

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

YSU Veterans Project

Vietnam Experience

O. H. 70

ROBERT A. HIAN

Interviewed

by

David M. Costello

on

November 14, 1974

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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INTERVIEWEE: ROBERT A. HIAN

INTERVIEWER: David M. Costello

SUBJECT: combat in Vietnam, living-working conditions,
reflections on My Lai, amnesty

DATE: November 14, 1974

C: This is an interview with Mr. Robert Hian for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, and as part of the Veterans Project, by David Costello, at 449 Crandall Avenue, approximately 5:30, on November 14, 1974.

Bob, could you first tell me a little bit about your background as far as your school and your family, what you're doing now?

H: Okay. Presently, I'm working for the Youngstown city in the police department. I was a graduate of Chaney High School in 1965. I've currently enrolled in Youngstown State pursuing a degree in business. I am planning to change my major, though, to criminology. You want my mother and father?

C: No, that's fine. Are you married at the moment?

H: No, I'm single at the present time.

C: Okay. Well, as you know, I would like to ask you a little about your service experience. Why did you go into the service?

H: All my buddies joined and I was going to college and I was fed up with college. And they were joining. So I decided that was the thing for me to do, to get away from home and get some good experience and knowledge out of it. So I joined with them.

- C: I see. Now which branch did you go into?
- H: I went into the Marine Corps.
- C: When did you go into the service?
- H: January 11, 1966.
- C: And where did you go for your basic training?
- H: I went to San Diego.
- C: San Diego, California?
- H: Yes. Then I went to Camp Pendleton and from there, I went to Memphis, Tennessee.
- C: How did you feel about things when you first went in?
- H: When I first went in, it was a heck of an experience. It was unbelievable, that boot camp was so hard and so demanding. I don't think I was ever homesick like most of the guys were because I had four of my best friends I went in with. And so we sort of took care of each other and when it became so demanding, I looked over and if they were looking at me and if I was doing it, then we all made it through that way, you know. Nobody said, "Well, if he could do it, I could do it." That's the way it was with us. So it wasn't too bad, as bad as some guys had it. I had it fairly good.
- C: Now, you did basic at San Diego, is that correct?
- H: Yes.
- C: And then you went to Camp Pendleton.
- H: Right.
- C: What did you do at Camp Pendleton?
- H: Well, you had your boot camp at San Diego and at Camp Pendleton, it was basic infantry training. And you fired all the weapons and you learned how to be a foot soldier. That's the grunt, as they call them.
- C: A grunt. It's a foot soldier.
- H: Right.

C: Then when you finished your training there, what was your military occupation?

H: Okay. From there, I was in the Air Wing of the Marine Corps and I went to Memphis, Tennessee. I went to school there. The first school I went to was basic mechanic school, just to become a mechanic. Then you had two choices: You either went to jet engine school or you went to reciprocal engines. So I went to jet engine school and I became a jet mechanic.

Then from there, you had another choice. If you wanted to stay as a jet mechanic, they would put you out in the field, as a jet mechanic. Or you could have gone into helicopters. They took only the top six guys and asked them if they wanted to go. I was in the top six of my class, so I was accepted to go to helicopter school. From there I went to helicopter school, and I passed that. Then I was assigned to Vietnam.

I had about thirty days before I was supposed to go and I was just messing around and I went and played football and I broke my collarbone. So I was put on a hold. I spent about four more months doing nothing. Instead of sending me to Vietnam, they sent me to New River, North Carolina, right near Camp Lejeune. There I went to a helicopter squadron. From there, I started out as a second mechanic; it's just a "go-for", that's all. You just go for tools for the crew chief.

From there, you become a first mechanic. And if you're lucky, you get to fly. Then you have to take all these tests and you become qualified as a crew chief. So I became qualified as a crew chief over there. I spent approximately a year in training, maybe a year and a half in training. Then I was sent to Vietnam.

C: Now, the training you got at these various places, did you think it was good training?

H: I was lucky in the sense that if I would have gone directly to Vietnam right out of ITR or my school, I should say, from Memphis, I wouldn't have known as much or have been able to react the way I did over there. I was sort of glad. Maybe it was fate with the collarbone that kept me from Vietnam at the time because I was good when I went over there. And most of the guys that went over there didn't know anything. They had to learn directly. I knew everything about the helicopter and the whole flying bit about it before I got there.

All I had to learn was just a little bit of combat and we always had war games. I was somewhat familiar with it then, which a lot of guys weren't that didn't have the training I did. So, reaction wise, I was thankful I had it because some of the times when we really got into a lot of stuff, bad experiences, there and really getting fired upon, I never had to really think. I just reacted and this came from all the training I had.

C: I see. So you feel then it was quite good.

H: My training was good. Excellent, in my case. A lot of guys maybe they would say no, but mine, I feel was great.

C: Now, there was some time there then before you got your orders to Vietnam. What was your initial reaction to your orders once you were ready to go?

H: Well, I knew I had to go because everybody, at that time, when I was in the Marine Corps, everybody in the Marine Corps was going. It was just a matter of time before you went. So I was fed up with all the guys coming back and talking about Vietnam and how good they had it and how bad it was. I had a lot of friends that had already died. So I sort of volunteered. So I was, in a way, afraid. In a way, I wanted to go because I was going with a lot of guys.

There was another thing. We had twenty guys come from our one squadron and fifteen of us, when we went over, got in the same squadron over there. So it was just like a change of climate. That's about all, in the beginning.

C: How did your family react?

H: Oh, I never told my mother or father that I had volunteered to go there. I just told them I was sent there and they think like anybody. They were afraid. But that was just because my mother had gone through the war with my father. My father had been in the Marine Corps over in the South Pacific.

Then we really didn't talk too much about it. In fact, it was kind of funny. When I went home, it was mentioned and hardly ever talked about. That was about it. When I was leaving, they would say, "I'll see you in a year," or two years or whatever it was going to be. We never really discussed it too much and I never really put much thought into it.

I was going to get engaged to some girl and she wanted to get engaged, but I told her not to because you never know. I said, "Why be a widow, you never know if I will come back, if there's a possibility." I thought about it and I figured, if it came, it came. What could I do, thinking about it, isn't going to stop it. Why go over already worried about it? I was a little apprehensive. I had a lot. I was afraid, in a way, but I felt that I could do whatever I had to do and just hope that it wasn't too bad.

C: I see. Okay, Bob, I would like to now ask you a few questions concerning your initial experiences in Vietnam, when you landed and what your first impressions were. What happened when you first arrived?

H: I'm glad you asked this because this is kind of funny. It was a long trip when we left San Francisco, and you know, a lot of guys, really a lot of guys. Then we went to Hawaii, but it was the night and we couldn't ever get to see anything.

So finally we landed and we were coming over Vietnam. You look down and it's a beautiful country from the air. A lot of guys don't see it that way; I did because I flew a lot over there. But when I was coming into Da Nang. . . Da Nang is like an airport, like a regular stateside airport. It's enormous. I expected to get off the plane and they would hand me a rifle and we would be fighting our way into a bunker or something, you know. All of a sudden, a truck would come up and you would jump in the back of a truck and you would go to wherever the war was. But it wasn't that way. It was a base and it was just like any other base except the guys were dressed differently and there were bunkers here and there were sandbags here.

It was a weird experience. As I got older, in country, I don't mean older as a person, older in country, you could tell a new guy. It was something maybe I noticed about new guys or somebody else noticed about new guys and told me about it, and then I finally realized it. Besides not being tanned--even though some guys were tanned, they went to California before coming over--the eyes were clear. They didn't see the rottenness of war, how terrible it really was. And their eyes were sparkling clear. Once you have been over there, maybe a month, you could get that way, but most of the guys, four or five months there, had seen how terrible it was over there and how everybody. . . You got into sort of a rut.

You could just look at a guy and say he's been here for awhile.

I was able to pick them out. I could ask a guy, go up to a guy, even if he was dressed just like everybody else in dirty, old clothes or muddy or just come out of the field; I could ask him, "You've been here just a short time?" And he would have to say yes. I don't know if it was a knack by me or somebody else said it and I noticed it, like I said before. But it was weird.

I wish I could tell you exactly what it was like. You could look at a guy, right in his eyes, and he was alive and when you were there, you were like dead, just walking around like a zombie, yet you weren't though.

C: So then there were a few surprises when you first got there?

H: Oh, yes. From Da Nang, I got on a truck and they drove us through the town. That was quite an experience, going through Da Nang itself. The people were completely different. You had read about it in the paper and looked at pictures of it, but to be there, you have to. . . It's just unbelievable that they could live in such rotten conditions, you know. It was like going back into the early American settler time. That's what they lived like. They walked around in these old clothes and these weird hats and they lived in poverty, horrible poverty.

C: What did you think about your first week or what were your feelings your first week there? Can you recall?

H: Yes. I wanted to get into it. I wanted to get into the war. I didn't do anything, really, hardly. I just checked into my duty station and they sent me to the flight line. They said this is it, and I would go out and fix the aircraft. But I wasn't into it.

I couldn't fly yet. You had to get orders to fly in a month period; you have to wait until the beginning of the month. So I told them I was a crew chief and they said, "Well, great. We're really hurting for crew chiefs. We just lost a lot of them." I asked them, "How did you lose them?" "Why, they have been shot and killed," or they crashed and burned or something like that, in the helicopters. That sort of scared me.

Then all the guys would be coming back. I looked up to these guys and I would listen to a couple of their stories.

I just wanted to get into it so I wouldn't have the fear that I had of maybe I couldn't do it. I had a fear that when it came down to combat, would I buckle? Would I run, really, or would I be too frightened to do anything? I didn't think I would because all my life I never, ever chickened away from anything; but I wondered. This big experience in my life, would I be able to handle it? So I wanted to get into it.

We were just sitting around, doing nothing, and being new. You didn't know hardly anybody. All my friends were checking in and we were all together and everything was a new experience--going to the mess hall and eating C rations, going up to the club and drinking, you know.

Then my second day there, I'm sleeping and all of a sudden this huge siren goes off and I don't know what it's about. I figured what it was about and a thousand guys, there was a 10,000 guys mad rush, to the bunker. I got trampled because I wasn't fast enough. (Laughter) So I ran out there and I ran into this bunker. I have a slight case of claustrophobia. It never bothered me. (Laughter) I sat in there and they started. Big explosions were going up and I figured the whole place was going to be--when I got up and walked out--nothing but rubble, everything burning like you see in old World War II pictures where they bomb cities. All the other guys were sleeping and everything else. I'm frightened and I'm shaking every time the bombs went off. I would be shaking like this. All those other guys, they were going back to sleep. Then another siren went off and everybody crawled back out. I got out and looked around and the stars were out. I saw a few guys running around. Then everybody was saying, "I wonder where they hit now? I hope they hit my plane so I ain't got to fly tomorrow." Statements like that, and I didn't even know anything about what was going on.

It's just that you're new. It's a totally new ball game you're in and you're brand new. You're like a rookie to it. You want to get in and you want to play. So it becomes easy that you don't have this apprehension all the time. You want to get over this apprehension, become acquainted and accustomed to everything around you, as commonplace. That's just about what I felt. I wanted to get it over with--quick. I wanted my year to be up, my thirteen months to be up really quick.

C: So you were there for thirteen months?

H: No, I was there for eighteen.

C: Eighteen months.

H: At this time, I wanted to get out already.

C: What was your rank at that time?

H: I was a corporal then.

C: Now, were you stationed in the same place through your whole tour over there?

H: No. No, I went to Marble Mountain and we were there my first six months. Then we got transferred to a helicopter carrier. I can't even remember the name right now. Tripoli, the U.S.S. Tripoli. We did an operation off the helicopter down south, below Chu Lai. Then we came back and we went up to Fu Vai and we off loaded at Fu Vai and we stayed there maybe two months. Then we went back on ship again and we had another operation. Then we went up to Quang Tri and from Quang Tri, we got another ship. Then we went back. We went to Marble Mountain and I stayed there the rest of the tour.

C: Now, Bob, I would like to talk a little bit about your job, your leisure, and living conditions while you were there. Basically, what did you do while you were there, if that can be phrased in that way?

H: My job was that I was a crew chief on a helicopter, I was assigned a helicopter. It was called the Yankee Tango #7. That was my plane and anytime that plane flew, my job was to fly with it; no matter what mission it was I flew with it. Also when it came back, the pilots would write up a grievance if something was wrong with the helicopter. Then it was my job to fix it, in the mechanical part. But if it got into the hydraulic part of it, the electrical part of it, or the radios, we had special shops that took care of that. Or metal work, if you had bullet holes in it or anything like that they took care of it. But most of the mechanical, engines, transmissions, rotor heads, anything mechanical in it, I took care of it, plus serviced it: greased it, oiled it, just like a car. You would take care of a car but a helicopter, you got to grease it and oil it once a week, plus pull filters and strainers and do periodic maintenance--they called it.

So that was my job, and the plane, when I got it, it was all destroyed. It had crashed. So I had to build it myself back from just a shell. So it really became part of me.

In fact, I even named the thing. I called it the Buckeye Bomber because everybody found out I was from Ohio, so my nickname was "Buckeye". In fact, everybody called me "Buckeye" and I knew guys that knew me for three months who didn't know my name was Bob. Everybody called me "Buckeye". I even had it stenciled on the back of my helmet. So, on the plane, I put on the outside the Buckeye Bomber. That only lasted three months though. It got shot down and it burned all up.

But basically that was the job. If the plane was downed, you fixed it. There were nights that I would come back from a mission at 8:00 at night, go get something to eat, and come back and go to work, and not maybe get off work until 3:00 in the morning and then go home or go back to our hut there. They would wake me up at 5:00 to go fly. So if your plane was up, you got some sleep. If it wasn't, if it was downed and there was maintenance, you had to be there and you had to do it. Then you were expected to fly with it in the morning.

C: Quite a lot of responsibility.

H: Yes. Well, yes, it was. It was quite a lot because it was \$1 million aircraft and you were in charge of it. You never had the same pilot twice though. One pilot would fly it differently. It became part of me like somebody would be driving your car, and you didn't like the things they did to it, you know, if they overstressed it or something or didn't treat it the way you wanted it to be treated. It's funny in a way because really it's the government's thing; they own it, but you're in charge of it.

C: It's part of you.

H: I would be flying and sometimes we would be overloaded or something, or we would be going through a lot of fire and bullets would be flying all over the place. I can remember saying, "Come on, baby, come on. I know you can make it," like it was your girl friend or something, you know. It was always a "she" to me. When I would come out and I would tap it on the nose, I would say, "We're going to make it through the day, aren't we?" It was something like that, just goofy experiences. But it was part of me, that plane was part of me.

C: You were still a corporal at the time you were a crew chief, is that correct?

H: Yes. When I first began over there, yes.

C: Did you like your job?

H: Yes. I enjoyed it. The mechanical part of it?

C: I suppose.

H: Well, I love flying. I love flying. It was a tremendous experience to fly. If you ever flew, you know what I'm talking about. If you haven't. . . I'm not talking about in a commercial plane where you sit down and you're like in a train or in a bus or something. I mean to fly. There's a difference. Maybe helicopters are so much different than an airplane because you start low and you go up and you can hover. You could stop anywhere. You could do anything you wanted with a helicopter, flying. It's basically going back like to the Wright brothers. Helicopters are coming into their own right now. But then they weren't so big and it was a great thing. I loved flying, and I loved. . . To work on the plane, I got a sense of. . . How can I put this? When I fixed it, it was mine; I did it. I was the one that fixed it. I'm the one that made that plane fly. I'm the one that kept it up in the air. Some pilot, he might have flown the plane, but it was me that was behind everything on it, you know.

C: What kind of helicopter was it, Bob?

H: I flew in a C-46, they called it, and it was a cargo transport. It was a tandem motor, meaning two of them. One was in the front and one was in the back. It looked like a banana. The troops came in and there was a ramp in the back and they came in there. The Army had a bigger version and we had a smaller version. They were called "schoonooks" in the Army and we called them "seanecks"; that was our plane. "Seanecks" was the nickname for them.

C: I see. How much armament was on this helicopter?

H: Well, the skin was 1/20,000 of an inch thick. The only armor plating was around the engines and the pilots had armored seats. They sat in these armored seats. Down in the windows, so they wouldn't catch a round right in the chest, they would put old bullet bouncers. We were required to wear a bullet bouncer. This was like a bullet-proof vest, but it's not like the flat jackets that the grunts wore. These were about 1/4 of an inch thick

and they would fit on your front and they would fit on your back. They weighed forty pounds. They were really hell to get used to, I'm telling you.

In the beginning, you would be walking around and the plane would always be taking. . . . When you would start on a mission, you would be up 3,000 feet, and then you would call down and they would tell you what to do. I will get into this later though; this is combat. But you would come down and they would make really tight turns. In the beginning, this forty extra pounds, you would be falling down and then it's hard to get up because of the forces and everything. So it took awhile to get used to. But I caught two rounds in the chest with it and it saved my life. So after that, it was just part of you. It became like a second skin. When you took it off, you felt like you could float up to the top of the aircraft--forty pounds lighter.

C: Now, did this have any weapons on board?

H: Yes. We had two 50 caliber machine guns and depending on the mission that you were in, most of the time the right one was my gun. On the left, you always had a gunner with you. He also helped look out the left side for the pilots so you wouldn't run into an aircraft or you wouldn't land--when you landed in some of these zones--in a stump and the stump would come up through the middle of the aircraft. Then you would have damage and you would have to go and fix it. You would have to watch the blades so the blades wouldn't hit a tree or anything. So he took care of the left side and the gun. He was really the gunner and he just helped you with bringing cargo in and doing other things like that.

Then everybody carried a .38 on them. But as I got older into the squadron, I became what was known as sort of crazy because I used to have a Thompson, my own Thompson. I had two M-16's and I had a .45 and I even had a little Derringer. One time a guy even laughed. There was a story going around because I fired every gun that I had. I went through 100 rounds on the 50 caliber, went out, went through fifty rounds with the Thompson, shot like a Phanter--you know, the old Phanter 50--with my .38, got my .45 out, fired that, and finally I was so mad I took two shots with the Derringer that probably never even hit anything. (Laughter) The guy that was watching, he said, "You're unbelievable. You're a human fighting machine," because I went through everything really quick. (Laughter) It was just wild.

- C: I can believe that, too. We've kind of spent a little time on something here that was your bread and butter, in a sense, while you were on duty. How about after duty, Bob? What did you do after work? How did you get a chance to unwind or enjoy yourself?
- H: That's quite a deep subject there because I think you change as you go along in your time. Like when you first get over there, there's not too much you have to forget. There you don't become--like I told you with the eyes--that zombie type where nothing bothers you because you have to become that over there. I'll try to get in there and explain that to you because it's a good thing. I hope people understand this. I've talked to a few people and they said, "How could you do things like that?" I'll try to explain that later.

When you first go over, going to the chow hall was a great thing because most of the time when you were out flying, you ate C rations and then you came back. Our mess hall at Marble Mountain, the cook must have been a guy that really loved his job because we had one of the best mess halls. People used to come from all over the country just to eat at our mess hall. It was so good. The enlisted I'm talking about, not the officers, was great. They had good food and this guy always cared about what he. . . We used to have fresh shrimp that fishermen would catch. You could take as much as you wanted, I mean as much shrimp as you wanted. I ate so much shrimp, but I still love it. Everyday I would eat shrimp. Plus the guy had good food all the time. So it was an experience.

The mess hall was a horrible place because it would be 120 degrees out and you would go in and eat hot food. You would be sitting in there and there would be 40 million flies, I'm serious. 40 million flies. You would start eating and it was so hot that you would be just soaking wet when you were done. I mean your clothes were just soaked because of the hot food in you plus from the shooing and moving your arm around. (Laughter) It was hot. You would completely sweat.

Then you have to go out and dip your tray in three things. The garbage was all in a big hump and the flies were out there. I was lucky. I never got mess duty because I was a corporal. But that was a horrible job there. I would hate it being in the country and doing that. But otherwise, the food was good and the mess hall was horrible.

Then you would come back to your hut. There were ten guys in there, usually at most ten, and the guys were pretty good friends. They would try to keep all the guys together, like all the mechanics and crew chiefs and gunners would be in one hut. Then another one would have all the electricians and all this, you know. So most of the guys were your good friends. You would talk over what you did during the day, funny things, never hardly bad things. Then you would come back and you would bull-shit for a while.

Then the best experience of all: You would go and take a shower. This was funny, this was. I mean it was great to take a shower because you would be so hot all day long. If you can imagine 120 degrees, like being in an oven for how long--ten, fifteen hours--and the sweat was on you. You would be white from sweat. It was the salt. It would be 5:00 or 6:00 in the evening. You would go over and you would get in the shower and that shower was tremendous. It was good. The water was probably. . . It was cold all the time, but then sometimes it would get warm. But it was nice and it was refreshing. So as soon as you dried off, you would go back to your hut and you were soaking wet again with sweat because it would just come on instantaneously. But for that couple of minutes, you felt good. So then you would put on fresh underwear and fresh utilities if you had them. You would make a mad dash for the club because it was air-conditioned. You went into the club and that was an experience.

I don't know if a woman could never get into this, but a man probably could. This is where all the frustrations of the day were gone. They just left. We used to always do. . . In our squadron we were really close. You would get about fifteen or twenty guys, maybe even more, sometimes thirty, and you would get a big table. First you would start inside. They had a happy hour and it was, I think 5¢ or 10¢ maybe. Yes, I think 10¢. So everybody would throw in a can, you know, you had like Monopoly money. That was the money; it was just like Monopoly money. It never meant anything because you didn't spend that much. The only thing you spent it on was toothpaste and stuff like that and drinking. That was it.

So you would throw it in. We would get a can. They would have like a can of potato chips or something. Nothing could be in the bags because it would be spoiled so they were in these cans. They always tasted like

formaldehyde, but they were good because you never ate too much of it. Somebody would buy a can and they would dump them and everybody would eat them. Then you would put in this can. . . Everybody would throw in a couple of bucks, that was all you needed. There were thirty guys, that's \$60. 10¢ a beer, well, you could buy a lot of beer. (Laughter) So you would sit around and everybody would drink beer and they would start talking about the day and you would laugh and you would talk about experiences at home. At the time everybody was getting loaded.

Then we would play drinking games. They were tremendous. When you drank over there, nobody cared what you did or what you looked like or anything. You could just pass out. Somebody would move over to the side and eventually you would get back up, throw up a couple times, and get back to drinking again. We would have chugging contests. We had one guy that was amazing. I'll still never believe he drank one beer, a twelve ounce can, in 1 3/4 seconds, he drained it. (Laughter) He was the best on the base. He made money. We bet on him.

Our base had slot machines. I used to blow about \$15 a month on those things. You would win, though. I was lucky. I used to win on those. That was fun.

The girls used to wait on the tables. They were fun to goof around with.

If you had a bad experience, the guy would go up there. Usually a couple of guys would have a bad experience and you would get your best friend and you would sit around and they would try to console you. They would get you blown away, right out of your mind, where nothing was in your head anymore but craziness.

So then you would stagger back. It closed at 10:00. It was only open for a couple of hours because they wouldn't let it go past 10:00 for a couple reasons. The guys would get too loaded and there have been times where guys would pull guns and stuff and the rest of it. Also for mortar attacks, they never came until after dark and they didn't want anybody killed, all in one spot. It could hurt the war effort.

Also they had a show, an outdoor show, just like a theater screen, as big as a drive-in screen. You sat out in the sand and it was sort of like a . . . Well, you call it a pit, and it was down on the bottom and everything. It

went up. There was just a hill and everybody sat on the hill. Guys brought chairs, those folding type, you know, outdoor lawn chairs and they would sit in those. That was if you were in country a long time; you owned a few things. (Laughter) That was part of your things. You had a mirror and you had one of those chairs so you went to the show in that. If it was a good show you went.

Shows were good. I don't think I ever enjoyed shows as much as I did over there because it sort of got you back into reality, what it was all about. What life. . . You forgot over there. You became like I told you, that zombie. So you would look back and you would say, "Well, eventually I'll be there." That's what the world was, the world was at home. That's what they called the world. "I'll be back to the world some day. Hopefully." You got to see it again. You were tired of looking at slanted eyed women so round eyes were pretty nice.

Most of the actresses were always nice. Sometimes movies made me sad, though. I didn't really like to go to them that much. Once in awhile if I felt good, I went to movies. If I felt bad, I would never go to a movie because it would make me more sad. You would get homesick. In a way, you weren't. You could say homesick, but you were sick of what you were doing, sick of the environment you were in, sick of the people, sometimes even sick of your friends because it was all nothing but guys. You wanted the companionship of a woman. You wanted to have to sit home and watch a television with a beer or just be by yourself over there. It was difficult to get by yourself because there were so many guys, I mean totally by yourself, where you could be lost in your own thoughts.

Dealing with grass, I had some experience in it, but when I was over there, we were always so busy that we never had the chance to. See, the grunts had a lot of time. When they went back from the field, they would go back to a rear area, they called it, a base camp. Then they would sit there for maybe two or three weeks where all they had to do was clean their rifles and stand inspections and stuff like that. But we were always working.

Everyday was a work day for us. You never had a day off. There was no such thing as a day off. Once in awhile, if you did something good, your section leader. . . A section leader, which I became eventually, had twelve planes. He took care of twelve planes and he had twelve crew chiefs underneath him. He was a staff sergeant and

he took care of these twelve planes, or the twelve crew chiefs took care of the planes. So if they got somebody to fly your plane, they had an extra guy or something. They would have you maybe a day off and you would go into Da Nang and that was quite an experience there too. But that only happened maybe about three times in my eighteen months over there. And there you would go hopefully with another friend.

They had an R & R, in country R & R they called it. They had a big movie house there. I went to the Bob Hope show. I was lucky enough when I was there. The colonel gave me a ticket because I had saved his life the week before that and he gave us all tickets, the guys he had a little preference for there. So that was an experience. I enjoyed that; that was good.

C: Were the USO shows well received?

H: Oh, yes. Wow! Yes.

C: You saw Bob Hope?

H: Yes. I saw him on Christmas Eve in 1968.

C: I bet it was great to see.

H: Yes, it was really good because they sang "Silent Night". I think there was something like 120,000 guys there. Guys were up on telephone poles and stuff.

C: Did it bring home to you?

H: Yes. It was good. Everybody sang "Silent Night". I think I even had a tear in my eye. I think everybody around me did. It was a good experience. I wouldn't pass it up for \$1 million, that experience. The feeling I had and the talent was good. I think that was the first ever I saw in person that degree of talent. Now you see quite a bit of it around.

Most of the other USO shows were everyday people. They were good, though, because it always brought the world to you. It was part of the world. When you were at home, you would go to a bar and listen to a band and they would sing songs that brought a lot of people out of their doldrums, which they needed for awhile.

C: Now you mentioned the happy hour and being together with the guys; the camaraderie was really good. It got your

mind off things.

H: Yes. It was tremendous.

C: How about a letter from home? How did you feel about getting letters from home? What did they do for you? Was this important to you?

H: I was lucky enough that I had a lot of friends that did write. I never wrote that much because I'm not a good writer and I just can't sit down and write that many letters. I would write my mother mostly and then I had a couple of girls that I wrote. Letters from home were great. I mean it was great to receive them. You read them two or three times, you know. You held them; you kept them for later reference.

Then I had, like I told you, I was going to get engaged when I came home. I got a "Dear John". That really tore me up. That was really a bad experience. Oh, I still can remember that. I feel stupid about it now, but at the time it was a big, it was a crushing blow. We were at Fu Bai and I got it and it tore me apart--I mean, really tore me apart. I was really torn up by that; that was one of the things I had. When I go home, she'll be there and we'll get married and I'll settle down, you know. Those are all the things you think about when you're over there because all you had to think about was the war. So you thought about how nice it would be to have a home and your wife and have children and how your life is ahead of you. You say, "If I make it, if I make it, if I make it, God gives me the right to come back; this is what I'm going to do. Boy, I'm going to make my life really something great." This was the girl I was going to do it with.

So when that happened, it broke that bubble for awhile. I went over the deep end. In fact, I almost went crazy. I wouldn't go out; I would refuse to wear the bullet bouncer. I wanted to die. I actually wanted to die. I would not wear the bullet bouncer. In fact, this is when I won most of the medals over there because I just did not care about living anymore. That bullet bouncer that saved my life twice? I put it in a corner and I said, "That's where it's going to stay."

We had a door that went down and I would stand out there in the door. I wasn't going to kill myself. I was going to let them kill me. So I tied a gunner's belt on and attached it to the floor so I wouldn't fall out of the

plane, but when we would be coming in, I would be standing there with two guns sticking out like the biggest target. You might as well have just painted a target on me because that's exactly what I was. I would stand out there with two Thompsons. I had acquired another one. Just like that old John Wayne, firing from underneath his arms there, I would be standing there with this belt holding me, from falling out of the plane, just firing and doing crazy things that probably nobody ever had done.

That's where I got my big reputation in the squadron that I was: To fly with me was an experience. The "Buckeye" was the greatest crew chief that ever, he's the best Marine you ever, a true Marine, and the gung ho bit because I did not care. Why? You would do anything in the world if you didn't care about dying. Who cares, you know? Why not do it? Risk anything, which I did.

Then finally my buddies got to me and they kept pounding it into my head, "Forget it, forget it, you don't want to die. You got a lot to live for. This is one chick. What the heck, there's 1 million back in the world. They're all beautiful. You'll probably go back and you won't want her anyway."

Then a colonel, this colonel whose life I saved, he was like a father to me. He called me in and he said, "Buckeye, I heard what's going on. I'm taking your wings away from you." It was the biggest thrill for a guy to get his combat wings. It took twenty missions, combat missions, to earn your wings. You wore those very proudly on your chest. You were a combat crew chief or a combat gunner, you flew. This showed that you went through twenty missions and to get a mission you had to be fired upon and other things like that, combat missions, not these re-supplies or anything or other goofy missions that you flew once in a while.

So he was going to take those away. That's like saying somebody is going to cut out your heart, take your fingers off or something like that. They would give them back to you eventually, you hoped.

When I heard that, I was already at this point really bad. He said, "I'm taking them away and I'm sending you to the Philippines." I said, "For what?" At this time I became a sergeant. I was a sergeant. I was promoted in the field. So he said, "You have to go and get these parts that we desperately need." I said, "I am not in supply. That's not my job. My job is a combat crew

chief. You ain't taking my plane away from me and you ain't taking my wings." I was talking to a colonel, a full bird colonel. I probably could have gotten busted for it, but luckily enough he liked me--to put it that way. He said, "You got to go. You're going to get yourself killed. The pilots are starting to talk. Everybody's starting to talk. Nobody should do what you're doing." I said, "Well, is this an order?" He said, "Yes." So he sent me to the Philippines and he said, "Stay as long as you have to and then come back." I was lucky because I went and this guy gave me a girl friend of his to go look up.

The girls in the Philippines were a lot different than all the girls in the other R & R ports. These girls were not like the true bar girls. With the sailors they were, with the Marines they weren't.

I went there. I was able to wear civilian clothes. I had a good. . . It was like being back in the States. It was just like a camp, just like a base, just like in the States--fresh water and everything, everything you wanted: flush toilets.

That was the first time I went on R & R. I was about eight months in there. I ran into my hotel room and flushed the toilet. (Laughter) That was a big experience. To tell you that, you probably can't understand why because we crapped in a can. That was it or you went out into the woods. So to flush a toilet, that was a big experience. That was part of the world. To flush the toilet was part of the world. I would go back and I would flush my toilet.

C: Modern plumbing.

H: Yes, right. Ten times the guys said, "What are you going to do when you first get home?" "I'm going to flush the toilet." That was a big thing and they all laughed.

So I got with this girl and this girl was good for me. She wasn't in the true sense of the word a prostitute. I moved in with her. In fact, I spent I think \$5 the whole time I was there because this girl fed me, kept me, and I would go out to drink and she would get all the sailors to buy her drinks. She made sure she found out what I was drinking. So when they went to the bathroom, she would bring over the four or five drinks that the sailors bought for her. That was her job, to be a hostess, that's what they called it. That's what they were.

They didn't go to bed with these guys. They had boy friends and I was her boy friend. So I stayed almost three weeks, got myself together, went back, and put the bullet bouncer on the first day.

My mother sent me buckeyes because as I said that was my nickname so she sent them. This all happened the first day. I put the bullet bouncer back on, strung holes through the buckeyes, and put them on a dog tag chain, hung it up in my plane, and went out and got shot. The very first day back I got shot and stuck in a hospital.

When I came back, I looked at the buckeyes. They were all shrapnelled up. I pitched them in the South China Sea. I said, "You might be my namesake and my state and my nickname, but you ain't no luck."

C: Oh my God! Wow!

H: I pitched them right out into the sea.

C: This is a good point then to talk a little bit about your combat experience. Before we get into the combat aspect of your experience, I would like to ask a little bit further about your living conditions. What were they like, where you lived and so forth?

H: Let me try to paint a picture for you of what it was like looking through my eyes, maybe, when I first got there. It became a habit after awhile. You lived in this, it's everyday. It would be like living on a beach. The ground was sand. I mean it was just like walking on a beach, that type of sand. You could not walk barefooted in the daytime or you would burn your feet. You would get really bad burns. That's how hot it was in the sand. You know how when you were a kid and you walked in sand and you burned your feet? Have you ever done that on a beach?

C: Oh, yes.

H: Okay. Well, that's the same thing. That's what it was like. So you always had to wear your boots. It was always hard walking because you were treading this sand, nothing but sand. Sand was everywhere; sand was in your mouth; sand was in your hair; sand was in your clothes, in your bed. Before you went to bed, you brushed the sand out. You lived in sand. That was it.

We lived in a wooden. . . Sort of like up on. . . I couldn't understand in the beginning why it was up so

high off the ground. It was about maybe three feet off the ground, like you would have a subbasement or something like that. Then there was a wooden floor and a wooden building and it had screens. Then you had a tin roof. You had tin sides to these screens that you closed when it rained in a monsoon or if it got cold, which it never. It probably got below 60 degrees, but that was freezing when you went from 120 degrees to 60 degrees. It was freezing. We did that one time. I wore long underwear and a field coat and shivered in 60 degree weather.

Finally I found out why the buildings were so high off the ground. We had a monsoon and then we had a typhoon come in. It rained for six days straight. There was no flying or nothing so all you did was spend your time in the hut and go into the chow hall. You waded through water that was four feet deep. It just rained so much and the sand only accepted so much. It just came all up. So we just walked through the water. We ate in the water and we lived in the water. But they gave you enough clothes. You had those water things and you just got used to it.

Your little hut had ten guys and everybody had a little area. You had a rifle rack where you put your rifle everyday. You went and bought a wooden box that the gooks made from old, discarded ammo boxes and they made it into like a locker box. This was your own and you put all your valuables in there. And then you put around where you were these ammo boxes and you put your underwear and stuff in there and your little goodies from home, like you would get these freedom packages.

C: How did the guys get along? Were there any problems, for example, any racial problems that you experienced or saw while you were there?

H: The racial part. . . In the beginning of the war, my war, when I got there, we were too busy ever to have any problems. Everybody got along really great. All the blacks and all the whites got along because you worked. But then the war started to wind down in 1969 and we weren't allowed anymore offensive operations. All you did was do goofy missions and do a few resupplies, not too many big operations. So you had a lot of free time then.

I didn't but a lot of guys who were working in the electric shop and other shops like this did and the guys that

were permanent, not permanent personnel, but didn't really do combat stuff, they just stayed on the base; the perimeter guard and that was it. They never really went out into the combat like we did. They had a lot of time. Then it started to get really bad and this was when all the blacks in the United States were starting to do all this stuff and the racial problems were here. I don't know if they got it over there. They started over there and it was really bad.

I'll tell you one of my experiences and this will probably relate to you exactly how bad it really got. We had come off ship. We had been on ship three months and being on ship is not like being in country because you didn't have the bar where you could go to lose it. You couldn't drink. You had a theater, but you had to go with all these sailors, and the sailors and the Marines don't get along. You were all so confined.

You lived in a place that was unbelievable. If I could describe it, it was horrible. You lived in a little hole and you slept six high. You couldn't even have enough room to turn over in your bed. If you went to bed on your back, you stayed on your back. You had to get out, turn around, and get back in if you wanted to turn over. So it was horrible on the ship.

You couldn't drink, you couldn't do anything. So everybody was all uptight, all our guys. We finally got in the country and we were going to stay three more months there. So everybody was happy because you had everything there again, which was nothing. But you had everything that was good for that area, like a theater and the club and the showers and girls and the rest of it.

So they had a USO show at the club that night, which was great. We all watched it. Everybody was just so together. The whole squadron hadn't been together in a long time. We started to lose morale because we weren't close like we were. So we started to get close again, everybody was--the blacks and whites and everybody was together. The guys were so lit up and so happy that they were out on the terrace and they were dancing together, even. Guys were dancing together. They had some kind of rock and roll and everybody was dancing, goofing around.

All of a sudden this one guy must have hit a black accidentally. The next thing a big fight, I mean a really big fight, broke out. I was really in the bag and I don't know to this day if I did or I didn't. I don't think I

did. I can't remember, but I knew I punched a few people. So I never thought too much. They broke it up and then a couple of guys were hurt like they always do. From being used to combat, you don't just have a little, regular fight, you have a fight. A couple of guys went to the hospital. I never thought too much about it. We had them before. A lot of guys fought a lot of guys because of the tension over there.

The next day I was in the club drinking and it wasn't the same. People were staring and looking and talking. You know when somebody is looking at you and somebody is mad at you. All these black guys were staring and a few words were said but I never caught any of the gist of it. The next thing I knew I was walking out of the club when it closed. There was a path of them; ten on one side and ten on the other side of the doors, which we had to walk through. All my buddies, I guess, found out about it and I was so in the bag that I didn't know anything about it. But I had supposedly, which I don't know--like I still can't tell you to this day because I was so loaded--punched a guy and knocked his eye out. He was supposed to have lost his sight. It was a black guy. I had, up to that time, gotten along with all the blacks in my squadron very well.

They told me they were going to kill me and the rest of it. So we went to where I lived, our hut, and outside about twenty of them congregated. They told me that they were going to kill me and that I had done this. I don't know how they even chose me out of the whole group. I found out later. When I went over there, I never wore what everybody else wore. I was sort of different and I had worked with the Korean Marines and I wore their uniform all the time because I felt if ever I got shot down. . . They used to cut the heads off of all the guys that wore flight suits. So all the other guys used to wear flight suits and that was it. I mean, no underwear or nothing because it was so hot that they would get a rash and everything. I never had a problem like that. So I used to wear a green T-shirt and these Korean utility pants. When I went down, that flight suit was gone. I wasn't about to get my head chopped off. They could take me up north before I would. They would say, "Well, you're a grunt; you're going up north." I would become a POW (prisoner of war) instead of a KIA, killed in action. So I always did that, and supposedly this guy who had done it had Korean utilities on. There was another guy there who was sort of my size and the rest. He had the full thing on and I had the T-shirt, which all came out later.

So they did this for a couple of days and I had to sleep. We had to post a guard in my hut. I had one guy who stayed up one hour at a time, slept with a .45 underneath my pillow. Everywhere I went, I had to go with my buddies. So finally I went and got a black friend of mine that I was really close with; Brownie was his name. I started talking to him. We talked and we talked and he said, "Let's talk man to man, Bob, not as black to white." I said, "Yes." He said, "Did you do this?" I explained that I didn't know and that I could have, but there was another guy there. I put a shadow of doubt in him. He said, "I believe you. I like you. I trust you. Let me go talk to them." So he went and talked to them. It didn't do anything. For a couple more days it happened.

Before this, before we had gotten there on this camp, a couple of white guys got beaten up and two got killed. They were jumped by these blacks and killed. I mean killed. So I knew this and I said, "It's breaking our squadron up. There're too many problems." I was sort of like the leader of the enlisted guys below staff sergeant. I was a sergeant at the time.

The blacks had gotten together and banded together and had their own little underground paper. They were where they felt if some white guy did something to somebody they would take care of it. They were their own vigilante squad.

I asked Brownie to take me to this squad. I wanted to go to them. He said, "You're crazy, but if you want to maybe this is the only way to settle it. I can't ensure that you're not going to get hurt. They probably won't kill you because you've told people you're going there. But they could beat you up so bad that you'll be in the hospital for a long time, maybe for life." I said, "Well, that's a chance I have to take to settle this." So I was blindfolded and then taken there at night. I don't even know where it is to this day. I never will know.

I went in front of them and it was sort of like a trial. I had a trial. I explained to them. A few militants were there. They said, "Do bodily damage to him." But the leader said, "This man's got to have a lot of courage to come here. No other white man has ever set foot in this place." Through probably my own courage, I put into them that it was this other guy. I wasn't about to say, "Maybe I did, maybe I didn't." Then the guy that I supposedly hit was there. He said, "I can't say that's

him." So, they were very honest and fair about it. It was like a regular trial and from then on, I was the only white guy in the whole base that could talk to any of these guys. Anytime I had any problems, I went and talked to them for the guys.

In the beginning, like I told you, there was no blood. You all were Marines. Then it became that you are a black Marine or a white Marine because the guys were sitting around too much. So that's my experience and then, like I told you, it was bad because we had to post a guard in my own little area to be alive. A couple shots were fired through my hut there.

C: So there was a lot of tension.

H: Quite a bit of tension. In fact, I was quite afraid. In fact, that was the most I was afraid even in combat because you never knew; those guys knew your actions. They could get you at anytime.

C: Now, the crux of what we want to talk about here would be your combat experiences and it's one of those things where from what you've said, you had a lot of experiences. So what I would like to do is focus in on your most impressionable or most vivid experience you had in combat, possibly from your own standpoint or your unit's standpoint, although, we don't have to limit ourselves to this.

H: Like I told you, I had so many that it's hard to say. I never had one really biggie. Yes, I guess I did. There's a few of them. I had quite a few that were bad. I don't know how to say it. I'm not trying to say that my war was any different than anybody else's or that anybody had it worse or less worse than me.

I was called a "magnet ass". I went into places that guys went in that haven't taken rounds in a year. I went into one place that didn't take one shot in a year. Let me try to explain that.

When you went into a combat zone in a helicopter, you would be at 3,000 feet. That was out of small arms range, so you stayed at 3,000 feet wherever you flew. You got your coordinates. Then when you got where you thought you were above it, either by visual or by coordinates and flying by the instruments, you would radio in and say to whatever unit you were going to, "Do you see us?" They would say, "Yes, you're to the right of

us," so many clicks. A click is 1,000 meters and 1,000 meters was a grid square on the map; that's what they called a click. "You're two clicks down from us," or north or south, east or west. You would fly to where they would say, "Okay, you're above us." Then you would go into an orbit right around where they were at. You would say, "Okay, we're going to be coming in," and you would try to come in on the heading of the wind. The way you found the wind was where they would pop smoke, which was a smoke grenade that you could see. It also would pinpoint where you were going to go because 3,000 feet is quite high for the naked eye. A lot of times they were in these heavy trees. So you had to see which way the wind blew.

You either had troops aboard or you had cargo aboard. Most of the time you loaded yourself to the maximum the aircraft could carry--the most troops and the most cargo. Water, C rations, ammo, that would be cargo. Troops would be the soldiers.

You had to be on the nose on your flying because if you blew the approach, you would be so heavy you would fall out of the sky, literally fall out of the sky. You had not enough revolutions for lift, so you would fall--too heavy. So most of the time it was pinpointed.

You had charts and everything, the pilots and you went over. You would tell the pilot how much you were taking aboard, how much weight, approximately. He would look at the altitude you were going to go to, where the zone was, the temperature outside, and also how much fuel was aboard, the weight of the aircraft. It was all tabulated on a computer card and he did it by looking at different weights. It came out that he could take so much weight, at the right time.

Then they would say, "Okay, we took fire the last time, ten days ago, a week. We're taking fire now. It's a hot zone. Our friendlies extend to the north." The friendlies would be where the troops were. They had all these perimeter guards all the way out and around. They were like in a circle. They extended out 300 meters to the north, twenty meters to the south, so many meters this way, east and west. They were called friendlies extend; that means that's how far they were out.

When you came in, if you were taking fire and you wanted to fire back, you wouldn't be shooting up your own guys. You knew the possible direction of fire. If the most

probable way would be the north, the pilot would tell you, "Okay, Bob," or "Buckeye, north will be where we're coming in, your side." You knew that was the gunner's side. You would expect it and you would be ready. You would be standing on your machine gun and waiting and looking out over it. You would get reports. "Last time took fire two weeks ago."

So I went into zones where they said, "Last time took fire, one year ago," and got shot out of the sky. That's why I got the "magnet ass". I went into places that nobody took any fire and got shot up--the plane, not me personally, but the airplane. That was what they called it, shot up, and got shot down.

I had so many experiences like I told you, but the very first one is kind of funny. Then I could get into the bad ones. When you first went out, you became a gunner. Even though I was a crew chief, I had to become a gunner first to see if I could make it through combat. So they stuck you on one, rinky-dink mission where there wasn't even any chance of getting fired upon. It was just a liaison aircraft. You went down, you picked up something, and you always stayed out of country, just to get used to flying over there because there were different procedures that you had to follow there.

Carrying the gun, cleaning the gun, the gunner had to take care of both guns. The crew chief took care of the plane and the gunner took care of the two 50 calibers.

Then they stick you on the worst mission, the most probable of taking fire which is called recon. Insertion and extractions were really the whole brunt of the helicopter business then. You would go to the recon pad and you were either going to have an insertion or you were going to extract guys. Extraction was when they were out in the field.

Where the recon went was not like going into a base camp. You went into the jungle and usually you picked them up at bomb craters where these big B-52's had cleared an area in the middle of a jungle. You would see nothing but a green carpet and all of a sudden there would be a brown spot. That's where you would land, where the trees were all blown down. There would be a big hole. They went right out to that spot; that's where the recon was to find out where the enemy was at.

When you went out there, you went out with two Phantoms

and two huey gun ships. If you were going to go in, you would pick up the guys at the recon pad. They all loved you because you were their main way out, the only way they came out. They never walked out. It was by helicopter. So they loved you. You were the greatest thing to them, the helicopter and you. You would go in, pick up the guys and then you would go up into the air.

The pilots would get briefed of what to expect and then they would brief you. Every time you went on a recon extraction, you knew you were going to take fire. You knew just about all the time you were going to take fire.

We went into an area that was on the side of a mountain and there was this big, high elephant grass. This was all brand new to me; I was all brand new to it. First, you watched and you watched. You would go up 3,000 feet and you would move over a little bit from where you were going to go in. You watched these two Phantoms work out with big 500 pound bombs and then they would shoot these rockets.

From the air and from the ground. . . I've had both experiences. From the air, it's a lot better. You can see them go into their dive. They get really low and they zoom past you going so many hundreds of miles an hour, 600 miles an hour or something. They get right on the tops of the trees going this fast.

They prep it and then the hueys go in to try to draw fire, to see if they are going to take any fire. If the gooks are worth their weight in salt, they never shoot at the hueys. The hueys will kill them. They have rockets on the side. They shoot a few rockets in all around the area to keep the gooks back. Then finally the word comes--you're going.

I remember the first time. The lump was so deep in my stomach. I was thinking, If it happens, can I react? What am I going to do? What's this all about? This was my first taste of combat.

So we started in. My crew chief kicked me and he said, "Okay," and I cocked my big 50 on him. Standing behind it, I had my bullet bouncer that weighed a ton. Boy, that thing was really heavy! We went into the tightest spiral. We were flying at a 45 degree angle. I was trying to stand up with this heavy bouncer. I fell down. Trying to get up was hard. I was laughing. Afterwards I really laughed, but then I was wondering if I was going

to be stuck in the floor, and if they started to shoot at me was I going to be able to get up to my gun.

So finally I got up. We were coming in and I couldn't see anything but trees zipping by me and the sides of mountains and stuff. The pilot screamed, "We're taking fire!" All I heard was popcorn; it just sounded like popcorn going off. I heard my buddy shooting. I didn't know what he was shooting at. I couldn't see anything. So I started shooting at nothing, just shooting. I went through 100 rounds and put another 100 in.

Finally, we landed. I cocked my gun and I was looking. We were in this elephant grass. I couldn't even see out of the window. It was like ten feet or fifteen feet high. I was going back and forth with my gun, left and right, to blow this grass down so that I could see in front of me. I was thinking all really quick in my mind, These gooks could sneak right up on me and I would never even see them.

The ramp went down. No, we were picking guys up, I'm sorry. So the ramp went down and we were waiting. I could hear them talking over the microphone in my helmet. They were saying, "Okay, we're in the back. We're coming on now." Then I heard that they were in a fire fight with the guys. They were out there shooting away with the gooks that were chasing those guys; it was an emergency extraction. That means they were being chased. They got spotted and a whole company was after them or something.

Here we were in the middle of a company of them. They couldn't hardly even see our chopper. There was gun fire going on all over the place. I was on this 50, not even knowing what was going on because I couldn't see anything.

The first thing, I turned and I looked down the end of the chopper, which was about twenty feet down, and the ramp was down. It was in all these weeds. I saw the first guy that came aboard was a gook. I went, "Hah, one snuck up!" I was reaching back for my M-16 because I couldn't turn the 50 around; it was locked and you can't turn it down the end. I was reaching back for my M-16 to blow this gook away that was sneaking up. I was saying, "This guy's going to shoot me any minute." All I could see was this gun go off and there were two of us dead. My crew chief didn't even see him. I was the gunner.

I was reaching back for the M-16, which was behind me,

and because of the weight of the bullet bouncer, I fell dead on my ass. (Laughter) I was lying there going, "Anytime now, anytime, I'm going to be dead." First mission and I was going to be dead; first day in combat and I was going to be dead. Holy cow! What were my parents going to think? All this was going through my head.

Finally, all of a sudden, the rest of the guys came running aboard and they all got on. I was still lying on the ground. The crew chief looked down at me and he was wondering, What the hell is with this guy? He asked me, "Are you shot?" I said, "No." I got up and I was really embarrassed. It was the scout; it was one of the scouts for the recon. I would have almost shot him if I could have gotten my gun. I was pulling my .38 out and they all came aboard, and then I figured out, he's the scout for these guys.

C: You mentioned that you were wounded. What were the circumstances surrounding that?

H: I was hit three times. The first time I was wounded we were coming into a zone. It was really hot. We were, I think, emergency medivac. We were picking these guys up that were wounded and were going to take them to the hospital. The zone was really hot and I was firing away. I turned around when we were in the zone; I turned around to pull a guy up. He was rolling over and he was really bloody. So I pulled down and I was picking him up and a bullet came through and hit me in the fingers, spun me around, knocked me down. Then I broke my finger. It just caught me in the end of it. So it wasn't too bad.

I broke it and I had plastic surgery and spent about two weeks in the hospital--a good wound and a nice, easy Purple Heart. The general gave me a Purple Heart. There was a big ceremony and stuff. I came back; all the guys laughed. "Hey, you got an easy one."

The next time I was shot I was. . . This is another funny one. I had all good ones, except for the last one. I was sitting in my chopper. It was a cloth seat, a metal frame and a cloth seat. It could go up and down. I was sitting there and didn't think too much about anything. I was kind of hung over, I think. We were flying low level because the weather was bad. One guy, probably a farmer out there, ran and got his gun when he saw us coming. He took a shot; it went through the bottom of the helicopter and went through right in the cheek

of my ass. That one hurt because I had to sleep on my stomach for a month.

I came back from the hospital and I was all bandaged up. After that, I used to sit on one of the bullet bouncers. I learned my lesson. I sat on one after that. It was uncomfortable, but I wasn't going to get shot there again because it really hurt.

Then another time, this you probably won't believe is true, but this is true. This is why I believe in God, even though I'm not a deeply religious person, but I do believe in God. I had a hang over again, which I did most of the time because that was your release. I never really knew what was going on until afternoon. I just reacted most of the morning.

It was early in the morning, about 6:00 or 7:00. It was the monsoon time and it was a big, not fog, but cloud cover really low. The clouds were like 100 feet off the ground. When you low leveled--they considered low level below 3,000 feet--you flew right on top of the trees so they couldn't see you coming. If you flew like at 100 feet, boy, they could see you forever and blow you right out of the sky. So you flew on top of the trees in a zigzag pattern, always going left and right, back and forth so they couldn't get a good fix on you. Then when the trees dipped down, you went down on top of the rice paddies. There were guys that blew tires off from hitting the tops of the trees and the dikes in the rice paddies. They were so low to the ground, but that was the best thing you could do, staying low on the ground, as low as you could get.

The pilot I had was an idiot. He was a major and he used to be a jet jockey. He was kind of upset that he got stuck in a helicopter. To them, that was a low thing, helicopters, after you flew Phantoms and all these big, heavy jets. He was an older man. He shouldn't have even been in combat. He was like in his forties, maybe, and was kind of stuck in his ways. He flew a helicopter like he flew a jet. The idiot flew at 150 feet. So the first time we went by, he would never zigzag; he went straight as an arrow 150 feet past all kinds of villages.

We picked up these troops. We were supposed to bring them to another place. The first time we went by, we must have woken the people up because it was early in the morning. So instead of changing our route and going by a different one, he came back the same exact way. So I

didn't even have my bullet bouncer on or anything, or my gun even cocked because this was all friendly area, supposedly. If you flew at 3,000 feet, you had no problem. Nobody took any fire. But if you flew low, I guess you could take it. So I never thought too much; it was supposed to be a secure area, but there were always Viet Cong around.

I was sitting and my head was killing me and the chopper was making all kinds of noise. I was sitting there on our way back. I still didn't have my bullet bouncer on. The guns weren't cocked. My gunner was half asleep; with all the grunts and they were asleep. I was just resting my head against the back and something went through my head. I said, "Get up! Put your bullet bouncer on and cock your gun!" I'm serious, I mean a little voice or something said to do this because we were going to be hit.

First, I tried to ignore it and it was just so strong that I got up, told my gunner, "Get up! Cock your gun!" I was reaching for my bullet bouncer, started to put it on, was turning around, and luckily I turned around or I would have caught one dead center in the side here where there was no protection. Where the two bullet bouncers came, there was a gap of about four inches where nothing was protected on either side. I caught a round right in the shoulder. It knocked me down. The gunner was hit in the leg. The pilot was hit in the leg and seven grunts were killed.

C: Right on board?

H: Yes, because he had a machine gun and just held and we flew right through it. It went right down the line. You could see something going straight across and there was a plane going that way or a plane of fire going straight and we flew right in front of it and it just went like you would see a machine gun go right along a wall, straight across the wall. We flew right into it. That's why so many guys were shot up and killed.

The funny thing about it, I said later that maybe if I wouldn't have gotten up, I wouldn't have gotten hit. Where I was sitting, there were two holes, chest high, right where I was sitting. It would have killed me instantaneously. So what do you call that? I mean, I just can't believe it to this day. I forget about it every once in awhile, but something said to get up and do that.

- C: What happened right after? You got hit and the other men were hit?
- H: Yes. Everybody was screaming and yelling. I wasn't hit too bad. So I got up. My gunner was hit in the leg. He couldn't do anything and all the other guys. . . Immediately, all the grunts, they were dumb, but I tried to explain to all the guys when we were taking fire not to dive on the floor. That's the worst thing you can do because they shoot up at helicopters, and the bottom has no protection at all and you would be lying there. You would be a bigger target. If you sat up, you didn't have that much of a target.

The guys, they all would dive on the floor in a big hump. Then you would have to get all the guys, peel them up. They wouldn't want to get off the floor. The grunts were taught to get on the ground when they were taking fire. So that to them was the ground. It was the worst thing they could do in a helicopter, lie prone on the floor there. They always shoot and you always catch most of your rounds in the belly of the aircraft coming up.

Then we went back and there was a corpsman with them, so he started patching a few up. I was hit and he wrapped one around me really quick. I just started patching the other guys and the dead guys, you just moved them over to the side because there was nothing you could do for them.

Life became meaningless because you were so into it all the time that it was nothing. I picked up where they stacked up twenty bodies on the back of my helicopter, just threw them in, threw them, literally threw them in and stacked them any way. They would get in my way sometimes and I would kick them out of the way. That sounds bad, but the reason I would kick them out of my way was to get to the guys that needed assistance, needed immediate medical assistance: mouth-to-mouth, heart massage, or tourniquets, anything like that, immediate first aid. So these guys were dead already. What could I do for them? It became that. You know, you had to become that way. The reason that I became that way and the reason everybody else became is because the very first time. . .

I finally became a crew chief and me and this guy, he became my gunner--my best friend, Kenny Luther. We started working together and he became my gunner until he died. He got shot really bad and died. We always worked together. We were brand new, really, and we were flying on an easy mission--it was supposed to be. They

gave us easy ones in the beginning. We got called for an emergency medivac because we were the only chopper in the air. These guys were riding in the back of a truck and some gook came up and threw a grenade in the back so all ten of these guys were really in bad shape--if you can imagine being confined to a little 6'X 6' area and a grenade goes off while you are all sitting around.

So two were dead and we had eight left. About three of them were really close to death. They laid all these guys. . . The one guy was hit right in the jugular vein and he was just spurting it out. I told Kenny, "Kenny, you take care of this guy." I kept throwing him fresh bandages to keep pressure on there so he wouldn't bleed to death.

So that meant I had seven of them. So I went to all seven. I started with the very first one. This guy was really in bad shape. I was patching him up as best I could and he died. I was feeling his pulse, he was alive, then he went out. I checked his pulse and he was dead. I gave him mouth-to-mouth and he revived. Wow! It worked! I saved a life, my first life. It was all new to me. He came alive and I was really happy.

Then I moved down to the other guy and moved to another guy and went to the fourth and then I came back and this guy, he was dead again. I gave him mouth-to-mouth and it didn't work. So I started a heart massage, smashing in the chest and steady pushing. He came back to life again. He even opened his eyes. It was amazing to me. I was really happy.

So I went down and I started patching the other guys, came back, and he was already blue in the lips again. I couldn't spend enough time with this guy. I probably could have kept him alive, but I couldn't. The other guys were all just as bad as he was. I had to do things for them and it wasn't enough. There was just me and my gunner. He had to take care of the one guy to keep him alive.

So I came back and I must have worked on the guy for fifteen minutes, everything I knew. To be honest, literally I started crying and slapping this guy. I was beating the shit out of the guy, just really punching him in the face and saying, "How could you die on me, you bastard? How could you do this? You can't die on me! You just can't! After I saved your life twice, how could you die?" I started to really get freaked out,

and I caught myself. I was so much involved with this guy's life that it was unbelievable.

I got up. I was shaking, everything in the world. I was sweating because it was so hot and he was dead. What could I do? He died. That was one life. I didn't think this at the time and I still don't, but you had to get into that. You had to feel that this guy was just a name and number and not a person. If this happened to you every time, I had guys die on me, I would be a raving maniac.

Then we landed in the zone or in the hospital. The doctor wouldn't take three of them. I said, "Why won't you take these guys?" He said, "We're so full, I can't take them." I was, at this time, really losing it. I pulled a gun to this doctor's head, put it at his head and said, "You'll take these guys or I'll blow your head off because they ain't dying on me. I ain't going to have another guy die on me today. I just can't handle it. You take these guys." He went, "Yes, yes, we'll take them." I figured, when we got back, boy, that's it; I'm gone. Boy, they're going to send me right to the looney bin. You don't pull a gun on a doctor, an officer, and tell him you're going to blow his head off. Not a word was ever said about it, luckily.

We came down; we shut the plane down. I sat in the back of the ramp after it was all over and shook. The pilot came out and he said, "You did a fine job." He left and me and my buddy, Kenny, we just. . . Oh, wow, I explained everything to him, you know. We went to the club and I got so blasted, so blasted that I couldn't even walk. I made a promise with myself that I would never let another guy, as long as I was over there, get to me like that again.

Only one other case did and then Kenny did when I saw Kenny die. He died in my arms, and that's different. That was friendship there. And the other guy was so blown away that I sort of took God's hands in my own. He had stepped on a mine. He had lost his leg to his thigh; he lost his left leg at the knee; his one arm was gone; his other arm was gone and his hand was gone; his chest was just nothing but guts hanging out; his face was, you couldn't even tell it was a human face, you know, it was just nothing but teeth and blood and eyes--and the guy was alive. I was looking down at him and he was looking at me. I knew he was looking at me, and you tried not to show how bad off he was.

Even if a guy loses his leg, which I have seen many times, the guy is saying, "My leg is still there. I can feel it. You know, there's a lot of pain in it." He doesn't even have one. It's gone at the knee or something. Or, "My foot," he's screaming, "My foot," and he doesn't even have one. You say, "Oh, don't worry about it." You try to be cool with the guy and make him laugh, if you can. "There's nothing wrong with you." Don't let him look and stuff like that.

I just couldn't help it. I mean, it was in my eyes. It was the worst human body I could ever see, destroyed the way it was. He said, "Are you going to help me?" I said, "Yes." I went down and I got a rag. I wet it and put it in his guts because you want to keep them moist. If they dry up, you lose everything; you can't let that stuff dry; you have to keep it wet, you know, your intestines and stuff like that and your stomach and all the insides like that, bladder and all that. If they dry up, they have to remove them. Then too much is gone. So you keep them as wet as possible.

I didn't know where to start. You would have to put a tourniquet on the guy. I mean, he was bleeding like a sieve. He was the only one that was really badly wounded and the other guys were already taken care of somewhat. I went and I looked at the other guys and I went and sat down. I said, "I'm not going to do anything for this guy. It's better he dies."

Can you imagine him coming back to the States if they kept him alive? No arms, no face whatsoever. He would be the ugliest guy you ever saw. There was nothing you could do with that kind of face yet. There was no plastic surgeon in the world who could ever replace things that are gone like that--I mean, the whole face gone plus his stomach. Oh man, the guy would never be able to eat again. No arms and no legs. A true basket case. A vegetable.

So I don't know if the guy lived or not. He was still alive when they took him off the plane, but I couldn't do anything for him. I just couldn't do anything, damn it! I felt that it was better that this guy should die.

C: I have to ask you something about this. When you see, you know, people so mutilated and everything, the whole situation, do you find that the guys, other than yourself, as you described it already, are able to handle it? I mean, is there a lot of panic and so forth? Are the

corpsmen and the medics, are they able to handle these cases well?

H: In the beginning it just happened in my chopper a few times. I wasn't down on the ground where it happened too many times. When the guys go down in the field, the guys just sort of carry on because you're in the midst of it right there. You're protecting your own self. When you take care of everything, then you go back to him and hope you can do something for him.

In a chopper, it has happened--instantaneous panic. Instantaneous because their. . . That's like taking a fish out of water when you put a grunt in a chopper. He doesn't like to be up there because you're nothing but a moving target, which is exactly what you are. He knows it and he has no way, himself, of firing back. He can't fight so he feels lost, completely. He is really scared.

Most of them were always scared to get in helicopters because while they were sitting there, they were a target. At least we knew what was happening and I could fire that 50 caliber. I felt like if they took me right there, when I was shooting, at least I went down in a blaze of glory and the whole thing. Those guys were sitting there. They were just clay pigeons falling.

When that happened, when you started taking fire like I told you, it sounded like popcorn because of the 1/20,000 of an inch. You heard the shot and then it would go off like popcorn, exactly like when you pop popcorn in a pan. That's the sound of bullet holes going through the aircraft's skin there. So when they went down, it was instantaneous panic. Then you would get them all up and start to work on them.

It was such an everyday affair--gun shot wounds and the shrapnel and guys, from mortars and mines and booby traps and all this--that for me, I was the first line of first aid and then came the hospital--corpsmen in the field, then me, and then the hospital. So I sort of reacted always the same. I just took the guy that I was with. I never looked him in the face. I did, but he was never a person to me. He was just a body that I was working on and as much as I could do is what I could do. If I couldn't do anymore, there was nothing I could do.

I couldn't let it say that I didn't know enough. I always read books all the time about as much as I could give on first aid, but how much can you give without being a doctor? I knew what to do in every case: tourniquet, how

much to put on, keep it wet; if there was an air hole, to plug it up, you know, like in a chest wound, to plug it up so he could breathe. I delivered a baby. I gave a tracheotomy. I didn't want to, I did it, you know, the neck thing, the hole in the neck. He couldn't breathe and his mouth was all blown up and his passage was closed. I had to stick a blade in his neck. All I was thinking of was, there goes his voice; what if the guy can never talk again? But it was either die or do it, so I said I would do it. The guy was able to talk; I did it right. That was down in here. I didn't cut out his larynx or anything.

Delivering a baby, we were on an operation in a sweep and destroy. We went in the daytime. We moved all the villagers out and went through the village. We checked for booby traps, arms, catches, and different things like that. Then, during this time, this one woman was having a baby, so they put her in the chopper and were taking her to the hospital; she had it there. I had to pull on the little kid, put a Zippo lighter underneath a bayonet to sterilize it, cut the old cord, tie it in a knot--my first baby I delivered. That was a good experience there. She smiled and it wasn't too painful to her. She probably had about ten before that so it was an everyday affair to her.

That is just the medivac part of it. I'm not talking really the true combat part of it we went into. Medivacs were my best because you got the most feeling that you did something for somebody. You saved lives. You helped guys that were in bad situations.

Recon was the best combat because you really got into combat there--great fire missions. You were firing like a madman on your 50.

War stories, to me, sometimes are. . . If I say I enjoyed killing somebody, somebody might say, "Well, this guy is a maniac. He shouldn't be fit to be a human being," but they killed my friends and I felt justifiable in killing them, in that sense. "A sense of a good kill," as you would say it, I don't know. What does that sound like to you, Dave? I don't know. You know, how could you say, "a good kill," as a human being? See, I look at it differently now. But at the time, it was a great thing, blow somebody away.

We landed in a zone. We were taking bad fire, and all of a sudden, over this little sand dune came about ten

of them. The pilot saw them and I saw them at the same time; he screamed. I was looking and he couldn't shoot. So I got the 50 on him and they were coming over. The one guy in the lead was carrying a grenade in his hand above his head. He was running and he was getting closer. The pilot was screaming, "Shoot! Shoot!" He was wondering if I froze up on the gun. I was just waiting and then when he got close enough, I blew him in half with the machine gun because they were big, the 50 calibers. The bullets were the size of a cigarette, longer even, and wider.

C: I know. I shot one.

H: Cut him in half and the grenade went back and blew all the other ten of them up. It was like bowling. It looked like it. The guy flew back through the air and the grenade fell out of his hand and all of them blew up. It was. . . I don't know. Now I guess it ain't as great as I thought it was at the time. It's different--opinion again, like I told you. It would be different if I talked in 1969 than talking now.

A combat experience that would be good for freezing up. . . I never did, but a guy did. This guy was a friend of mine. Like I told you, everybody wanted to fly with me. "It is a great experience to fly with the 'Buckeye'. He always gets into the action. If you fly an easy mission, you will at least get into some action because he has the 'magnet ass'." That was the statement, and at this time, it happened.

This kid always wanted to fly with me. He begged me, "Please let me fly, let me fly." I had become, at that time, natop, which I was in charge of all the crew chiefs' training and training of the gunners. I was promoted to meritorious staff sergeant, so I no longer had my own aircraft. So I finally said, "Okay." I put him on gunner's pay and I taught him how to be a gunner.

I had a class. I used to run classes to teach them how to shoot the gun, how to take the gun apart, what to do with it; when you got shot down, to take and destroy these radios, put incinerators in the 50's if you couldn't get out quick enough, if you were not going to take it, if you had to run to your sister bird that was coming down to save you; if you had to run into the bushes, how to set up a perimeter; what not to destroy, what to destroy so the gooks couldn't get it; how to destroy the aircraft itself if you had to so they couldn't

get ahold of it, different things like that.

So he finally flew with me and we landed. We had an operation. We were coming into zone, fifteen planes strung out in a row. Have you ever seen it on the old TV where they would show an operation beginning and the choppers coming in and the grunts running out the back? Well, there were fifteen of us in a row coming in, all coming in and landing.

We started taking fire really bad. I was firing on my side and nothing was on my side. The other side had a big, high hill. I ran over and I was looking out. I noticed he wasn't firing. He was frozen right to the gun, froze right to the gun. I looked out and there were about fifteen or twenty of them out there, so I had a grenade launcher and I was sticking M-79's in there. I was pumping these M-79's out as fast as I could go, like about fifteen or twenty. I was kicking him and saying, "Fire! Fire!" He wouldn't fire; he was frozen. So I had to punch him in the head and knock him down and get on the gun. I started firing.

Then we lifted off. As soon as we lifted off, immediately, we went back in. I said, "Oh, here we go." I thought we were shot down because immediately we went up and came straight back in. We went about fifty feet and then started going back in. I was getting braced for a crash because I figured we got shot out of the sky, or our engines got shot up or something or the pilots got hit.

Then he told me, "The colonel, this is how I saved the colonel's life; the colonel got hit." He was in the lead bird. He said, "The colonel is going down. We're going in behind him." I said, "Okay." This guy was already gone to me. He was nothing, you know. There was nothing I could do; he was just a zombie. He was on the floor crying and everything.

Like I said, we were going in immediately. In fact, we overstressed the aircraft to get down quick enough. So when we landed, they were to the left of us and I couldn't even see them. But like I said, my gunner was gone. He was just in a babbling state. So the pilots couldn't get out. I had to run out.

When I ran out, both the crew chief and the gunner were shot and the colonel was shot. He was in the pilot's chair there. They weren't shot bad enough. I helped

them up and I told them to get over to the aircraft. They had shoulder and arm wounds like that, so they were running over there. The other pilot was scrambling out so I popped the door on the colonel's thing and he was shot up pretty bad at the time, legs. He got hit in the leg and the arm and caught a couple in the bullet bouncer, broke a couple of ribs later we found out. So I just let him topple out on top of me and I carried him about fifty feet. He was a big man, too, but I didn't feel anything. The adrenaline, I guess, was flowing and just going like a madman.

I ran back again, got the two 50's out really quick and those weighed about eighty pounds. You couldn't carry them one-handed. It took both hands to carry one. I picked up one in each arm and then ran across with those, threw those in, ran back with two incinerators, threw them in the aircraft. The aircraft exploded, knocked me down. All the time bullets were going all around me and the pilots were taking fire.

I ran back to the end of the aircraft and got my Thompson out and stood up, like an idiot. I was standing up and then firing like this up in my shoulder, and I was firing these rounds at these gooks that were coming out at us. Then I saw that these rounds were going all around me, which I was not even thinking about. Later I remembered. Then all of a sudden, sense said to me, What are you doing, dummy? You're standing up; you could get hit in the legs. So I bent down and tried to get behind this bullet bouncer I still had. I was getting way down, my neck down and everything, kneeling down and firing back. Then I ran into the chopper and we took off. I took them to the hospital, all the guys that needed a hospital.

Then we were coming back to get fuel to go back into the missions to take some more guys back into the zone, to get back into the flight. The other guys just lifted off and they continued to drop those guys in all the time, going back and picking them up and dropping them in.

So we went back to get fuel. As I was filling the aircraft, this red stuff was dropping out in between the walkway up into the cockpit from the cargo area to the cockpit. I said, "This can't be blood." It was hydraulic fluid. I had a big main line shot up. We were lucky even to make it back. The main hydraulic line was shot up and even the pilot said, "Yes. I never noticed, but we're losing hydraulic pressure really bad."

So we had to shut the aircraft down right there. The plane didn't go out and turn over because you had no control over it once you lost the hydraulic. It would be on manual and you couldn't control it. So we had to shut it down and I was really mad. I was all psyched up. I wanted to go back and do some damage to a few of those guys that shot up my colonel and my buddies on the other aircraft.

This guy who froze, finally I got him straight and he landed and he was glad. He just ran out the back and took off. I didn't know where he even went. I really didn't care at the time and he was a friend of mine, still. In fact, at the time, I didn't care anything about him.

So as soon as we landed, I was mad. I volunteered to go back into the zone to get this other aircraft because I wanted to get back into something. We got heeled, lifted out, and we dressed as grunts and went in. We got the aircraft ready to be lifted out by another bigger aircraft.

I ended up winning a bronze star for that, the first aid I gave and the combat wound and the rest of this. I have citations. You probably would like to read them--two citations, how they were written and the rest of it.

The other one I got. . . I was up for a higher award, but it didn't come down. In fact, the guy that did the same thing later, when the war wound down, got the award. When I was over there, there were 550,000. Imagine, a lot of guys were doing a lot of heroic things then. But when my buddy got the award for doing the same thing I did, he got the Congressional Medal of Honor for it.

We landed in a zone. It was sort of like a bowl in the middle of a sand dune. We were supposed to just pick up three KIA's, killed in action, dead bodies, three dead bodies. About six grunts were dragging these guys. They were all lying on a poncho and they were dragging them to the helicopter to throw them aboard. All of a sudden, a big explosion went off while these guys were dragging them and the next thing, bodies were all over the place. I had thought we took a mortar round because many times we got mortared in a zone. They would see us land and they would start pumping these mortars in on you.

So the pilot said, "What was that?" I said, "I think we're taking mortars." He said, "You want to lift off?"

I said, "No, hang on a minute. If we take another one, close, we'll lift off." You know, we could have gotten killed. It could have been a direct hit. But he said, "Okay, I'll wait."

So I watched and all the other grunts just took off. I was waiting and I didn't see anybody coming to help these guys, and as a crew chief, you're not allowed to leave the aircraft, ever. That is your responsibility. Like a captain, you never leave the ship. You're the last one to leave the ship.

Nobody was helping these guys and I was looking out. These guys were crying and screaming and blood was all over the place. They were pumping. You know how it does when big things are open and it starts to pump. I saw this one colored guy and my mind just snapped, You got to do something for them. Immediately it just sort of snapped, I pulled off. I broke communications and I ran out. In the meantime, the pilot was talking to the radio man on the ground there and he stated, "This is a mine field you guys are in. You've landed in a mine field." I never heard it.

So I ran out, picked this colored guy up, threw him over one shoulder, grabbed another guy, picked him up, threw him on my back, lumbered back to the chopper, threw these two guys aboard, and grabbed the corpsman. We had a corpsman aboard. I grabbed him and I said, "Let's go! Come on! Come on!" He wouldn't go. I pulled a gun, put it to his head. "Let's go!" I dragged him out. He went out with me and we picked up all the rest and came back in. I told the pilot he could lift off. "Let's go!"

I plugged back in. The first thing that came out of his mouth, he said, "I am going to write you up for this." The term in the service when you're written up means you're going to be busted. I said to myself, I really don't care. What the heck. I felt I did something to help these guys out that none of these other grunts would help. I never thought too much about it.

We landed and I shut the plane down after everything was over. I came out and the captain ran out to me and he shook my hand. I said, "After, he's going to write me up. What the hell is he shaking my hand for?" He said, "That's the most heroic thing I've ever seen anybody ever do in my entire life." I said, "What?" He said, "You ran in that mine field seven times." I said, "The what?"

He said, "That was a mine field. Didn't you know?" I said, "No." I never thought. I never looked where I was running. I could have stepped on a mine so easily.

I ended up with a bronze star over that one. I was in the right place at the right time, I guess. It was supposed to come higher, but it never did. I don't know why, but it doesn't matter. I still got an award out of it. What the heck with the Congressional? It would still be on the wall or somewhere. It doesn't mean that much. I would have liked to have gotten it, for the sense of getting it, not for the sake of saying, "I'm a Congressional Medal of Honor winner."

But my buddy. . . You can read them. I have it at home, his citation and mine. You can read them. They're almost verbatim. He got the Congressional.

Bad experiences. . . These are just some of them. I'll tell you about a crash. We had lifted off this one zone and we were overloaded. I knew we were overloaded. I was talking about a weight there, in the helicopter. We were too overloaded for this zone. We had sort of like a rookie pilot. He was a second lieutenant, just got in country.

The captain gave it to him and he said, "Okay, come into the zone." So he overshot the zone, meaning the zone would be like a plateau on top of a mountain and he came in too fast and overshot it. So we went over beyond where the zone was. That meant we didn't have that ground cushion you needed. The wind pushing down from the blades gave you sort of like a cushion. No matter how heavy you are, you have this cushion. But when you lift out of that cushion, your RPM's drop.

We overshot it and he went into a hover. As soon as he went into the hover--you could hear it, when your blades were losing the RPM's--we started losing lift. I told him, "Just back it up and set the wheel down and you'll get that ground cushion again." I was screaming to him what to do. He decided he was going to wave it off and try to make another approach. This time it was too late. We had lost that lift. As soon as he started to move the stick to go to the right and to wave it off, we went right into the big trees.

Boy, I'll tell you, that was frightening. I knew it was going to happen. I just saw it happening, so I curled up in a little ball and said, "Well, if it's coming, if

death is coming, let it come." I just got in a little ball and the next thing I knew we hit the trees and we started rolling down the side of the mountain. People were screaming and guys were going crazy. I was just in a little ball as tight as I could get.

All I ended up with was a head injury and a back injury because I was thrown from the chopper out the window. I hit a tree and it knocked me out. When I woke up, I looked down. First I felt myself and I said, "I'm okay." I started to move a little bit. Then I got up and I was still groggy. But I looked down and you could see right where the chopper went down, where the trees got lower as the blades and everything were mowing them. At the bottom where it stopped, which may be about fifty feet down the mountain, there was nothing but ashes.

Eighteen guys died in that. They all burned up. I was the only guy to make it out alive, in this first crash that I was in. So it took awhile to get myself back together. I wasn't really hurt that bad. I hurt my back a little bit, but I wasn't hurt. To get my mind straight I took about a week off from flying. I just worked on choppers and did a few other things, paper work, I had at that time.

C: Were you thrown from the chopper?

H: Yes . I was thrown out. I hit a tree and was knocked out.

C: That's why you survived.

H: Yes. The aircraft fell on its side and the gas tank had erupted. The jet fuel had hit the jet exhaust and ignited. As soon as it ignited, it threw all the gas on one end of the chopper. That was all burning, plus the back caved in and blocked the back so the guys couldn't get out the back. The only way they had to get out was through the front where it was all plexiglass, and it had crushed the pilots and the seats had all fallen. They were trapped inside there; they had no way out because it was on its side. All the other windows and escape hatches were all covered so they just. . .

If you've ever seen magnesium burn, you know that you can't put it out. You can throw it in water and take it out and it will ignite again. There's no way you can put magnesium out. They have a thing that you use for magnesium fires, but it really never puts it out. You

could scratch it and it will ignite again. It's called PKP and it just covers, makes the covering and the coating. The only way you can stop the magnesium fire is in a true vacuum, no air at all.

So that's what happened when the chopper started to burn. It took like maybe three minutes and the whole thing was gone, I mean just powder. Three minutes. Powder. So it didn't take long, and they died instantaneously.

A month later on Friday 13, we were going into the same zone. It was just like a repeat performance. We got shot up. We lost our engines this time instead of losing a bad approach. We just creamed right into the side of the mountain again. The thing wouldn't have been so bad if it was the first time, but it was only a month later and it was only my third mission again.

I was hanging out the window like I always did, telling the pilot when we were coming into an approach; you had to hang out and look if you were only taking fire, and tell the pilot if you could land. First you watched for the gun and then when you got low enough where they couldn't shoot you that much, you got out and told the pilot, "Okay, you aren't going to land on any stumps or anything." Sometimes you had to bash your two wheels into it, or you just backed up into the side of a mountain. That was the only way you could land the whole chopper.

So I was hanging out and I heard the fire going, so I was going at my Thompson. I was firing and I heard the pilot screaming, "Our engines are shot out! We're losing power! We're going to cream!" So I said, "Oh!" I could see it happen and I knew exactly what happened. So instantaneously I threw the gun down and got into this ball because I remembered this ball saved me at one time.

In a matter of seconds this all transpired, but my life never flashed in front of me or anything like that. The only thing that flashed in front of me was the thought that I really remembered I was there. I was lying there and I had a couple of minutes before we really hit. You were waiting for that initial impact. You knew it was going to come, that crushing, first impact, something stopping instantaneously like our plane hitting the mountain.

I was waiting for that and I was saying, "Well, it's funny that I have enough time to realize that I'm going

to die," because we were really going this time. Before we were only going maybe fifteen miles an hour, our air speed. This time we were going about 110 knots. So this was going to be a hell of a crash.

I knew that if I survived this, it was going to be lucky. I already went through one and I knew I was the only one. So how many times can you be lucky in a month, within a month's time? This was towards the end of my time in Vietnam, so I figured this was it.

What was going to happen? It was all over with. There was no more. Life was over with. What was it going to be like? How was I going to die? I finally decided. Was I going to burn to death? Was I going to be crushed to death? Would it be instantaneous? These were all thoughts that were going through me. How was I going to die? I was thinking to myself, I hope it isn't a painful death. I hope it's a real quicky and it's all over with.

We hit and I remembered I was jammed somewhere really hard. I was bleeding. I had all kinds of cuts and bruises all over. I was jammed into this closet, we used to call it, where all the controls went up to the rotor head. We called it a closet, and I was jammed into this thing. Then I remembered we started to roll again. I remembered looking up, which was down at the time. I was looking at the ceiling or I was on the ceiling looking at the floor, which was vice versa.

C: Yes. Everything was upside down.

H: We had a cannon barrel on board. I rememberd this cannon barrel was right above me. I remembered looking up at it and I knew we were going to change places pretty soon. We were going to meet halfway. I kept saying, "Well, this is it."

Then the next thing I knew, everything stopped and everything was instantaneously quiet. I was all grogged up. I said, "Is this what death is?" Quiet, everything was quiet. Nothing. No sounds at all. Then all of a sudden, it was like everybody turned all the volume of every kind of speaker that could ever go into the whole world. It rushed right in, like you had two plugs in your ears and you pulled them out and it just rushed in--all the screaming and crying of all these guys that were hurt that were on board.

So I slowly got to my knees and I . . . Have you ever rolled in the car? I've done that also where you're upside down. Well, we were on our side or something. I was so disoriented; I didn't know where I was at. Everything was not where it usually was. You turned to your right, you knew where something was at. The walkway to the cockpit, that was up here or something.

My first thing was to check the pilots. I went up there. They were both hurt so I helped them get out. I popped both their doors and got them out of their straps and out of there because their armor seats were thrown around. So I got those two guys out.

Then I went into the back. The engines were still going at this time. The rotors were all destroyed. They were all thrown all over. So I got everybody out. I made sure everybody got out. We were on our side and things were thrown all over the plane. You couldn't believe the damage.

I crawled out through the cockpit, the way the pilot got out and I worked my way up through the jungle, up into the little area there, and the engines were still going. The gas was just flying out of where they had a vent pipe. It used to be a vent, but the way the vent was, the gas fell through there and started to come out of the vent, which it shouldn't, only if you turned on your side, which it was.

It was coming out there and the pilot said, "There's going to be one hell of an explosion. We have to shut those engines off. What are you going to do?" I said, "Well, I'll crawl back in there and do it."

So I crawled back in there and you had to go into the back. I went into the back, pulled down the doors--had to go through all this. As soon as I did it, the thing started burning. I was stuck in the middle of this burning inferno.

The next thing I knew, during fire you had to pull these two handles and it would shut the fire off in the engines. So I ran up in the cockpit and pulled these two handles and got out as fast as I could. I got about fifteen feet and the plane exploded, and that was it. We lost that plane. That was the Buckeye Bomber, one of them.

C: How many men were lost that time?

H: Oh, that time I think two guys were killed and about six injured. I mean, it wasn't like before. It wasn't so bad where everybody died. We had two guys killed and that was about it. A lot of guys had broken legs and everything. We even had a priest aboard who was coming to do his Sunday service. He got his leg broken, but that was just some of the bad ones. There were a lot more.

When I got shot the worst, we were flying in a zone. We were coming in to land in a zone again. Then we started taking a lot of fire. I had this M-79 and I was just starting to fire it. The round had come through and hit the barrel and shattered the barrel just as I was pressing the trigger. So when I pressed the trigger, the muzzle velocity blew the gun up. The round never went off, but the gun blew up.

All the metal went back. I had a big piece that went through my cheek and landed on my tongue. It was red hot and burning. Immediately, I spit it out. A piece went back and cut me through here and through the thumb. I had tons of shrapnel, like little salt and pepper, all up and down my arm and all over my face and stuff. In fact, I still have a lot in me. It works to the surface eventually; it all comes out.

So I was standing there and my thumb was broken. It was bent way back. Kenny came up to me and first he saw me and he started laughing because it was funny, like in cartoons where I'm holding this gun that's all bent back at six different places, all bent back like those old blunder busses, and all blown up, like on Elmer Fudd. That's what happened literally.

He was laughing and I was screaming, "My thumb! My thumb!" He was going, "Your face! Your face!" I said, "My thumb, damn it! My thumb! Look at it! It's all cut open and bleeding!" He said, "Your face!" Then it got to me, my face. When you think of your face, you never want anything to happen to your face.

So I reached for my face and I put my hand up to my cheek and my finger went into my mouth. You talk about panicky! Wow! As soon as I did that it started squirting. I was going, "Oh!" I was getting light-headed and everything, ready to pass out. I fell down on my butt and I was sitting there. Then Kenny, you know, he was upset now. He thought maybe I was sort of worse than I really was.

I got up and I crawled up in the cockpit and I wanted to look in the mirror that they had up there. I saw the pilots' eyes and I said, "I don't think I'm going to look." So I came back and he was screaming, "We'll get you to the hospital immediately, immediately! Don't worry! We'll get you there!" I was saying, "Maybe I am as bad as I think I am. You know, they're really scaring the hell out of me."

So I was lying there. My thumb was really killing me and my tongue was killing me. My cheek, I didn't feel anything because my tongue was burned and my finger was broken, so I didn't feel the wound in my cheek too bad.

They got me there and I had a broken thumb. I had a big cast on it. Big scar on my face. In fact, they even called the doctor a quack because I had a lot of scars on my face and this was the worst one that ever came out. Now you can hardly even tell it's there.

C: You must have spent a lot of time in the hospital then.

H: Yes. I spent quite a bit in the hospital. I was in there maybe five months out of eighteen while I was there.

C: Why were you there eighteen months? Isn't the standard tour thirteen?

H: I had extended six months, but I got hit. This was when I got hit and I went to the hospital ship and they said, "We'll send you home. This is your third or fourth Purple Heart. You know, why don't you go home? You've done enough already."

So I got home a month early, but I extended for six months extra to stay over there because when the time came to go home, I had maybe about ten or eleven months to do in the service yet. I felt at least if you were going to be in the service, why didn't you do something that you felt that you were doing service to? At least I was in the war and it wasn't so bad. They treated you pretty good over there. You didn't have to do any of that spit and polish stuff and I felt that I was doing a good job. And at that time, I sort of liked it.

My last six months I should never have extended. That was when I got hit twice and had most of the crashes. After that, I didn't fly too much, after the last crash. In fact, I didn't fly hardly at all. I just stayed on the ground. I was afraid to fly. And now, today, I've

lost all the remembrance of beauty I told you of flying.

I went flying with a friend of mine the other day, and I flew the aircraft myself, which I can do. I learned how to fly the choppers because the crew chiefs were made mandatory to learn how to fly the airplane because if the pilots got shot up, you would have to get in there and fly the plane back. So I knew how to fly the chopper.

I enjoyed when I was flying, but I had that sense of two violent crashes like that. It's hard to shake that easily. But when I came back to the States and I was still in the service three months, when I finally did come back, I just flew for the pay, for that money. That was all, because you got flight pay.

I wouldn't let the pilots. . . When they did a lot of things, I used to just. . . I remember just sitting there shaking when they did things that were beyond the ordinary, which I used to love before, like chasing sea gulls and going under bridges and stuff like that. I just couldn't handle that anymore because there was always a chance, that risk that you could die. You might make a mistake and you could crash, which I never thought of before. It was always the fun of flying. So I sort of lost it.

C: Overall, in the time that you were there, as you got ready to leave, what was your rank?

H: I was a staff sergeant.

C: That's an E6, right?

H: Yes.

C: Although that's sort of the middle of the labor as far as the enlisted ranks go, how was your leadership overall, your officers and your senior enlisted?

H: The officers, the majority of them were good. Some were bad. I would say overall, they were good. Same with the older, like the staff sergeant, gunnery sergeants, and that. We changed quite a few; a lot of guys were always different rotation dates, so you were always changing a lot.

In the beginning, I think our squadron was really great. Towards the end, it got really bad. Morale went down to nothing because of the ship, I think. We got stuck on

a ship so much that it went down. We weren't in country like everybody else was. That was sort of disappointing to a lot of guys. They wanted to be in country. They didn't want to be stuck on any ship. So overall, I would say it was good, though. A lot of guys didn't know anything.

My leadership, I always said that if I asked somebody to do something, I would do it myself. You know, I would be right there. If I had a rotten detail, I would be there with the guy. I wouldn't go to the club and say, "I'll be back in three hours. I hope you guys do the right job." I stuck there and did the job with all the guys. All the guys were close to me, I mean, like I went with them.

I started as a corporal and I was lucky. I got all these meritorious promotions. To make staff sergeant in the Marine Corps in three and a half years was unbelievable.

C: I know.

H: Unbelievable. I made it and I never kept it though because when I came back to the States, I lost it. I ended up as a sergeant.

I had to move to a different area. I was with these older guys that were like in their thirties and forties and I couldn't relate to these guys. I was still back with the privates, and I had to go to a different club. I couldn't go to their club so I used to always take off my shevrans and go to their club. I couldn't get away from the guys; I had to be with the guys all the time.

The same in working, I never asked them to do. . . And they always worked good for me. Whatever I asked them, they did. Even if it was bad, they said, "Well, okay." But they did it. We had good leadership.

C: Did you work much with the South Vietnamese at all? The ARVAN?

H: Really, you could say we picked them up and moved around. I had more experience with the Korean Marines from South Korea there. But there was one experience to tell you what they were like.

We had gone into this hot zone like I told you. If it was hot, they wouldn't get out of the plane. They would just stand in the middle of the plane and you couldn't

stay on the ground long when you were taking fire. You had to get up because you were so vulnerable to fire. It was unbelievable because they had all these controls and things all over the place. One round could hurt you really bad in the right spot. If it took in the middle of the aircraft, then it could hurt you.

So you would start. These guys were ninety pounds, even less than that. If the adrenaline was flowing, you could throw them with one hand. So we used to throw them out of the aircraft, literally throw them out. You threw one out then they got the idea and they started going. Well, you and your gunner would get up and hold hands and just mow them out. There was a big pile at the end and you would pick up the ramp and you would take off and they were left in a big pile, I mean like twenty guys in a pile. So they weren't worth anything. I'll tell you, those fighters, they were terrible, in my opinion. I don't even know how they keep what they have now. They aren't doing too good of a job.

Another experience was that there was a lot of Viet Cong in their outfits. We had done this where we had to throw a couple out and then you kept going back and forth and we kept bringing fresh troops in all the time.

Finally, we were going to resupply them, I mean bring cargo inside. We had these seats, these fiber seats that were metal and you could pick them up so you made more space in the chopper. They went down parallel on both sides of the aircraft, then they sat, and then you picked them up. So we were picking them up as quick as we could because we were going to land and pick all this cargo up.

The sun went on like a wire or something, or gleamed in my eye, which it shouldn't have because everything in the chopper was painted dull gray or black so there wouldn't be any. . . where they could come in and they could see you or something, you know, a flash like that for them. So this shouldn't have been.

I looked down and I saw this wire and it was attached to the seat. I was following this wire along and it was attached to a grenade, stuck in the middle of the back here, right to the pin. So as soon as you pulled the seat up, it would pull the pin and the grenade would go off, which was right next to where the fuel tank was at.

They were supposed to be our friendlies, so that was

passed along the line, but they couldn't tell who was who. They all looked the same. So that was my experience with the ARVAN. I don't think they were any good.

C: You couldn't trust them either?

H: No, not at all. I didn't trust any of them over there. We found out later we had barbers that went in there and they all used straight razors on you anytime. They were great, though. For 35¢ they gave you the best haircut in the world. They would get that blade and go all over your face and everything, your eyebrows, and your nose, and everything, all over--tremendous haircut, I mean, and everything. They would give you a neck massage and all that--typical gook stuff.

We found out that three of them were Viet Cong. They were barbers and they had this blade all over my face at times. Think about it. Any time your throat could have been gone, but they were just getting information because they would talk to you. You weren't supposed to tell them anything, but guys would talk. That's what they were there for; they were like spies.

C: During the whole war, Bob, who was the enemy then? Who do you think was our enemy?

H: Well, see, I fought both. A lot of guys would say the Viet Cong. There is a difference between the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese.

The North Vietnamese were a hell of a group of fighters. They were good. They could match our troops in fighting. I'm telling you, they were good. When you went up north, meaning up by the DMZ and Kai Son and Quang Tri area, you didn't fight very many VC. You fought the North Vietnamese that came as insurgents down from the north there. They wore uniforms and the rest of it. I had seen a few of them and had shot a few of them. They wouldn't fire at you unless they could get you. When they fired at you, they usually knocked you out of the sky or came damn close to it.

The Viet Cong, they were farmers by day and at night they would go out and put their rifle on. They wore their same clothes; they didn't change; they had no uniform. They just had the black pajamas and a white hat. You could fly over the same area at 100 feet and never take a round. You would see these farmers out in the field. They were doing everything. If you did that at night,

well, you might not come back because these guys would be out with their rifle instead of their hoe.

So that was the difference. You never knew who you really were fighting. I mean, you could go into a place and you would look at them and they all looked the same to you. Who are Viet Cong and who are civilians, innocent civilians? It was that type of thing; it was very difficult. You never knew who your enemy was until he got a rifle in his hand and was firing at you. So that was who your enemy was, the guy that was trying to kill you.

I used to, just as a rule of them, everybody was my enemy there. All the Vietnamese were my enemy. They either proved differently by not killing me or proved you that they weren't.

C: Do you think that what happened to the people at My Lai had something to do with this feeling?

H: Well, I could relate to My Lai because it happened right when we had an operation there. We had an operation right in that area, the My Lai area, Bitanging Peninsula. That's right where My Lai was at. We didn't fight very much combat, but the gooks had set up booby traps and such like that, mines and stuff. We were taking like fifty percent casualty from these. These were the worst wounds you could get. I mean, these were loss of legs, loss of arms, blow your chest out. Very few skirmishes with the Viet Cong at all. In fact, maybe ten or eleven.

The first day we went in there, all the guys were in the field. I remember going in. All the farmers were out there farming. Never saw any more farming as the mission went along. They found a lot of arms and a lot of catches in these underground caves and stuff. It was a successful operation. But the guys had lost like 100 guys. You were with 100 guys and in a week's time, you had fifty of them left. None of them were shot. So you were just waiting for combat. You couldn't wait to shoot one of these guys back, that was doing this to your buddies.

So My Lai happened. It was a sweep and destroy. I could see how it got carried away. You had to be there to understand it. There was nothing you could do. You wanted to kill anybody in sight, and this is what happened. It just got carried away. It happened at a bad time and in a bad way. If they took one round, the guys were just itching. As soon as one round was fired, which at

My Lai somebody did fire a round, a Viet Cong, maybe only one Viet Cong out of all the innocent civilians that were there, it just started. And it just got carried away, but I wasn't there so I couldn't tell you. It happened during this operation.

The Army had this sector and we had this sector. I flew over My Lai and took fire from it in that area, the My Lai area. See what I mean? It was a couple hamlets there. It was called the My Lai area. It wasn't really one village. It was called My Lai. It had a different name. In fact, the one they took wasn't really My Lai. It was a different name. They had one in the wrong area, but it was in the My Lai hamlet area.

We had flown over there and I had thirty boxes of mortar rounds we were taking out to a mortar platoon. We took machine gun fire and then we landed back on the ship--we never got shot down, but we couldn't go in the zone. It was too hot. They started unloading these boxes and I looked where all the bullet holes were. We had about seven bullet holes in the bottom of the aircraft. I looked through and one had just missed by about an inch hitting the projectile head. If that round would have hit it, it would have exploded that round, and you can imagine thirty boxes of ammo going off. There would have been nothing left of us. Pieces about 1/4 inch thick would have been floating down from the sky.

C: You think then that Calley just recently has been paroled, that he's now a free man.

H: I have few experiences into that. There are a lot of guys that I've heard about that have done a lot of things. War is not judged by social means, it's not. You can't go and fight a war by the rules. What are the rules of a war? The Geneva Convention Rules, okay. But you just can't do that. There are some times where men are men and you revert back to that old animal state that you were, the cave man state, the kill or be killed and do whatever you can not to. War is hell. There's no doubt about it. There shouldn't be any, but I mean, it's there. You want to win and you want to stay alive and you do all your means to do it.

Calley was a scapegoat. I hate to say it. There were a lot of guys probably more involved in it than he or lesser that should be just as equally reprimanded as he was. Why should he be the only one that should burn for it? He wasn't the only guy. He was a lieutenant.

He had many guys underneath him that probably shot all these guys up, too. Why should they be exonerated? They needed somebody and he was just the guy that had to go down.

There were times where we dragged people in our chopper through trees and stuff to get information. I personally never killed anybody that way, threw anybody out of a chopper. There were guys in our squadron that did. But the ARVAN had their ways.

The ROK Marines, the Korean Marines, we used to call them ROK Marines, the Republic of Korea, they were known not to take prisoners. At one time they called us up and said, "We have seven of them. Come down. Pick us up." We started to go down. We got called away on an emergency medivac, went on the medivac, went to the hospital, came back, landed in the zone. They threw on seven bodies. I said, "I thought they were prisoners." "Well, they tried to escape." Things like that.

If you looked at it that way, I picked up a couple of Americans that were found in one of these caves. They were beheaded. There were fingers cut off. The toes cut off. Their private parts were stuck in their mouth, cut off and stuck in their mouth. So what is right, what is wrong? War is not meant to be fought by rules. What is right for somebody, for the other side, isn't right for us to do, or what is right for us to do isn't right for them.

We fought it basically under humane rules. The very few cases, I mean, you're going to have it in every war. Look at the Second World War. There were many, many cases of massacres and stuff like this. Even the Indian wars, they massacred Indians there for no reason at all. That's just part of war. I hate to say it that way. It's sort of an inevitable thing. Men, at the brink of utter confusion, their minds are on one thing--killing off somebody. You're going to have that. When they're so frustrated because they can't shoot anybody because their friends are getting killed and they can't do anything about it, that's what happens, and it happens that way.

You talk about guys being thrown out of choppers and stuff like that, I've been tempted. I was tripped one time and almost fell out of the chopper. We had prisoners aboard. We had an engine problem. I was walking back to the end of the. . . The engine compartment was right

at the ramp. I was tripped and had to grab onto something. I was looking out 3,000 feet below me because I was tripped and I rolled and I almost fell out of the chopper. I was tempted, in fact. I got the guy up and threw him halfway out the window and held him by his feet. Then I said, "Well, you know, you can't do this. This isn't right." I pulled him back in. If I wouldn't have thought about it and I was still in the rage, I probably would have let the guy go. But I brought him back in and I beat the hell out of the guy. I punched him around quite a bit. But that was because he had scared me to death. In fact, I came inches from dying, falling out of the plane myself. At 3,000 feet, I know I wouldn't have survived. Those were just a few incidents.

C: As far as the people then, would you say that your overall feeling was that you couldn't trust them?

H: Yes. I don't think anybody had a trust for them.

C: Do you think this was a reflection of the U. S. soldiers average feeling about the people, your feeling?

H: Yes. I think the majority, ninety-nine percent I would go with, didn't trust them unless they had some dealing. I had a few friends that were gooks, but I still didn't even trust them.

C: Was there anything about their way of life over there--now, we're moving from combat into another area--that you might have liked or thought was admirable? You were in a foreign country even though you were in a war.

H: I'll tell you, the thing I was amazed with or not amazed but I thought was the greatest thing they had was their patience. They had patience unbelievable to our society. Nobody had patience like they had. They would wait. There were the times when they would wait for days just for you to walk by, say for an ambush--days.

They had such strong loyalty. We had picked up a prisoner and this is a true story. We picked up a prisoner and I was talking to him through an interpreter. He was a young boy about eighteen years old. He said he lived up by Hanoi. He was drafted, not drafted, enlisted, I think he did. Maybe drafted. I don't know. But he was so psyched up into his country that it was unbelievable. I mean Americans, we believed in our country but most of us didn't believe that we were fighting for America. We

were fighting for our lives. That's what I felt. I was fighting for myself. I wasn't fighting for anybody. I was sent there; I was in the service. That was my job and I did it. But they were so into their own to do things. They would do anything to win this war.

An example, this guy was sent with one, big rocket stuck to his back--I mean a big rocket. They said, "Okay, deliver it here," and they gave him our map coordinates. "Here's a map. Go ahead. Go through the Ho Chi Minh." He walked from Hanoi down through the Ho Chi Minh into the south and almost to the Da Nang area, which is a hell of a walk let me tell you. If you looked at the map, that's maybe 200 miles, maybe even longer, which isn't much but when you're walking through B-52 bombings. . . . Ho Chi Minh was constantly being bombed. Walking through the jungle, you were fighting all these bugs and these things that were out there. You were always constantly harassed by the U. S., the soldiers. They were always around the area, walking mostly by night.

To come and deliver this one rocket, to set it against the Da Nang air base or out Marble Mountain, whichever was the case, they didn't have any guidance on them. They just put sticks up. They put up bamboo like a board and they put a stick there and it would launch off this board and hoped it hit the right place. They were just a little Kentucky windage and hoped it went to the right area. If they hit something, they had it. They never knew if they hit anything or not.

He went down there and he delivered. I don't know how he found the place he had to deliver it to, but he found it. He delivered it to them and the guy, his commanding officer or where he had to deliver it to, told him, "Okay," patted him on the back, and said, "Okay, go back and get another one." He said he did it. He went back there again and this was the second time and he delivered and they told him, "Okay, go back and get another one." He said. . . . You know, this is talk. I don't know. Gooks talk a lot differently. But he said, "You're crazy." He defected. He said that it was just impossible, you know, but he did it twice. Can you imagine any human being doing it more than once that is an American? No way. So he defected. He said, "This is not for me."

C: Did you have any experience with the black market?

H: No.

C: Not personally, but. . .

H: None whatsoever.

C: Did you get a chance, now again, to get into any of the cities at all?

H: I got into Hanoi city and I got into Da Nang. That was about it. Most of the time that was about it. Many villages, I was in a lot of villages.

C: What was your biggest impression of the cities?

H: Well, Da Nang was considered a big city. They lived like in tin shacks and they had a few stucco buildings, you would call them I guess. Some of the buildings and stuff were beautiful, but there would be bombs and craters all over the place, bomb craters.

The country itself, I would say, was the most beautiful country I've ever seen from the air. Beautiful. It could have been a resort area. The climate was so nice down there. The area would have been perfect, for the beaches were tremendous. I did a lot of swimming there when I had a chance to.

The village people were like farmers. That's what most of them were. They were farmers. They lived off the land. Like in the old west days, you lived off your little land. You made your rice and you sold it and you went about your business.

C: Now, let's kind of bring things back to the States a little bit. What was your feeling once you knew that you were going back home? What went through your mind at the time? Can you recall?

H: Yes. I can try to remember. We had time. They mustered you out, like you signed all the papers and got all your gear given to the right people and I had about four or five days. They were kind of beautiful because like I told you, you never had any time off. You were always working, at least I was. I guess in other outfits, they had a lot of time off, but I never had that much time off. Finally, I had time on my hands.

We got back to Da Nang, Marble Mountain, which I loved. It was beautiful as a base. Out of all of them, that's the one I liked the best. So I would go to the beach, sit around, catch the sun, go swimming, go to the club

at night, drink it all. Everybody talked about the old experiences because I was an old guy. I was already over there a year and a half almost and I was still recuperating from my wounds.

I was a little frightened to go home, in a sense. This you probably can't believe. When I first got there, I told you how much I wanted to get over with it, become part of it and get it over with and get it done. In a way, I didn't want to leave. We had guys when I was there that were there two years. That had become part of them, the way of life. Living like that was part of them.

I had a friend, this guy that won the Congressional Medal of Honor, and he ended up spending two and a half years there. He went home, couldn't handle the States, and came back. I met him in the States when I got out and he went back again. He said, "I can't take this. I have to go back." He liked it over there in that sense. I can understand what it was. You hated it, yet you were doing something. You were accomplishing something. At least you had a purpose in life. You knew you were going back to the States and you were going to get out eventually soon.

For me it was soon. I had three months to do and I was going to get out. What was I going to do then? My accomplishments would be done. What can you accomplish in life again? What I had thought, all these dreams that I had finally where I would have to make those dreams come true, it was kind of scary in that respect. Then you didn't know. You were stuck in an environment all military and in a war. Could you react to peacetime and people that couldn't care less about the military?

At the time I came home, it was the big time when you were in the service that it was bad. You didn't do that kind of stuff. You went and carried the signs and that and you were cool. You smoked the grass and you got high and everything. That was kind of scary to a guy that knew nothing but the service, at the time. That's all I knew. What could I talk about?

I wanted to come home bad because I wanted to see all my friends and all my family and everything. But in a way, I was scared. When it did come, it was kind of great, though. I can remember coming home--beautiful experience.

C: When you got home, what was the first thing you did?

H: Flush the toilet.

C: Flush the toilet. (Laughter)

H: No. That's what I told you. What was the first thing I did?

C: What was the first thing you wanted to do? Can you recall? Was there any one thing that you missed the most?

H: I wanted to drive a car.

C: Driving?

H: Driving a car. That was it. I wanted to drive a car so bad. I hadn't driven a car in over two years. It was two years since I had driven a car and that was kind of a big thing. I think I wanted to do that bad.

I enjoyed looking in a mirror, a long mirror. All we did was shave in a mirror that was about four inches round. That's all you had. You never had any big mirrors, and cold water shaving. I remember I wanted to shave in hot water.

I wanted to take a bath. I don't know if it was the old, get all of the dirt out of me or all the bad stuff or wash the blood of my hands, how the old saying is psychologically or what. But I wanted to take a hot bath and just lie in it for a while.

Some of the other things. . . I wanted to sit down with my friends and drink a beer. Then when I did, it was a bad experience. The first day I got back, I went down to where all the guys I knew hung out and they were all there. Glad to see me, and then we started having a few beers. We started talking. What else could I talk about but war stories? They were so tired of hearing it that it was coming out their ears probably, which I can see now. One of my friends that was there, he was back for maybe a year. He had gone to Vietnam and got shot up. He told me and we almost got in a big fight. He said, "Nobody wants to hear this bullshit." Then later I thought about it and he was right. Who would want to hear about it at that time? You know, nobody wanted to hear about it then. But me, that was all I knew. What had I done in the last two years but be in this war? I couldn't sit down and talk about the football games or

the baseball games or some girl or somebody's family or anything that was current events because I didn't know anything. So I was lost.

I remember I put all this in the past, beyond my mind. I remember being lonely in a crowd because I couldn't say anything. I couldn't talk to girls. I couldn't talk to my own family. I couldn't even talk to my father and mother. I had nothing to say to them but the war. That's all I had and I was lost. For those thirty days at home, I enjoyed them, but I was lost. When I got out of the service, I was lost for at least three months that I remember.

I had one friend that was there and he understood me. We went in together and we came out, all of us. Three of us were shot up, but we all came out. Four of us went in and three of us came back. The Youngstown one stayed in California. But this one guy was here and I needed him more than I ever needed a guy because we could sit down and we could talk to each other. He had been out already maybe six months and I was just out. He was probably over this period, but he knew what I was going through. He remembered what he had gone through.

That transitional period from military to civilian, it's a frightening experience. It's another thing that you have to go through to realize. It's hard to put into words. I can remember it and I can feel it, but I can't really say exactly what it was about. But to be lost in a crowd because you had nothing to say. . . What did I have to say? I had nothing to say to anybody.

C: Did you have any regrets once you got out of the service?

H: The only regret I had was collegewise. I felt that I would have already been a college graduate, if I wouldn't have gone into the service. Sometimes I felt like I wasted four years of my life. At that time, I really felt that I wasted four years of my life, I mean I really blew four years. I didn't accomplish a damn thing and I wasted four years. All these guys had an advantage over me. They had their college. Some of them were coming damn close to becoming graduates and here I was, just a nothing. I was an ex-Marine, and an ex-war hero and what had that to do with civilian life? It didn't do a damn thing for you.

I had to go out and start finding a job and earning my keep. They were already advanced. They went through

these menial jobs that I was probably going to go back to, which I didn't want to go back to. It took a couple friends to get me straightened around. They got me into a good job and from there, eventually I got back into civilian life.

The experience I gained in combat and in the service I wouldn't pass up for \$1 million. If I had to do it over again, which you'll probably ask to which the answer is no, I would probably stay in college. I feel that way. I mean, it made me a better man today for what I went through, but college and the rest of it, it was a big thing to me then. It's hard now to go to college because the money is more important than the education now because you need the money. You're in that kind of society where you can't do anything without money. Then when I was younger, you could live on a few dollars.

My tastes have changed over the years, so it's hard now to look at it that way. But practically speaking, you couldn't get a course in any school you know like they say of hard knocks that would teach you. Who could teach you to be frightened out of your mind like I was at times or to see the experiences I saw, the horrible conditions that people lived in today? You can't believe it. You could look at a film and not feel it. You had to be there and feel it, that people could live like they lived over there.

C: Do you think then what you did in Vietnam was worthwhile?

H: This has sort of changed over the years. But like I told you, I would have probably felt differently in 1969 than I feel now.

Me personally, I felt that I did a good, adequate, better than average job of being a combat soldier. Personally, I accomplished nothing over there. I mean, I didn't make babies. I didn't change the country in any way that much. Singularly, I'm talking, me, myself, and I, as a personal thing to anybody.

The war, as the United States' viewpoint, we could have won it if we were left alone and as a war, instead of run by the congressmen and run by the Pentagon. For an example, in 1968--the height of the war when I got there--we had set certain goals and we needed them and exceeded them. In our one area where we had, we had pushed all the gooks and the Viet Cong just about back into the jungle. They could have that country. It wasn't

worth anything. It was nothing but mountains. Who cared about that? They weren't doing any damage that much. That was when we had a lot of operations, continuous operations all the time. All of a sudden, the Congress decided no more offensive operations. So what we strived for and accomplished and all the lives that were lost, many friends of mine in three months they were all back. So it was in vain.

What was the sense of it? Really, what was the sense of losing those lives? You took this much land, "X" amount of clicks or miles, and then you turned around and gave it all back to them. Then you got to go back in and fight them again. It made no sense. Who ran the war? You would have to go talk to a politician about it. I'm talking about the way I felt about it and the way the guys felt about it. If it was run by generals, there would have probably been a lot less aggravation over this war at the time because we had stopped. We could have gone up north. There were times when we could have gone across the DMZ and started up north, and that's what a war is about.

You fight to win. It's like playing a football game for a tie. Basically, that's what we did. We played a game for a tie. That's all it was. It was a tie. Nobody won. Nobody lost. They had their casualties. We had ours.

So feelingwise, I'm kind of disgusted in the way. I'm not a hawk in the true sense of the word, but I'm a competitor. I look at it as a sports arena. When I go out to play a game of baseball, softball, or hockey or bowling or anything, I play to win, as most people do. I mean, I agree it's a sport. I don't think there are too many people, very few, that go out and play it just for the fun of it--I mean, there are. You play tennis to win. You want to win at everything. Winning isn't everything, but it sure beats losing. So we fought this war to a tie, and nobody won.

C: So you think then it was kind of a waste?

H: It was a waste. It was definitely a waste. That's my opinion, mine alone.

C: Yes. That's what I was after.

Now of course, this is another highly controversial area, but I would like to touch on it just a little bit before

we close up here. Do you think that amnesty today should be given to men who avoided this war? If it in fact was not worthwhile, do you think then that amnesty should be given to men who went to Canada or other countries?

H: This is a big subject. I thought about it quite a bit. I'm really not set in my ways because I really don't want to think about it. Now, I'm serious. I'm sort of evading the question because I know what I would say and then I would look and if somebody else read this or listened to this would they say, "What's with this guy?" I don't know. You have to look at it both ways. If somebody believed in what I said, they would go along with me. Somebody would say, "Get him." But everything everybody says about anything, that's controversial. Either you believe in it or you don't.

I don't believe in amnesty at all. I'll be honest about it. I was shot up. I was hurt. I was scared. I was frightened. I was cold. I was sick. I was miserable in my mind. I'm not saying everybody should have gone through this, but I did. I didn't go because I felt, I'm going to save the South Vietnamese, rah, rah; here I come, look out; the Yanks are coming. Bullshit on that. I went there because I was ordered to go there, because I was part of a military establishment, and because my country said, "You'll go there." So I went there. I was following orders.

I went there and I did the best job I could. I did what I was told. A few times I went above and beyond the call. That's because of my human nature. Most of the times I won anything or did anything brave was not because I felt there was an award involved in it. It was because I felt compelled to help my fellow man.

If you looked at all the times when I did win the awards, I was helping another guy that was sick and in distress. You know, when I went into the mine field, I saw the guy bleeding to death. My mind snapped. When we went in after the colonel there, he was shot up. I saw that. I didn't get up in the middle of the seige and kill ninety guys or something all around me until my gun barrel melted down. I don't know if I could have done that anyway. But I went, I did what I had to do.

I had a lot of friends that were just like me, that were some better friends than me, you know, better people than me, and some that were less people than me. I don't know

how to explain that. They went and they died. All these guys that died, what did they die for then? If you're going to give the guys that said, "Well, I'm not going to go. I don't believe in it. I'm going to go up to Canada and I'm going to hide," to have them come back with open arms and say, "Well, you're welcome," I just don't believe that. But then when you look at it, it's over and done with. I did it. They all died. You know, they're gone. And whatever the country says, I'll do.

What can I say? I'm only one man. If I had to vote, I would vote no on the basis I gave you. The guys that died were the reason why I can't see giving amnesty, because they gave up their life for something if they believed in it or they didn't believe in it. If they believed in going because they were ordered to or if they believed they had a purpose over there, they still died no matter what they believed in their mind at the time. They went.

There were probably a few guys that thought about amnesty that were thinking about going to Canada or deserting at the time and not doing anything that died. So who's to blame? Man? What's wrong here? I don't know. You have to look at it different ways. Amnesty's a very touchy subject. Me, I haven't given it too much thought and I don't know how I can react to it. If I met a guy that said he came back from Canada, could I accept the guy? I don't know. I would have to take him now on different merits. I wouldn't take him on the military merit that when I was then in the service I probably would have killed the guy or punched him out and not kill him, I mean get in an argument or fight with him. Now I'm a civilian and I think differently. I could probably forgive and forget. Maybe that's the best way.

- C: We've gone over a lot of things and there are a lot of things that we haven't said. But you think back here a second on what we've talked about. Is there anything further you would like to add? Is there one overall impression that you might want to leave with this, any one thing that you think needs to be said about your whole experience or what we've talked about?
- H: Well, anybody that listens or reads this has to go with the idea that this is what I'm saying and I was there and I did it. Maybe you were there or you weren't there and you're trying to get some basis from it.

Every man that went there was a different kind of man when he went there and became a different kind of man when he came back. It has changed my whole, entire life, and not just in thinking. It changed it in different ways, so many different ways that I couldn't name every different way that it has changed me.

Mostly it changed my thoughts about my fellow man. If it did anything for me, it made me ten times better than when I went. If I could give you anything into the thought of why, it's because to see your fellow man at his worst in all stages of his life, from environment to mental anguish to physical distress, to see all the worst in a man, has to make you better.

C: Well, it's not too easy to close except to say thanks a lot, Bob, for this.

H: Okay, Dave. Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW