



COL Bruce Crandall, US Army, Vietnam War Veteran

Interviewed by: Joe Galloway

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Joe Galloway: Colonel Crandall, before we talk about your experiences in Vietnam I'd like to get a little biographic information about you. How old were you when you went to Vietnam?

Bruce Crandall: 32 when I went to Vietnam. ... *You were an old guy.* ... I was called the old man. ... *Yeah.* ... Yeah.

0:48 JG: What was your family status?

BC: I was married to the woman that I had for 54 years, that I loved for 58. And we had three sons. And coming out of Fort Benning, going to Vietnam.

1:04 JG: What was your hometown?

BC: Olympia, Washington

1:08 JG: That's where you grew up? ... Yeah. Well-- ... More or less. ... more or less, yes. I was a All-American baseball player there.

1:16 JG: Now you had been in the Army for some reasonable amount of time by then.

BC: Mm-hm. I got a letter in the mail, Joe, that said: "Greetings." ... *[Laughs]. You were drafted?* ... You have been selected by your friends and neighbors-- ... *You were drafted?* ... Yeah. I was drafted. I didn't have to go because I was in the National Guard in Olympia. ... *Yeah.* ... But I wanted to play ball, and the Army was the best place for me to play at that time 'cause I was-- when I graduated from high school I was only 5' 6" and weighed 145 pounds, so-- ... *You went-- you went in as an enlisted man?* ... Yes. To Fort-- ... *And then--* ... All the way to Fort Lewis from Olympia. ... *Yeah.* ... 15 miles.

1:55 JG: And you went OCS?

BC: I did that, yup. ... *How long after you enlisted-- or were drafted?* ... I had-- I hadn't even finished at AIT when they picked my buddy and I, and they said we were too screwed up to be troops. ... *[Laughs].* ... And that we might make corporal, and that sergeant didn't want to have that on his conscience. But we'd make good second lieutenants. ... *Uh-huh.* ... And so he had us sign that document, and we headed down to leadership school and then off to OCS. ... *Alright.* ... Fort Belvoir.

2:28 JG: What year was that?

BC: That'd be 1953.

2:34 JG: Now [pause] describe--. ... Does the OCS confuse you? ... *Describe the training you received.*

BC: I went through basic, and that did my baseball career 'cause I tried to throw a hand grenade too far and tore up my shoulder. And then I went to AIT. And AIT was engineer, and it was amphibious engineers at Fort Worden, Washington. So I'm still only 45 miles from home. And that's where I got sent to leadership school and OCS at Belvoir. ... *At Belvoir*. ... Yeah. Engineer OCS. ... *As an engineer*. ... Mm-hm. I was engineer in basic and AIT. And then I went to engineer OCS at Fort Belvoir.

3:21 JG: *Now at some point along this line you decided you wanted to fly airplanes.*

BC: Yeah, it was almost as good as-- well, never mind. But I-- when I was graduating from OCS, an engineer colonel came down and said he wanted everybody that was physically fit to go to flight school because the Corps of Engineers had the two biggest aviation outfits in the world at that time. We had over 100 aviators assigned to 30th Topo¹; another 100 in IAGS² down in Panama. And we mapped all of Latin America and South America except for three countries. And then we-- the guys who were in the other Topo—the 30th—we went to the Arctic, and then I went to Libya to-- and then I went to South America to a Topo outfit.

4:14 JG: *So the engineers had a lot of aircraft and they were doing the world mapping-- ... That was it, and-- ... for the Army. ... they-- the engineers also had the most commanders in the Cav, in the aviation. In my battalion, three out of four companies were commanded by engineers. ... Yeah. ... Ed Freeman³ was my platoon commander. I had Piney Gramley [sp.] was my ops officer. The whole group staff were engineers.*

4:41 JG: *When did you go to flight school?*

BC: In 1950-- late '53 and '54.

4:46 JG: *What were you flying?*

BC: Started out in Piper Cubs. And then L-19s.⁴ I was in the first class at Camp Rucker, Alabama, flying fixed wing. And then after we had about 300 hours in fixed wing we were supposed to go to helicopter school. But we were trained by the-- by the Air Force at Gary Air Force Base in San Marcos. And the commander there said that they could train any monkey to fly a Piper Cub. ... *[Laughs]*. ... And then they washed half the class out. So-- ... *[Laughs]*. ... the Army had to get its own flight training.

5:21 JG: *And so now you're-- you're flying fixed wing. Where'd you go for helicopters?*

BC: Back to Gary Air Force Base. They got a second shot at us. ... *They had another turn at you. ... Yeah, and-- ... What chopper were you flying? ... It was H-23s⁵—the small, single-engine type-- ... Not much of a helicopter. ... Well, let's put it this way: It wouldn't get off of the ground in the heat of the day in Libya. ... [Laughs]. ... We flew it at night. ... Really? ... Oh yeah. Yeah.*

¹ 30th Engineer Battalion (Topographic) (Airborne)

² Inter-American Geodetic Survey

³ MAJ Ed "Too Tall to Fly" Freeman

⁴ Cessna L-19/O-1 Bird Dog

⁵ Hiller OH-23 Raven

5:53 JG: *Now, so you're fixed wing, and now you're helicopters. ... Mm-hm. ... And we're in the mid-'50s. And you're flying all around the world.*

BC: Yup. And goin'-- like I went to Libya: They told me on a Friday night I'd leave Monday morning, and on Saturday they called and sent me Sunday. And my wife was pregnant. We lived off post. She had-- she was 21, and she had to clear the housing. They didn't give a damn. ... *They didn't care.* ... No. Next time-- I'll never answer that phone on Saturday ... *[Laughs]*. ... 'cause they called and sent me Sunday.

6:36 JG: *Alright, we-- let's fast forward to your deployment to Vietnam. When and-- let's-- no, let's back up from there and talk about-- about helicopter-- the development of the 11th Air Assault test and the development of airmobile warfare.*

BC: When-- we came home from South America to Fort Benning. And the purpose was to get involved in the 11th Air Assault development, and to develop the air mobility concept. And we spent a couple of years doing that kind of stuff. I came home in '64. And I went to the 229th.⁶ And we went out in the Carolinas and killed all the turkey farms that we could. ... *[Laughs]*. ... And then we-- while I was in the Carolinas I had a slight stroke. And they put me in a hospital down in-- at-- anyhow, it was a base I wasn't assigned at. ... *Fort Jackson probably.* ... Fort Jackson. That's where it was. Yeah. And I got-- talked to the doctor and told him I was gonna have a helicopter come and pick me up and fly me back to Fort Benning, where my family was. So I got him to give me my records and ... *And you took that page out of there.* ... I didn't go back—Yeah, I didn't go back to Fort Benning. I went back out in the Carolinas and joined my outfit again. And my boss said, "How'd it go, Bruce?" I said, "Fine." And that was the end of it. ... *That was the end of that.* ... That one, yeah. Yeah, but I thought I had all the records. I was wrong. ... *You were wrong.* ... Yeah. ... *[Laughs]*.

But when we were doing the 11th Air Assault we tested a lot of different concepts, including using the smoke generators and a little-- something like GPS today. You had a map and drew a line in my cockpit. The only problem was the-- I couldn't fly the airplane, look around, fly that needle also, so-- ... *Right.* ... And then we couldn't figure out how to get the enemy to put the radio relay things out ... *Well, that-- yeah.* ... That's very difficult. ... *Inconvenient of 'em.* ... Yeah, I know. We went down to Dom Rep⁷ in '65. People forget that that was done. And I was the liaison officer to the 18th Airborne Corps. And they got our helicopters from Fort Benning 'cause they didn't have any. They'd given 'em all to us.

And it was interesting 'cause I got the first carrier qualified unit in the United States Army. We occupied a brewery; had the helicopters parked in the polo grounds right next door. And we would fly out to the carriers each day and-- ... *How was the beer?* ... It was pretty good. It was free. And ... *[laughs]*. ... the first helicopter onto that carrier always had quite a bit of beer on it. And from that we got steaks from the Navy. And I probably had the only helicopters that took off in a formation on a carrier because the carrier wouldn't let us do it. And the last day, after I got everybody signed, I hit the overhead beacon; and that means everybody get light. And we took off; the four of us went off at the same time. And I was out there, and the guy came up on the radio and says, "You come back here right now. The captain wants to talk to you." ... *[Laughs]*. ... I said, "I'm a major, and we don't give a rat's ass about what the captains have to say, so-- ... *[Laughs]*. ... The next day I got orders to put all my carrier-- my aircraft—and me—

⁶ 229th Assault Helicopter Battalion

⁷ Dominican Republic

on that carrier to go back to Mayport⁸, Florida. ... *Ooohhh*. ... Well, I flew back with the Air Force. ... *Yeah, I think that's probably a good thing*. ... It was safe. I would have found out that a Navy captain does outrank a major ... *Yeah, I think he outranks a--* ... Army. ... *Army-- major by then, or what?* ... Yeah, I was a major. ... *You were a major*. ... Mm-hm.

11:03 JG: Okay. You're gonna deploy to Vietnam. How's this gonna take place?

BC: We got the word—actually, one of the wives got the word first. And then we got it. And the idea was that we would send the troops and the aircraft over by ships, and the commanders would fly over in the advance party so we could learn about the country and we'd fly with the units. I flew with the 117th out of Qui Nhon⁹, for example. And my aircraft came over on a carrier, and on a-- troops on the ship. And that was good, so we would have that experience before they got there. And we'd find out how well we responded to being shot at. ... *Yeah*. ... And those of us that had bad hearing already would probably not-- we responded different than those that knew-- ... *You didn't know you were being shot at?* ... Yeah, I did but-- ... *[Laughs]*. ... makes a good story. ... *Makes a good story*.

12:10 So the troops and the helicopters left in July-- ... Yeah. ... *of 1965?* ... Yup. And we left at-- ... *Same time?* ... Yes. ... *But you flew ahead*.

BC: Yeah. Well, yes. We went over with the Air Force. And the first night in Vietnam they parked us in tents that were right in front of an artillery outfit. ... *[Laughs]*. ... And I'm sure that was to give us a-- ... *Welcome. A warm welcome*. ... Oh, it was lots of fun. I can't remember sleeping.

12:45 JG: Now tell me about your first arrival in Vietnam. ... That was my first time. ... *What was that-- what was it like?*

BC: Well, when the artillery was going off, I thought it was incoming. And so I stayed awake that night. The next time I came back to Vietnam, I slept right through the landing. I didn't-- ... *Didn't even care*. ... No, didn't give a rat's ass. But it was a-- we had to land down out of Saigon, and then we moved up to Qui Nhon to-- ... *Unload the ship--* ... Yeah. ... *and get your birds, and--* ... Start flying them. ... *start flyin' 'em up to An Khe?* ... Yup. That's when-- when they arrived. When we first-- we did the-- I flew with the 117th. And the last day with the 117th was when they wanted us to go up and start clearing our company area. And I said I was field grade; I didn't cut brush-- ... *[Laughs]*. ... 'til I got up there and I saw-- Colonel Burdette¹⁰ was the aviation group commander, and he was cutting brush in my area. ... *Uh-uh*. ... So it didn't take me long to find a machete. ... *Find you a machete and--* ... Yeah. ... *and started--* ... Getting very eager about cutting brush. ... *cutting that brush*. ... Yeah. ... *Yeah*.

That was-- that was one of the stupid things that we did. We went into an area that was a jungle when we could have gone up to Pleiku where there was a Army base, runways-- ... *You could have done that, or you could have brought in the bulldozers and cleared that brush*. ... And all of us were engineers. So we had a-- we knew dozers and graders and bucket loaders and-- but they wouldn't let us do it. There was a DCG that didn't understand. We nicknamed it the golf course-- ... *Right*. ... and he didn't understand the sarcasm. ... *Yeah*. ... Yeah. But if we had gone up to Pleiku, there was a-- the 52nd was up there. It could

⁸ Naval Station Mayport, Jacksonville, Florida

⁹ 117th Assault Helicopter Company (UH-1)(A), 10th Combat Aviation Battalion

¹⁰ COL Allen M. Burdette, 1st Cavalry Division, 11th Aviation Group commander

have been moved somewhere else. And we could have gone in there, in that area right outside it-- between it and the Air Force base-- ... *Yeah. Camp Holloway.* ... Yeah. Then if we'd had Camp Holloway, we'd have kept our Chinooks¹¹ and our Caribous¹² and Mohawks¹³, and the Chinooks-- ... *All of that.* ... all would have been inside that fenced area. And we put the-- the division would have been between the two areas. And that would have been a smart thing to do. But some idiot picked out the jungle. And they were still clearing that area two years later. ... *Yeah.*

15:18 JG: What was your daily routine like once you got to An Khe? You were the company commander?

BC: Yes. My daily routine was to try to build a base camp, get my people into their tents and get that put up. And my goal was to have my unit be the first one to have concrete floors and to have con-- plywood walls, and have a-- ... *Hot shower.* ... hot shower.

Freeman was able to witch.¹⁴ He found water over on the side of the unit area ... *[Laughs].* ... at 12 feet. And when he told me he could witch-- *He did it with a water witching?* ... Yes. And he told-- he came into my tent and he says, "I know how-- where do you want the well?" ... *[Laughs].* ... And I said, "We're not gonna be able to do a well." And he says, "Oh yeah." He says, "I can witch." And I said, "What the hell is that?" And he says, "I'll show you." And two hours later he comes back and he's got a-- ... *Twig.* ... Yeah. And he says, "Come on." And he went out. And I have one jeep, 20 helicopters and one jeep. He goes over and steps on the bumper, and that damn thing points right down to the radiator. ... *[Laughs].*

And I tell Freeman, "Don't do this to me." ... *[Laughs].* ... "Get the hell out of my space here." He says, "Where do you want it?" And I says, "Over on the side of the unit area. And make sure it drains out so it goes down to the unit below us. We don't want-- ... *You don't want water in--* ... we don't want that water in our-- ... *your tents.* ... And he hit water. And we had-- then we got to-- ... *Was it artesian?* ... Well, no. We don't know what the hell it was. But there was plenty of water. And we got a pump from somewhere. We got drop tanks from somewhere. ... *I wonder--* They looked like Air Force. ... *Looked like Air Force.* ... Yeah. And so the tanks would sit up there and would warm the water-- ... *Yeah.* ... in the sun. ... *So you had a warm shower.* ... Well, the other shower unit was run by the Army. And there was 15 shower heads for 15,000 troops. ... *Yeah.* ... That doesn't work well. ... *So--* So we had the only one that was a private-- .

17:45 JG: Now if I recollect right, you built an officer's club.

BC: Yeah, that was-- it was a tent. It was a-- it was a GP large tent. And we had a little problem because we didn't have enough electricity to run the radios and the lights-- ... *The lights that you had liberated out of--* ... out of an officer's club down in Qui Nhon. ... *Yeah.* ... Yeah, that we could-- *How'd you do that?* ... We were engineers. We had an engineer brass. We told the guy it wasn't legal. ... *[Laughs].* ... And he helped us take it down. And we took it back-- *You took his-- you took his lights out of the Air Force club-- ?* ... Yeah. They were fluorescent lights. They didn't work. The fluorescent lights were

¹¹ Boeing CH-47 Chinook

¹² de Havilland Canada DHC-4 Caribou

¹³ Grumman OV-1 Mohawk

¹⁴ Divining or dowsing for water with a forked stick (called witching for the witch hazel, a popular divining rod of the early American settlers); usually just called finding water

too much-- they took too much-- . . . *They drew too much power.* . . . Yeah. . . . *So what'd you do about that?* . . . Well, I got a bigger generator. . . . *Where'd you get that from?* . . . It was a -- I think it was an Air Force base. . . . [Laughs]. . . . It was at night so I'm not sure. But anyhow, the problem with our GP large tent, we had only one light bulb because we couldn't run the refrigerator, and the beer-- . . . *Keep the beer cold and have a light.* . . . That's it. So we had one light.

And one of my warrants went downtown and bought a python. And so we would welcome the new guys in that tent. And I would hang that python on my shoulders. And then I'd come up behind 'em and I'd pull 'em to me (and of course guys hate this: you're in their space). And I'm-- and they're looking at me. And I say, "Welcome to the outfit. I'm your commanding officer." And I have my little majors leaves here [indicates shoulder], and they're usually warrants or lieutenants. Anyhow, Serpent 7 would taste 'em. And they would turn to see that. And then it was Freeman and the rest of their job to keep me from getting my butt kicked. . . . [Laughs].

But that's where the snake came from. And it was painted on the doors of the helicopter. I never flew a helicopter that didn't have those-- . . . *Didn't have that snake on it.* . . . didn't have the doors-- when the door would-- the plane-- when the helicopter would get shot up, they would change the doors on-- get their other aircraft running. And they'd switch the doors while I'm getting my helmet out and switching aircraft. So that was-- it worked every time.



**"Ancient Serpent 6"
Major Crandall's door emblem**

20:17 JG: *So you got yourself settled in--* . . . Yeah. . . . *And you had been flying with the 7th Cav for two years?*

BC: Yeah. I flew with all of the battalions. I supported all of 'em. There was eight battalions at that time. And there were three brigades, but we only had two lift battalions. So a brigade would go out, or one or two of their battalions, we would end up going out, too. And-- but the 1st of 7th was my-- I was with the most. . . . *Yeah.* . . . And they got into the most-- . . . *Trouble.* . . . trouble. Yeah, they thought they were back with Custer. And they were. . . . *Yeah?* . . . They'd get into it.



Major Crandall's Huey

21:13 JG: You guys had flown together for two years. . . . Yeah. . . . You weren't gonna leave those guys in the lurch. . . . It didn't matter which outfit that it was, Joe. We weren't gonna leave anybody behind. I still feel that way. I'll never leave a living somebody behind if I'm flying—as long as they're living. I really don't

believe in going after a dead body to pull them out. If there's heat still going on in that—because one of my people might get killed for a dead body—and I sure didn't believe in that. I don't believe in it today. The Creed¹⁵ should say I will never leave a LIVING-- ... *Brother*. ... brother behind. ... *Yeah*.

21:59 JG: *So what were your living conditions like? Your quarters?*

BC: Well, they-- ... *Getting started*. ... getting started, they were-- there was a lot of mud. We had no floors in the tents. We had no-- nothing that brought a quality of life to us. ... *Hmm*. ... So we had to do things about that. And-- ... *The Air Force was very helpful*. ... Well, the Air Force and anyone else that had a supply depot anywhere close ... *[Laughs]* ... 'cause they only guarded 'em from the ground. ... *You guys could fly in*. ... That's it. And all we'd do is, you know, mark off our symbols. I never flew-- ... *You're snake--* ... No-- the snake-- *disappeared for those missions*. ... Yeah. I forgot I didn't-- never-- . But anyhow, at night-- the one good thing about the guys guarding those supply depots, they knew we had the helicopters. And they weren't gonna shoot us down. Now the guys that were commanders of that-- might have wanted to shoot us down, but the guys that were doing the guarding, they didn't.

And sometimes you'd make a deal with-- depending on how you-- what you needed. We had concrete floors and plywood walls. ... *Very soon?* ... Oh yeah. ... *Sooner than everybody else?* ... Sooner than the commanding general. ... *That's pretty good*. ... That's pretty stupid. ... *Ah, yeah, well—only if he notices*. ... Well, he was in those CONEX containers. And my boss still wasn't in the-- but he wanted me to share everything that we brought in. ... *The wealth*. ... Yeah. We didn't do it. ... *No*. ... No. He wasn't that-- he didn't scare me that much.

24:00 JG: *What were your impressions of the Vietnamese folks that you had anything to do with?*

BC: I had a lot to do with Montagnards when we moved over on the border and stuff. I didn't have a whole lot to do with the Vietnamese soldiers. ... *ARVN, or--?* ... ARVN. We didn't lift them. I think I lifted one time a-- and we had an American adviser with them, and we lifted 'em once I think. But I didn't get to know the Vietnamese as such.

24:36 JG: *Any dealings with Vietnamese civilians?*

BC: Not much. When I went to Thailand I got to know the people of that part of the world a lot better. But that was after I'd been in Vietnam twice.

24:53 JG: *Describe your friendships with and your impressions of your fellow soldiers.*

BC: Oh, I loved 'em. I had-- well, you knew-- you knew my guys. Ed Freeman was a captain, Corps of Engineers. And in South America—we were in Panama together—he outranked me. And then he didn't get promoted and I did. ... *[Laughs]*. ... And I asked him to be in my unit, 'cause once you served over someone you don't have to serve under them. And he said, "Fine." But what he didn't-- I had to talk to

¹⁵ **Soldier's Creed (United States Army)** I am an American Soldier. I am a warrior and a member of a team. I serve the people of the United States, and live the Army Values. I will always place the mission first. I will never accept defeat. I will never quit. I will never leave a fallen comrade. I am disciplined, physically and mentally tough, trained and proficient in my warrior tasks and drills. I always maintain my arms, my equipment and myself. I am an expert and I am a professional. I stand ready to deploy, engage, and destroy, the enemies of the United States of America in close combat. I am a guardian of freedom and the American way of life. I am an American Soldier.

him and explain to him that there were three things that he couldn't do. He couldn't write performance reports 'cause he gave me the worst performance report I ever got. ... [Laughs]. ... And he said that was the best one he ever gave. ... Oh. ... So I didn't let him write a performance report all the time he was in the unit. I wrote 'em. He couldn't drink. Only two beers per day, just like-- that was the limit for everybody. And the third thing he couldn't do was gamble 'cause I didn't want my people losing money over in Vietnam that affected people back home. And so we didn't do any gambling within my-- my unit. And he was really good at gambling. We got tossed out of-- ... *You cut his income.* ... Oh, we got tossed out of a club in Las Vegas he was doing so well. ... [Laughs]. ... But he was my platoon commander for a whole year. And he was the only captain that stayed in that job. He had half my aviators and half my aircraft.

All of our-- we had a lot of extra majors. And every now and then my battalion commander would say, "We've got to replace Freeman." And I would say no. And then one day I told him, "If you take Freeman, you've got to take me, too." That was too tempting. I shouldn't have done that. ... [Laughs]. ... So I seriously thought I was gonna be replaced at six months-- ... *Yeah.* --- because everybody else got replaced. And I didn't. I got to stay for a year because General Burdette was the group commander, really-- he liked Freeman and I [*sic*] as a team.

And when we were about halfway through, that's when everybody got shifted out. That and the fact I had-- you're gonna ask me I hope: What was the toughest thing I had to do? The toughest thing I had to do was to transfer my people to other units, one person at a time. So I had to get rid of half my people by the time we were there for six months. And I had to have the other half gone by the time I was there for a year. And Freeman and I were the last two to leave our unit. And the guy that replaced me had never led an assault. And I had 756 of them by then. I was almost tempted to stay, but it was no longer my unit. Everybody had to be gone. ... *They were all gone.* ... *Yeah.* And I had guys that I'd had for two years-- ... *Yeah.* ... that I had-- ... *And now you got a whole unit full of greenhorns.* ... Oh, and they were their very best people. Any drunken warrant officer-- if I sent 'em one of mine, they sent me theirs. ... *Yeah, not the best.* ... The guys that were privates that used to be sergeants. I would get them. And I'd have to send my crew chiefs and my people over to other units, the 1st of the infantry or 82nd or-- we had to get rid of all of our people by the time-- *So that all of your unit wouldn't rotate at the same time.* ... Rotate home. That's right. ... *Yeah.*

And they don't do that anymore. But it was so stupid because when we got home, there was no Cav. There was no unit left behind—because we went to Panama; we went to Germany; we went to-- all over the world. But we didn't-- we weren't 1st Cav anymore. ... *Yeah.* ... And then the ones that were in country were damned inexperienced. ... *Yeah.* ... So they learned not to do that. So that was the hardest thing I had to do.

29:28 JG: *Tell me about flying in the Ia Drang.*

BC: That was one of the hardest things I had to do. No, I-- the 1st of 7th, I lifted them-- . It was the 14th of November, and we-- I'd gone to the briefing the night before. And they had discussed where they wanted to go. And they wanted to do a recon flight first thing in the morning. And the G-2 type set his hand on a map and says, "This is where the enemy is." And I, you know-- ... [Laughs]. ... He didn't know a damn thing about where the enemy was. We were going to set up along the border of Cambodia, and stop the people from getting out of the country that had been attacking Duc Co and Plei Me and-- that had been

hitting the Special Forces camps. We wanted to keep ‘em from getting out of the country, and kill ‘em before they could get out.

So I came-- took off at six o’clock in the morning; flew out to pick up Hal Moore¹⁶ and his people. And Freeman was in the second helicopter. And we took off and went over to the border, and then cut north to Duc Co. And we were looking for places that we could land and we could put the infantry in, and that was big enough for us. And when we went north, we went up to Duc Co and landed there. And we went through the-- looking at where we could put ‘em, and that they wanted to go. But they wanted to go wherever we could put ‘em; needed to have enough space for the helicopter. ... *Right*. ... And we only-- I was only gonna have 16 helicopters-- ... *To lift the battalion*. ... instead of 20. Yeah. Normally I would have the 20 because I’d have my-- but I didn’t have 20. I only had 16 going.

We picked out X-Ray. We picked out two other areas that were possible. One was for the artillery base. And when Moore was satisfied that’s where we’d go, then we set up for takeoff time, time of arrival in there; the artillery was supposed to be in the Falcon, which was the artillery base that he picked. And so we had a takeoff time at 10 something (it’s not important). ... *Yeah*. ... But when we took off, the artillery hadn’t completed the prep. And so, General Moore-- Colonel Moore (later General—I always refer to him as General)-- anyhow, he wanted us to-- ... *Circle around*. ... circle around a little bit, burn some fuel off; but give the artillery some time to-- ... *Finish*. ... to get that prep in.

And that worked out. We-- when we went in the first couple of-- well, the first four times, the fourth time I started getting shot at. The back aircraft, the back eight, one helicopter got hit. And that was on the fourth lift. But I had to refuel, and that was because of that orbiting. And so I was in the first eight aircraft, and I went in to refueling point and refueled. So then I took off and we made our fifth lift into the landing zone. And all hell broke loose. I had the D Company commander¹⁷ and his artillery-- mortar platoon leader. And when we came in, they both got wounded. Their radio operator got killed. My crew chief got shot through the throat. And when I came out I had three dead and three wounded on the aircraft. I’m not sure where the hell they came from, but I think that they had wounded they loaded on from one side while we were getting the other guys off the other side. ... *Yeah*.

So I had my crew chief shot; I had-- Lieutenant Bean¹⁸ got shot in the back of the helmet and he had 14 stiches. ... *Creased his head*. ... Yeah. I always liked to tell the generals that I knew he would be a general someday. And they always asked me how I knew. And I said, “‘Cause he’s so friggin’ hard-headed.” ‘Cause that bullet came right around the inside, and it had 14 stiches. And when we got through that night about 11 o’clock, he’s in the-- in our ops tent trying to put a headset over that bandage-- ... *[Laughs]*. ... ‘cause he wanted to fly the next day; didn’t want somebody to have to take his place. ... *Now he was your co-pilot?* ... No, Bean was-- my co-pilot was Jon Mills. ... *Jon Mills, that’s right*. ... Yeah. Roger Bean was a young lieutenant that later became a two-star. ... *Right*. ... He was-- and he was that good.

Anyhow, when the-- we had to stay on the ground, my helicopter, while they got the radio away from that-- the dead radio operator. It was in the-- still sitting in his seat. And the D Company commander and

¹⁶ LTC (later LTG) Harold Gregory “Hal” Moore Jr. (1922 – 2017)

¹⁷ CPT Ray LeFebvre

¹⁸ 1LT (later MG) Roger K. Bean

the mortar platoon leader got off after they got the radio away from him. But they'd been wounded while they were still on the bird. And two-- a lift later I took them back out because they'd been hit again. They both were wounded again, and we carried 'em out. And I think Metsker¹⁹ got killed at that time, when he was putting the D Company commander on the aircraft. And he was already wounded. And he got hit from the back side.

But we could see people shooting at us just outside the rotor wings. And my people never fired once the infantry's on the ground. If you ever see my helicopters, the guns were pointing down when we were on the ground. And coming in we never fired because we didn't know where the infantry was. And we're not gonna shoot our own people from the back side. ... *The only guns I saw on your birds were volunteer riflemen.* ... Yeah, at that time. ... *Yeah.* ...

Yeah. We only had the M-- ... *M16s.* ... Yeah. We didn't get the guns 'til- ... *You didn't have any M60s.* ... I thought we did, but we didn't get the guns until-- ... *December.* ... 4th of December. ... *Yeah.* ... And then we didn't get mounts for 'em-- ... *Right.* ... which almost got us shot down because we tried bungee cords, and they would come up and shoot your rotor blades if you didn't-- ... *They would. They would [laughs].* ... Yes, I know. Freeman says, I just got shot up." I said, "What? I didn't see any enemy fire." He says, "No," he says, "The door gunner shot the blades when-- ." ... *[Laughs].* ... And I said, "We'll talk about it when we get back." And by the time we got back my door gunner had done the same thing; put a couple holes in the-- ... *Put a couple holes in yours.* ... blades. Yeah, because you-- if you turned, they don't see the blade. I took some troops out shooting-- .

37:08 JG: *Tell me about Ed Freeman.*

BC: Oh. Wonderful. Got a battlefield commission in Korea; was in the Corps of Engineers-- was in the Corps of Engineers in Korea. And he was as brave a man as I've ever known. But he also was tremendously proud. And when he didn't get promoted, it damn near killed him. And I knew-- ... *He was a Mississippi boy.* ... Yeah. I knew how good he was. And so I had him come to my outfit. And gave him the choice. He didn't have to serve under me. And no one in the outfit ever knew Ed had been my boss, or that he had been not selected for promotion. We didn't-- that was not a subject that I allowed to be discussed anywhere. ... *Anywhere.* ... And Ed got the Medal of Honor in 2001. ... *Yeah.* ... Yeah. And he deserved it. He-- .

38:21 JG: *You guys flew together for a long time?*

BC: Yeah. Yeah. I'd known him for 10 years before-- ... *Before Vietnam.* ... before Vietnam. ... *Yeah.* ... And we had served together in the 30th Topo. And he went-- when we-- I did the Arctic, and then he went to Iran when I went to Libya. ... *Mm-hm.* ... And then we went to Panama together. And he went to Nicaragua when I went to Costa Rica (and so he's right on my border). And we-- we had been partners in aviation for a great deal of time. We were both instructor pilots in everything we flew. ... *Yeah.* ... And he was in charge in the Canal Zone. He was the head of the standardization, and I was his test pilot. ... *[Laughs].* ... But no, he was a-- I've never met anybody I had a higher admiration for that was treated more poorly than Ed was. He should have been promoted. He didn't go after the education. He didn't go after his degrees. Yeah. He shouldn't have had to. He was that good. ... *He was that good.* ... Yeah.

¹⁹ CPT Thomas C. Metsker

He was-- General Burdette really loved Ed. And we kept him-- when-- after the-- after X-Ray we learned a lesson, and I took all of the seats out of the helicopter. And General Burdette was-- Colonel Burdette at the time, but he ended up as a three-star, 5th Army commander. Anyhow, he came down and he says, "Why did you take the seats out?" And I said, "Colonel, you-- you don't think the infantry's sitting in those seats with seat belts on when we go on the assault?" I said, "They're in the door. I have a real problem keeping 'em on the aircraft until I can get low enough so that they don't get hurt when they jump--" ... [Laughs]. ... "cause they're going as soon as I level off." And I said, "We don't need the seats. We need the space on the floor where we can put the wounded, so we can lay 'em in there— because they can't sit in the seats. So I took the seats out." And he said, "Well, that sounds reasonable." The next day he puts out the word that everybody can take their seats out. ... *Take their seats out.*

Now today, it's my understanding—at least it was in Iraq—in order to take a seat out of the aircraft you had to get a general's signature. ... [Laughs]. ... Yeah. That would not have worked very well. They didn't fly the aircraft; they shouldn't have had too much responsibility for-- and they didn't fly the aircraft. ... *I'm sure Ed could have got a signature on their paper that would have passed.* ... Yeah, we probably would have been able to fake something [both laugh]. Well, I think the infantry would have supported us. I think that Hal would have gone and talked to the general. We wouldn't have had any trouble with him. ... *Wouldn't have had a problem.* ... No.

41:45 JG: *What's your most vivid memory of your two tours in Vietnam?*

BC: How good the people were. My-- I just loved 'em. You know that every one of those guys was there to protect the other guys. And they were my sons. They were my-- my men were my sons. And I don't care if they were not in my unit. They were mine. ... *Yeah.* ... So every mission that we flew, we flew with the idea that we would do whatever they needed. Always. And they knew that we would do that. So they would protect us as much as they could. And the idea of-- the camaraderie, the relationships that you have in a combat situation is just-- it's better than any other relationship you'll ever have. Ever. We-- for 40 years afterward we would get together. Now you're-- it was-- it was right. It was the way life should be.

The people didn't understand that it wasn't the soldier that caused the war. It was the-- and it wasn't the soldier that wanted the war. ... *Politicians.* ... Yes. We fight the war. We don't start it, we don't-- but-- and we didn't get to finish it. The politicians control the whole damn operation. And you do the best you can do with what they are giving you. And combat is not something the soldier wants to do. ... *Right.* ... The soldier gets paid to not have-- ... *And Vietnam was so messed up--* ... It was. ... *that we gave the North Vietnamese strategic initiative from the get go.* ... And even when we were winning, we-- *We couldn't win.* ... Well, no. But when we went back to Vietnam and we met with the guys we fought, they thought we were winning. But then they looked at it and saw what was going on in the States. ... *Yeah.* ... They said, "Oh hell, we're not-- we're not losing." All they have to do is stay there long enough-- ... *Just hang in there.* ... and we'll get the hell out of there. ... *Yeah.* ... And that's what we did. ... *That's what we did.* ... Yeah. Yeah.

I think when we go back, Joe, to look at Vietnam historically—when all of us are gone—they won't look at Vietnam much different than they look at Korea. It will be a-- it will be an unnecessary fight for an unnecessary benefit. ... *Yeah.* ... And I don't-- I think that Vietnam and Korea will be very much alike the way they'll be looked at historically.

45:12 JG: Describe for me the best day that you had during your Vietnam tours.

BC: The day I came home. When I came home the first time I didn't realize I'd be going back in 12 months and 12 days. And when I got home and-- I had the boys and my wife in Seattle. And then we went to Fort Carson. But I didn't realize that I would be going back so soon. When I got to Fort Carson they assigned me to a helicopter outfit that I was going to be just Peter Pilot in. I was-- I-- if everybody came that was scheduled to come, I'd have been 14th ranked. So I'd just commanded for a year in the Cav, and now I'm gonna be 14th ranked in an outfit getting ready to go. And the guy who's gonna command it has been passed over the most. So the guy that was the biggest screw up was-- ... *Was in command*. ... was gonna command. And I didn't-- I didn't go and sign in in that unit.

I went right down and sat out in front of the general's office, and I asked to see the general. And the secretary, she said, "He doesn't see people without making an arrangement." And I says, "Well, I'll wait." And I sat out there. And I saw him going out the back door. And I beat him to his staff car. And I said, "Sir, I have to speak to you." And he says, "You didn't get the impression I didn't want to speak to you?" And I said, "Yes Sir. But that's not gonna work this time. We've got to talk because I'm not gonna join that outfit that's getting ready to go." He says, "You're a coward. You're out there. Get out of the service." And I said, "Sir, I've just commanded for a year. What you've got here is a unit that is so screwed up the guy that's passed over the most is gonna command it." And I said, "I'm not gonna join it." And he says, "What outfit did you say you were in?" I says, "1st Cav. And I commanded for a year." So then he knew that I wasn't really a coward. And he says, "You come in my office. I'll check this out and I'll see you Monday morning in my office at seven o'clock." I went in. He says, "I found out you've got a pretty good record." He says, "I'm gonna give you a full colonel slot." I'm a major still. I should have been smart enough to say, "Thank you Sir, but-- ."

Anyhow, I ended up-- I had 1,400 troops; 450 were in the stockade. ... *[Laughs]*. ... And I ended up having to deal with that the whole time I was there. It took me six months to get out of there. And Hal got me an appointment to go to the Armed Forces Staff College. And then I went right back to Vietnam. But I couldn't-- .

48:18 JG: Tell me about your second tour. It didn't end very well.

BC: No. Well, it was going great. I convinced the division commander I ought to command the 1st/9th Cav-- 'cause that's a wonderful outfit; they've got their own infantry, they've got their own gunships, they've got their own lift ships. They go out and they start trouble, and then they make the-- ... *Infantry come clean up*. ... Yeah. Get the brigade to-- and I can start trouble. I'm an expert at that. And I convinced the general to let me go down there and do that.

Then I got assigned the 1st/9th, duty unassigned. I could go anywhere. So I went to B Troop. And we were up by Khe Sanh. And they-- the battalion commander got killed. And I got to the aircraft that they were in, the Charlie-Charlie²⁰-- they were flying it way too low. And they got knocked down. And they burned. And I got to 'em, but it was-- it was late at night. And there wasn't anybody-- I could see the fire still burning; I could see the four guys were in there. And so I went back, and I said, "We'll go tomorrow morning. We'll go after 'em in the morning." And so I asked for the Air Force to bomb a target at seven

²⁰ C&C: command and control helicopter used by reconnaissance or unit commanders

and another one at 10, which was closer-- right near the downed aircraft. And about six we got the word that they couldn't get off for the seven o'clock because of the weather in Thailand. So I said, "Cancel it and hit the 10."

And I was about two miles from the 10. And I had just hit the mini-guns—I was flying a gunship—I'd just hit the mini-guns to pick up sniper fire that was going on our troops, and I blew up. And I thought it was me 'cause the mini-guns and the blow up was about right at the same time. And I cartwheeled across the rice paddy. I always claim I was playing NASCAR. And when it finally stopped doing that I was paralyzed. I had to crawl away from the aircraft. The damn thing didn't burn, but we thought it would. So-- and then I found out I didn't kill those guys I was shooting at because when you shoot, you shoot straight ahead, and we cartwheeled straight ahead. And I had a cover little helicopter, and-- a Loach²¹. And I sure would love to find out who that kid was sitting in that door with that M60, 'cause he picked up all those guys that were trying to kill us. ... *They were coming after you.* ... Yeah. Yup. ... *You had 'em coming after you.* ... They were after me and-- the four of us that were on the aircraft, we all had the same injuries: back injuries, legs. My crew chief had a compound fracture of his leg. And he went back to the helicopter to get my Thompson, and get it and put it on me. And I'm laying in the ditch in the rice paddy. ... *And you're paralyzed.* ... I'm paralyzed from the waist down. And it's scaring the hell out of me. And-- ... *Can't run, and they're coming. Bad guys are coming.* ... Yeah.

And anyhow, when the captain gets over there, the infantry commander that from the outfit I was picking the sniper fire up for, he gets over there and looks down. And he says, "Some bloody noses here, but otherwise they all look okay." And I says, "Don't you-- don't you do that. You tell 'em to get that damn medevac in here right now. I don't belong on the ground you twit." ... *[Laughs]*. ... And so we negotiated, and-- ... *You got your medevac.* ... Yeah, but I didn't see it. By then they'd put some morphine in me and put me to sleep. When I woke up in the Philippines I found out that General Burdette had talked to my wife. And she explained to him my brother was in the Navy in Japan. So the next thing I know I'm in Japan. And I stayed there for an extra month. I thought I could go back. I thought I should go back.

52:43 JG: Now if I recollect, while you were in the hospital your wife had some problems.

BC: Yeah. She didn't tell me about it until after-- after we had left Seattle. She was from Kent, and my oldest boy was told that the teacher wouldn't teach him because his father was a killer in Vietnam. And my wife never told me about it until we were gone—'cause I would have looked that teacher up. ... *I thought so.* ... That is the most disgusting thing I've ever heard. The boy was an Eagle Scout, straight A student; never gave anybody any trouble. ... *And she refused to teach him.* ... She refused to teach him 'cause his father was a killer in Vietnam. And I wasn't killing anybody-- well, I might have. I would sure as hell do it if I had the need to do it. But when you're flying lift ships you don't-- ... *It's not your job.* ... I was killing them the second tour 'cause I had a gunship. But you kill them rather than have them kill your people. It makes good sense. It's-- that's why you go to war. It's not a gentlemanly thing. But for her not to tell me, it-- 'cause she knew what I'd do. She knew exactly what I'd do. And she kept it from me. I had her for 54 years. I loved her for 58. I tell everybody: Best thing ever happened to me. ... *Yeah.* ... Yeah. But-- .

²¹ Hughes OH-6 Cayuse, nicknamed "Loach" after the requirement acronym LOH—Light Observation Helicopter

54:28 JG: *You-- you earned a Medal of Honor for your actions-- ... I received-- ... you and Ed...* No. I received the Medal of Honor. ... *Oh, I like to say you earned it.* ... Yeah, but you see, you don't agree that I [flashes his Good Conduct Medal from behind his lapel]-- ... *Oh, that's something else-- ... my Good Conduct Medal. ... Good Conduct medal. I know you didn't earn that.*

You know, I use that with our-- our young ones now. I'm a mentor for five of our young ones, the ones that receive the medal. And they-- every one of them says, "I don't feel comfortable wearing the Medal of Honor. I didn't do anything except what I was supposed to do and I'm trained to do. I was just doing my job. And I don't want to wear this. It should go to the guys that didn't come home." And I sit there and-- they all have a Good Conduct Medal. So I say, "Do you have the Good Conduct Medal?" And they say yes. And I says, "Well, don't you think even your mother wouldn't believe you deserve that?" ... [Laughs]. ... And now they all wear it under their collar. ... *Under their lapel [laughs]. ... And I wear it-- I wear it under mine because I check them. ... Yeah.*

And we all understand now, and they're very relaxed, they all understand that they got the Medal of Honor. They have to wear it-- wear it proudly, but you wear it for the others that didn't come home. You wear it representing them. It's not something you won. It's something that happens to you. And you are going to live with it for others the rest of your life. And except that [flashes the Good Conduct Medal again]-- this is harder to explain, the Good Conduct Medal. ... *It is in your case.* ... Oh, for all of us. ... *Oh, in your case-- ... Imagine if you got it. ... in your case especially.* ... Well, but you got that Bronze Star. So if you-- if you had a Good Conduct Medal, it's be un-- totally unacceptable. ... *Totally unacceptable.* ... Yes. ... *I wouldn't have accepted it though.* ... Uh, I wouldn't want to test that. ... [Laughs]. ... No. No, it's-- everybody that's-- ... *Describe for me the-- everybody that's ever got the medal has felt the same way. ... Yeah.* ... They didn't do what-- they were doing their job. And so the young ones had to understand that.

56:42 JG: *Describe for me the worst day that you in two tours.*

BC: 28th of December, 1965. I lost a helicopter. It disappeared. It had four of my damn good people on it²². They became MIAs from that day until about six years ago when we finally buried them in Arlington. But we looked; we hunted for them; we knew within a couple of miles where they went down. We were still looking for them on my second tour, every time we flew over that area. When we went back to-- on a visit in '93, we looked. ... *I remember.* ... And I understood what I had to do for MIAs and KIAs, but the military doesn't teach you what to do for MIAs. An MIA-- when do you tell a wife that you've known for two-and-a-half, three years that I can't find your husband? And when do you tell a mother, "We can't find your son?" And those young guys for-- 'til the day they were found, they never aged. I think of them all as 19 and 22 and 23. They didn't age one damn day. And they're buried in Arlington. And I visit them when I go.

But that was the toughest day because I allowed them to fly single ship. And it was the only time I did it. And there were supposed to be two ships. They stayed in overnight at the base so they would fly out with the one that was in maintenance. And the next morning the one in maintenance didn't come up. And they called on the radio. And we were on the other side of the pass—I know supporting Moore's unit again. And I could see the pass through my side, and they could see it from their side. And so it wasn't a

²² CW2 Jesse Donald Phelps, CW2 Kenneth Leon Stancil, SP5 Donald Carroll Grella, SP4 Thomas Rice, Jr.

question of weather. It wasn't-- ... *How did--* ... and they were just gonna come straight down that highway-- ... *How did they get--* ... 'cause we just on the other side. ... *How did they get off there to the right and disappear?* ... They got off to the right—they got shot at, and they got shot up, and that's what put 'em down. ... *Ah.* ... We finally-- they-- the guy that shot 'em down told the MIA-- ... *MIA people.* ... Yeah, where it was and they went there. ... *They didn't believe him for years.* ... They didn't for two years. They went, but they didn't do their due diligence. ... *Didn't do the digging.* ... No, they didn't pick out the-- and look at the ground. And the bird had been burned. I don't know if it burned when they crashed. Nobody knows.

But the guy that told 'em they shot it down, that he shot it down-- they wouldn't have found it otherwise. ... *He knew where it was.* ... Yeah, he knew where it was. And he had a certificate for shooting it down from the local NVA guy, or the VC guy. ... *Yeah.* ... So there's no doubt. And the Army wouldn't give a Purple Heart for those guys. ... *Hmmm.* ... Well, I got-- I put the Purple Heart on their pictures. And then we went back after 'em. And the Army now has changed its policy. If you're listed as MIA, and if there's-- we'll issue you the Purple Heart. ... *One of--* ... Yeah. ... *the sisters of--* ... Yeah. ... *one those crewmen*²³-- ... Yeah, Shirley Haase. ... *Shirley Haase.* ... Yeah. She's the sister. ... *The-- dealing with the government, and the DoD--* ... Yeah. ... *and the MIA--* ... Yeah. ... *office made a revolutionary out of a nice little lady from Omaha, Nebraska.* ... Yeah but she-- ... *They messed with her--* ... I wouldn't want to mess with her. ... *Oooohhhh.* ... Yeah, I think she's even tougher than my mother-in-law was. ... *Yeah.* ... Yeah. ... *Yeah.* ... Shirley did-- ... *She did-- she was never gonna let up.* ... Well, I went to the award branch with the colonel out of the vice chief of staff's office and-- to get that policy changed. ... *Yeah.* ... He wouldn't do it. And it was a lieutenant colonel who was the awards and-- branch chief at the time. And he knows that they want to do it. And he still didn't do it. ... *He wouldn't do it.* ... He wouldn't do it. ... *They-- they--something happens to 'em when they go to the awards branch.* ... Yeah. Well, I got a piece of him. ... *[Laughs]. Good.* ... Yeah. ... *Good.* ... Because he should have-- there shouldn't have been any question about it. We had the proof that the guy told 'em that he shot 'em down. ... *Yeah.* ... And that they-- so-- ... *It was a combat loss.* ... It's a combat loss. There isn't any question about it. And for a guy to be sitting in the Pentagon-- ... *On his fat butt.* ... Yeah. And I wanted a piece of him real bad. ... *[Laughs].* ... And so did Shirley. ... *Yeah.* ... I talked to her three days ago; told her I'd see you: so "Hello" from her. ... *Yeah. Yeah.* ... Yeah. It was her younger brother who was on that helicopter.

1:02:32 JG: *How much contact did you have with your family back home--* ... None. ... *when you were on those tours?*

BC: None. ... *Letters?* ... If you write a letter it takes two weeks to get it. I had-- I had four letters prepared in case something happened. And I had-- Freeman was gonna take care of getting the word-- . And when I did go down on my second tour, General Burdette (he was a one star in the Pentagon), he contacted Arlene to tell her that I was down, and that I was alive, and that I was gonna be okay in the end. And that was the day after I went down. And then he called her every couple of days. And she's the one that told him-- she told him that I was-- my brother was in Japan. And next thing I know I'm-- because General Burdette was just that kind of a general. He was-- he loved his people. ... *Yeah.* ... And he would fly in my formation, and I would forget he's back there because he's so easy to work with. ... *[Laughs].* ... And I'd send him off on a log mission once in a while. ... *[Laughs].* ... And he'd tell me, no-- my

²³ Crew chief Donald Grella

boss didn't fly in any of my formations, but his boss was General Burdette—and he did. ... *Yeah*. ... And he was really a-- he was an aviator. ... *Yeah*. ... And he was-- he'd know everybody that's in the helicopter he flew in. And he'd remember them. And he'd stop by and say, "How's the family back in Omaha?" or wherever. And he would remember 'em. I wish I could have done that. I just wasn't that good at remembering names and-- but he did. And he meant it. He wasn't playing games. He had a tag on me, 'cause he probably knew I was gonna get in some kind of trouble, but-- ... Oh, all-- all the time. ... *Yeah*, well, it just happens. I guess better than not, eh?

1:04:39 JG: How much news did you receive about the war from home?

BC: We didn't get that much from-- my wife never-- never mentioned all the crap that was going on. But I-- when I got back in '66, we didn't leave the base in a uniform. We didn't go anywhere in uniform because people would do something stupid, and I would do something stupid. And that wouldn't be a good thing. So I never left the base. And today when I see the young troops in the airport in fatigues (whatever they call them, BVDs²⁴-- anyhow--), it just tickles the hell out of me. ... *Yeah*. ... Because that's making our trip home be right now. ... *Yeah*. ... They are being honored, they're being patted on the back, there's people going by and saying, "Thank you."

1:05:39 JG: What was your attitude toward being told you can't wear the uniform you're proud of?

BC: I had a choice. I could have worn it. The problem would have been I would have been in a fight at home. And I didn't need that. We actually-- it was our choice. We couldn't wear flight suits off post ever. We couldn't wear fatigues off post. But I wouldn't wear TWs²⁵, I wouldn't wear anything green, I wouldn't wear them off post because you got the same problem: Somebody will smart mouth or spit-- ... *Somebody gonna get hit*. ... *Yeah*. They're gonna have-- well, they're gonna be spittin' out of a different side of their mouth if they-- ... *[Laughs]*. ... Because that-- that's the way we felt. We weren't soldiers because we were unwilling to fight. Most of us understood you-- once in a while you have to fight. If it's at home I-- I'd have been just as happy about that. ... *Yeah*. ... Particularly once I found out what happened to my oldest boy.

1:06:46 JG: Were you aware of the political and social events and movements that were going on back here?

BC: Pretty much. I didn't listen to that stuff. You know, we had Armed Forces Radio (whatever the hell that damn thing was), and it was nothing but a bad morale factor for me 'cause they-- not only would they tell us all that other stuff, but then they'd play all those damned songs like "I Left My Heart in San Francisco²⁶"-- ... *[Laughs]*. ... "Put Your Head on My Pillow²⁷," "Back home in Indiana." I'm listening to this crap and then I finally get rid of my radio-- ... *[Laughs]*. ... because all it's doing is making me homesick. ... *Yeah*. ... And-- but the crud that was on there about what's going on, that made me unhappy. And-- but the music—I really had to get rid of the radio. ... So you threw the radio out? ... *Yeah*, got rid of it 'cause I couldn't-- when they played that song, "Put Your Head on My Pillow," that was just more than I could handle. There were a lot of late nights.

²⁴ BDUs: Battle Dress Uniforms

²⁵ Tropical Wears

²⁶ Tony Bennett (1962)

²⁷ Paul Anka, "Put Your Head On My Shoulder" (1963)

1:08:05 JG: Describe your return home—the first tour.

BC: The first tour I came back, picked up my wife and son in Seattle, went to Fort Carson, Colorado. And that's when I had that bad experience. But I wanted to keep going-- like the Armed Forces Staff College: I knew I had to keep getting my tickets punched. And I'd been going to college at night and on weekends. And so when I came back the next time I finally-- I was lying in the hospital for quite a while (about five months 'cause I had the--). ... *Cast.* ... My back was all broke up and the-- and so I-- the Army let me go to get my bachelor's degree. And then I got my master's before I got out. And that saved me because it made my career after I got out worth something. So I—my-- we had three sons, and all of 'em were Eagle Scouts. And all of them got master's degrees or better. My wife says she raised four boys. You can understand that. ... *Oh, I understand comp[lately].* ... You know her. Yeah. I think you fall in that group once in a while. ... *Yeah, every now and then.* ... I think so. ... *[Laughs].*

1:09:44 JG: *How much contact have you had with fellow veterans over the years?*

BC: Oh, I still have a lot of contact with-- ... *Yeah.* ... not necessarily guys that I served with, but guys that I had the same admirations for; guys that have gone-- and gone back to combat. I have-- we had 10 medal recipients from the War on—from the War on Terror and Afghanistan. We have no living recipients from Iraq. There's something wrong with that. So I think they'll go back and take a look, and maybe we'll find the ones that-- ... *It's a very-- that's a very hard war though--* ... Yup. ... *for a Medal of Honor--* ... Well-- ... *action* ... *Yeah.* ... *because 65 percent of our casualties came from somebody punching a cell phone button.* ... Yeah. The IEDs are-- but you also have hand grenades coming in. Leroy Petry²⁸ lost his hand up to here [indicates mid forearm]. He just got out of-- we've had a hell of a time keeping these guys in the service because they're treated like poster boys. ... *Yeah.* ... So the 10 we have all got out, except one.²⁹ ... *Yeah.* ... And I will tell you, he's gonna be alright because he just got promoted to major. He's from the Seattle area.

1:11:18 JG: *He's a Seattle captain?* ... *Yeah.* ... *Now major.* ... *But--* ... *He-- they had a hard time getting his straightened out.*

BC: Well, but he-- they sent him down to language school in Monterey still as a captain. And so you can't get out of there. You can't-- no general can send you out to be a poster boy 'cause you can't leave that school. ... *Yeah.* ... And now he's on his way to Chile. It's gonna be damn hard to get him there. ... *It's gonna be hard to get him there, too.* ... Then they promoted him to major. And he's a fine, fine-- ... *He is a fine guy.* ... And the rest of our guys are first class. I-- it makes you almost think that because they were so outstanding in their units, someone took the time to go ahead and write 'em up when they lost their hand to a hand grenade, or when they did the things that they did, because every one of 'em really deserves the award.

Jumping on a hand grenade is not a-- I don't know how you talk to the young troops. ... *You know--* ... I tell 'em-- ... *there's an action that I think they ought to go back-- and it's worth a DSC at least, and maybe the Medal—and it's a female³⁰ who--* ... Oh. ... *was in a truck convoy that was ambushed.* ... *Yeah?* ... *And she led the resistance against the enemy. She charged across the road. She got in the*

²⁸ MSG Leroy Arthur Petry

²⁹ MAJ William D. Swenson

³⁰ SGT Leigh Ann Hester

trench where the enemy were lined up. And she went down that thing and killed 'em all. And she killed 50-- I've never heard the story, but-- ... And they gave her a Silver Star. ... I'll be damned. ... Yeah. ...

Well, see the guys-- when I talk to young ones about jumping on hand grenades, for example, I say: "I don't think that's a good idea-- ... *It's a bad idea.* ... because, well yeah, what you ought to do is kick it away and dive on the floor. ... *Yeah. The other direction.* ... Yes. ... *[Laughs].* ... It's so-- that's exactly what I tell 'em. ... *Right.* ... And I say, "If we're in a room and you want to jump on it, I'll kick it toward you if there's no other place to go." ... *Exactly.* ... But they-- they all-- "What's that? What'd the colonel say?" ... *[Laughs].* ... I don't mean it, but I don't intend for them to jump on it. I think that the idea is kick it away from you and dive the other direction. And get on the floor. Sometimes I guess you can't do it, but-- ... *[Laughs].* ... that's the way I would like to see it done.

1:13:55 JG: Did you have any difficulty readjusting to life after combat?

BC: None. ... *None.* ... None. I'm a-- I'm-- I've been very strong on PTSD—fighting it. I believe it's PTS. I believe everybody has it in their life at some time. You can't get through life without losing a loved one or-- there's gonna be something happens that you get PTS. But you shouldn't call it PTSD because that makes it sound like it's a military thing, and this is not a military thing. And it's not a disorder. Now I have no problem with the VA doing whatever they-- they call it disorder 'cause they're gonna give a disability for it. But the average is not-- the way you get rid of PTS is for somebody to hug you up that loves you. And take you in their arms and say, "It's okay." And tell you you understand it is okay. You don't have to treat 'em like it's a military disease of some sort. So when-- I don't think the Army calls it PTS-D anymore; it's PTS. ... *Right.* ... And I'm for that.

And General Chiarelli³¹, who lives here in Seattle, is really strong on brain damage and PTS. He's working very hard at-- ... *Good man.* ... at that. And we-- in the Medal of Honor Society we give an award now to civilians that do things that are equivalent to what we get the medal for; we issue them an award for that kind of heroism. And there's a whole lot of people that do those kinds of things. ... *There are.* ... We had a hundred and some nominees at the last one. And I got to carry an award up to Connecticut where the six teachers died trying to save their 20 students. ... *Yeah.* ... And we awarded all six teachers' families the award for-- that we present. And that whole town has got PTS. ... *I believe it.* ... Yeah. You can't go by the school-- I was trying to convince them to tear it down. I understand they finally did. ... *Tore the school down?* ... Yeah. 'Cause there's no way that people driving by it aren't gonna-- that's gonna be in their minds. And it's better to tear it down and have a monument somewhere honoring them. ... *Yeah.* ... Yeah. Because what they did was tremendously heroic. ... *Yeah.* ... My teachers would have wanted to shoot me, not to-- . No, no. No. My favorite teacher said I was educated beyond my intelligence level as a sophomore. I think that's a terrible thing for a teacher to say. And don't put this on that-- .

1:17:12 JG: Is there any memory or experience from your service in Vietnam that has stayed with you through the years and had an effect-- lasting effect on your life?

³¹ GEN Peter W. Chiarelli

BC: Yeah. My love for the troops and the great honor it was for me to be a commander, and to have them. And to this day, now that I have the award, it's a tremendous honor. But it doesn't belong to me. And it's-- the greatest honor was being able to lead those troops and support the troops that I wasn't leading, the ones that expected so much from us. And we expected so much from us, too. And today the infantry that we supported remember us fondly. And I remember them the same way.

1:18:13 JG: Did your experience in Vietnam affect the way you think about the veterans coming home from combat today?

BC: Oh, I think so. But I've been involved with veterans coming home so much-- I've never been away from it. So I don't know how much Vietnam impacted me, but I know how much the infantry impacted me (that I was supporting). And I know how much being able to lead-- command our troops affected me. Because that's the greatest honor you can have. ... *Yeah.*

1:19:02 JG: How do you think the Vietnam War is remembered in our society today?

BC: I don't think it is remembered much. I think that the people who did the spitting are ashamed. They're now in their sixties or more. And those of us that they did it to see how they're treating our young ones today, and we think that's great. ... *[Laughs]*. ... So there isn't any push for-- to go back and look at Vietnam much. You don't see anyone blowing up an armory or attacking a base; you don't see anybody spitting on the troops; you don't see any of that stuff on the people from Iraq and Afghanistan. You-- every now and then you hear somebody making the comments about it. ... *Well, they got four million people who claim to be Vietnam veterans.* ... It was 10 million. ... *10 million?* ... *Yeah.* ... *Whatever. Where were they?* ... That was a-- I don't know, but it was in the census. ... *In the census, yeah. Yeah.* ... But that's a great book: *Stolen Valor*³². ... *Yeah.* ... It picked up on a lot of the guys that pulled that stuff. ... *Jug Burkett*³³. ... *Yeah.*

1:20:41 JG: In the end, what did that war mean to you and your generation—our generation?

BC: I think it taught us that not everybody is going to be reasonable; not everybody is going to feel the way we do. The people who-- who blamed us that were fighting this stuff have finally been pushed off to the side I think. But we should never send our troops into combat with restrictions on the border. We should never send our troops into combat with a restriction on use of the weapons that we have. If we need to kill Saddam, send a shooter. Don't send a-- don't send-- ... *Division of infantry.* ... *No.*

And we went down to Panama, and took Noriega,³⁴ and tried him for drugs that aren't even illegal in the State of Washington anymore. And we sent large sized units down there to do it; to get him. And we had people in USSOUTHCOM I think, stationed in Panama that knew where he was. So it wasn't a question-- my gut feeling is that we didn't want him; that we thought he would go to Cuba. And they would have had a little problem with him. ... *[Laughs]*. ... But as it turned out, he tried to surrender to the Papal Nuncio of the Catholic-- *The Papal Nuncio [laughs]*. ... *Yeah.* And they turned him down. So we ended up with him. ... *And we gave him to the French.* ... *Yes: as a prisoner. And so-- that's weird.* ...

³² B.G. Burkett and Glenna Whitley, *Stolen Valor: How the Vietnam Generation Was Robbed of Its Heroes and Its History* (1998)

³³ 1LT B.G. "Jug" Burkett

³⁴ Manuel Antonio Noriega Moreno (1938-2017), and the 1989 invasion of Panama.

It's very strange. ... Yup. But I don't want to ever see us go into a fight that we tie the hands of the guys doing the fighting. We've got too many elected officials that have never been in the military. And I think that that's a-- that's a sad statement. Because they can't know what it's like if they haven't been involved.

1:23:04 JG: Have you been to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, DC?

BC: Oh, about every year. ... *About every year. ... Yeah. ... What are your impressions when you go there?* ... Well, E3 is our-- all of our people, that whole section of the wall is the battle in the X-Ray, in the Ia Drang. And then right next to it is the four guys that were MIAs. They're right next to it and connected to 'em. And we have-- I thought I'd hate that because it was black, and it was gonna be stuck in the ground, and all the bad things I'd heard about it. But the day you go and see it-- ... *Powerful. ... it's tremendously powerful. And you know that every year you can go back and still see that-- and the guys are there, and you tell 'em hello again, thanking 'em for doing the best they could do. But that's a tremendous experience.*

1:24:19 JG: Have you heard about the 50th Anniversary of the Vietnam War Commemoration project?

BC: Yes I have. And I'm 100 percent behind it. ... *Good. ... Yeah. I think it's great. And I think it's one of the things that-- that when they do the 100th, you guys are not gonna be able to do the-- be topped. I think you'll be able to interview a lot more people than they'll be able to. So-- ... I don't think I'm gonna be around. I don't know about you. ... I don't think you will either, but-- ... [Laughs]. ... but somebody might want to do the 100th. ... Yeah. Maybe.*

1:24:57 JG: Thank you, Colonel Crandall. ... Thank you, Joe Galloway—the only civilian ever to receive the Bronze Star. ... [Laughs] From the US Army. Marines gave a couple out. ... Did they? ... Yeah. ... Well, see, it's not trustworthy.