this other sergeant in the sense of none of us, wasn't anybody in that group that was as
27 gung-ho as either of those two guys.

28 RV: How did you relate—what do you do about familiarizing yourself with the
29 Montagnards and with the Vietnamese, the local Vietnamese. What do you do? Come
30 up and introduce yourself, what do you do?

1 RM: That's a good question. I remember going out into the villages that were
2 close by everyday.

3 RV: By yourself?

4 RM: No, you never went anywhere by yourself, but we had a jeep; we had two
5 jeeps, actually, assigned to our team, and we had a .50-cal on one and an M60 on the
6 other that sat up above in the back, and I wasn't supposed to drive, I was supposed to ride
7 shotgun, and then one of the NCOs would drive me. And then the other lieutenant—the
8 other officer would have the same set up, and then our NCOs pretty much took care of
9 them, maintained them as Motor Pool. And then I had an interpreter, and a lot of times
10 we put the interpreter on the M60 or the .50-cal.

11 RV: Why?

12 RM: I don't know. They had to sit somewhere, might as well have them sit up
13 there. And then we had sandbags in the floor of it to somewhat protect us from mines.
14 And so we'd run up and down the highway to these various villages.

15 RV: How long would it take you to get to these villages?

16 RM: 15 minutes. My Thach was 10 minutes up the road, Plei Djereng was 15
17 minutes to the south. Those were the two that we went to a lot, and there were little
18 villages off inside the road that we would go down trails to get to that were within a
19 couple of miles of the highway, a couple of—probably two clicks, three clicks away.

20 RV: Did Silver say, 'Here's a map lieutenant, here's where you need to go,' or did
21 he say, you know—

22 RM: We had a schedule of places that we would go to check these pacification
23 issues and fill out these forms.

24 RV: Was the schedule set?

25 RM: It was set for the next week or two, I think, and this operation we were going
26 to go onto was an actual operation in the sense that we would leave the compound by
27 foot, and we would go out to a village that VC had recently been seen in. And the idea
28 was to take a ruff-puff unit out—it would be a company operation—and that we would
29 go out there and set up a CP in the village, and we'd spend the day there. We weren't
30 going to spend the night. We were going to go out by foot and then expected back seven
31 or 8 o'clock that night. That was my first operation.

1 RV: Show of force or awareness?

2 RM: Yeah, you didn't always know. These were not necessarily planned by us.
3 Remember we're advisors, and there is a Company Commander of the Regional Forces,
4 and he would have a plan to go out, and we would go out, and we went along as the
5 advisors. Now we'd preplan artillery fires, and we'd have all of our map there, and we'd
6 have everything marked where we'd want fires if we needed then. And then we had the
7 Cobra gunships on standby and F4s, and we had all those things all set. And so I got to
8 go through the kind of the planning for one of these operations; that was the big job for
9 us, is making sure if you get in trouble, you could call for air support. Usually Cobras, it
10 was pretty hard to get F4s. We were sort of a populated area along that road, so we
11 didn't usually get F4s... usually, a little bit later we did, but mostly you could get Cobras
12 in in about 15 minutes from Pleiku.

13 RV: Let's go back to when you first got there, and you're visiting the villages,
14 and you're with Silver and the sergeant, I presume. What do you do when you get into
15 the village?

16 RM: They would introduce me to the village chief and say that I was the new. At
17 that time I was the new Thieu-uy. I would become a Trung-uy very shortly, first
18 lieutenant.

19 RV: Do you want to spell those for the—

20 RM: Thieu-uy, I think it's like T-H-I-E-U dash U-Y, and Trung-uy is T-R-U-N-G
21 dash U-Y. And Thieu-uy is second lieutenant, and Trung-uy is first lieutenant, and I
22 became a Trung-uy within a couple of weeks.

23 RV: What did you say to these guys? 'Hi, how're you doing? I'm Ron.'?

24 RM: Yeah, I'd tell them through the interpreter, and then they would usually have
25 just enough English to ask where you were from. They had heard about America, and
26 'Nice to have you here.' And then I'd asked them how long they'd been village chief,
27 and they'd usually say a week. And I'd ask them if there were any problems in the
28 village and that kind of thing, and then Lieutenant Silver would interrupt and say, 'Oh,
29 yeah, well they had VC, beaucoup VC,' beaucoup VC. And they'd start talking, and
30 they'd use their limited English on me, you know, let me know that they knew certain
31 words. And they were always swear words.

1 RV: Yeah.

2 RM: And so we'd kind of have that kind of talk, and then they'd take me through
3 the village, and if the village chief had an elephant, they'd be proud to show his elephant
4 off. That was really a nice village if the village chief had an elephant; that was a big
5 status symbol.

6 RV: How big is a village? Typical village.

7 RM: It might be 50 hooches, 50 bamboo huts, and those huts might have three
8 families in them. There was what they called the long houses, very long this way, and
9 then there was the shorter houses, all elevated up about five feet off the ground with a log
10 ladder leading up to the porch and then the inside area.

11 RV: Is this what you expected to see?

12 RM: Well, I'd seen pictures at Ft. Bragg about it, so it was probably about what I
13 thought it would look like, except that the people—it was amazing to me, all of the
14 women were bare-breasted, and that was a little bit of a surprise to me. And the children,
15 up until about the age of five, the children were naked, and then all the men wore
16 loincloths. And even the PSDF Army wore loin clothes.

17 RV: What did you think about that?

18 RM: That was pretty strange, that was pretty strange. I remember when I saw
19 *Apocalypse Now* in 1978 when it came out, I remember going with people who said, 'Oh,
20 my goodness, I never saw anything like that,' and I thought, 'You didn't? That's who I
21 fought with, that's how they dressed.'

22 RV: Did you ever have to get in a loincloth?

23 RM: No, but I did very shortly after I was there. I did have to become a member
24 of the Jarai tribe, and I went through the rice wine ceremony that almost killed me...
25 literally. They took me to this location.

26 RV: How long after you were there?

27 RM: I think this was after my first combat experience, so I was in combat on that
28 Tuesday that we went out for the first time, and so I'd been shot at a few times. So I
29 didn't have my CIB yet because they had a rule that you had to be in combat for 30 days.
30 You had to have combat experiences within a 30-day period, so I was eligible for the
31 CIB, but I hadn't been awarded it yet. They took me down to this village on a Sunday

1 afternoon, and I don't know why that was a Sunday afternoon because we normally took
2 Saturdays and Sundays off and dressed down in civilian clothes which consisted of blue
3 jeans or shorts and a magazine vest with all the magazines that you could carry in there,
4 that we had made in the village.

5 RV: So you took the weekend off?

6 RM: Well, often the sense of dressing down and hanging out, it's staying back at
7 the compound. And so they took me down to this village on the Sunday afternoon to
8 participate in the rice wine ceremony, and they butchered a water buffalo for us.

9 RV: For you?

10 RM: Well, it was me, and there was at least one other new guy that were going to
11 become members that day.

12 RV: Were you told beforehand that you were going to have become members of
13 the tribe?

14 RM: Yeah.

15 RV: So you expected this.

16 RM: Yeah, because Silver and all those guys, their arms were full of bracelets
17 where they had been awarded, become members of the tribe. But I didn't know what I
18 was going to have to do exactly; they sort of told me what I was going to have to do. But
19 it consisted of eating the innards of the water buffalo, the guts, and they would—and
20 literally they had butchered this thing, and it still had fecal matter in it and everything.
21 And they would hold the intestine, and they'd run it like that and get as much stuff out of
22 it as they could. And then they'd wash it in some water, kind of a thing supposedly to
23 clean it, and then they chopped it up. And then you ate it, and they had sauces to dip it
24 in. So it was raw intestine. And then they had some actual cooked things there and of
25 course, rice and all these kinds of stuff.

26 RV: And you can't refuse it.

27 RM: Oh, no, can't refuse it. And you know, you're sort of of the opinion, you're
28 thinking, 'I've gotten all the shots that you can get,' when I'm going in there, but you've
29 heard about Hepatitis and all this kind of stuff. And you just know that you're going to
30 get something from eating all this crap. And then they take a—took a toothpick, about
31 that size.

1 RV: And you're indicating about four inches long.

2 RM: Yeah, about that long, yes. A long piece of—maybe it wasn't a toothpick,
3 maybe it was a—but it was about that long. And they broke it in half, and they put it on
4 the edge of a 55 gallon drum of rice wine that had a reed going down into it as a straw,
5 down into the bottom of the barrel. And to become a member of the tribe after eating and
6 everything, you had to suck down rice wine until the top of that wooden straw floated or
7 cleared. And I don't know how much that is, in terms of 55-gallon drum that big around
8 times one inch, but it's a lot. And you start drinking it.

9 RV: Who does? Just you?

10 RM: Just me. That's your job. And I start drinking, and I keep drinking and
11 drinking, and I couldn't do it all at once, so I waited a little bit. And you can start feeling
12 that stuff work on you, and you just get absolutely blown away and sick. And I passed
13 out, I mean, I don't know over what time period. And when I came to, I had the
14 Montagnard bracelet on my arm, my right arm. And I wore that Montagnard bracelet
15 from having it been put on me in, this would be probably the first or second week of July
16 of 1970, I wore that bracelet until 1997. Never had it off, and then I lost it in diving
17 down in Belize. And my wife still has hers on her. Now she didn't go through the
18 ceremony. By going through the ceremony, I got one for my wife, and I put it on her
19 when I saw her in Hawaii at R&R.

20 RV: Were you thinking about her during that ceremony?

21 RM: Yeah, I was thinking that she's going to be a widow (laughs).

22 RV: (laughs) So alcohol poisoning and—

23 RM: Oh, and Hepatitis. I was sick for two days, oh, man I was sick. Everybody,
24 they say everybody gets sick from this stuff. I don't know if it was the food or the drink
25 or what, but it was something that I had to do. Probably as dangerous a thing as I did
26 while I was there, I never did that again. I didn't ever eat that kind of stuff; I just didn't.
27 I made sure I didn't because it really did make me sick.

28 RV: Well, why don't we stop for today? This is a good place to stop, and we'll
29 pick up here next time. Thanks, Ron.