

BOB KREBS, ARMY -- END OF WAR-- "72 -'73

Bob: Okay, my name is Bob Krebs, it's K-R-E-B-S. I'm originally from the Baltimore area. I was born and raised for a couple years at the foot of TV Hill in Woodberry. My parents moved out to Rodgers Forge, and I went to school in that area. Graduated from Towson High School in 1965, next year will be our fiftieth reunion. I went to Baltimore Junior College, and then transferred to the old Towson State College. The draft was still going on then. I had what we found out to be later a middle of the road draft number, but every ... and literally every business I went to see they all backed and they asked you about your draft number.

Many were sort of maybe interested in hiring me, but I guess they were afraid of the hiring and then the training, and then getting a greetings letter from Uncle Sam. My dad basically said, "Why don't you just get it out of the way?" That's pretty much what I did. I enlisted in the Army. Come from a long ... I guess that sort of happens with Navy and Marine Corps, Air Force people. My grandfather was in World War I, my grandfather was in the Army. My dad was in World War II in the Army, and so I guess the grandson enlisted in the Army.

Speaker 2: Okay, so give me the years. I don't think I heard the ... and did you graduate from college?

Bob: Yes. Yes I did. I graduated from college, and I went into the service in 1970. I went through basic training at Fort Dix in the winter. You wouldn't think, but it was cold up there. They had us in these old, what we called World War II barracks. They were constantly waking us up in the middle of the night, and telling us to take your clothes out of the lockers, and hang them on the windows. To keep whatever heat we had in, in. From there I went to ... I really caught a break, I went to the intelligence school at Fort Holabird, graduated from that. We were transferred, about half the class was sent to Fort Bragg. I went down to Fort Bragg, North Carolina, was attached to a intelligence unit down there.

There wasn't really a whole lot going on, and we were doing what they call down there painting rocks. We were just sort of doing almost busy work. It's been this many years later, so I guess I can say what my unit was doing. Was looking for places where helicopters could be inserted into Cuba, if we ever decided to go back. They war game everything okay, and so that's what I was doing for a number of months. Then, my CO comes up to me one day, and he says, "They want you over at Womack Hospital, and go see Major so and so over there," I forget the gentleman's name. But they had pulled all the records of soldiers at Fort Bragg who had a college degree, and they were starting what they called Operation Awareness.

They were starting a program for guys who were coming back from Vietnam with a drug problem. This was their last shot, literally. They had been in all kinds of problems. They were ... been court-martialed, but they volunteered to come into this program. If they finished the program they would get a general discharge, but it was almost like basic training again. I wasn't a doctor, I wasn't the psychologist to talk to these guys. We were just there to monitor their behavior twenty-four hours a day. We had twenty-four hour shifts. I really liked that, I felt like I was really doing some good for the guys that were coming back that had really seen some nasty action, and were trying to cope as best they could. But I got my orders for Vietnam in December of 71.

So I really never saw anybody that came into our clinic make it all the way through. I really hope some guys did, but I don't know. I got my orders for Vietnam, that would have been I guess in the beginning of winter 71. They gave me some leave, so I ended up staying home at Christmas time; again that was a great break. I reported to Fort Lewis, Washington State. I left from there, and even that was iffy because every morning before they dismissed you there was a formation. Where they were pulling people out of the formation about who had orders, but now the orders were rescinded. I kept figuring maybe I won't go.

The formations in the morning kept getting smaller, and smaller. Till finally one morning they just said, "You guys will be going over to the Air Force base, and catching the flight to Vietnam. From that Air Force base we did the great circle route. I ended up in Alaska in February, they made us deplane and walk across the tarmac. Everybody was trying to be real, I guess, macho about it, and not run, but after a few steps you could almost hear your uniform start to crack. We ended up trotting if not running to get into the terminal, get out of the Alaska weather in February.

Got on that plane, and flew to Nakota, Japan. Before we took off there, there were people crawling all of the wings of the plane, deicing the wings. I'm figuring this is great, I haven't even got there yet, and we're in trouble. Finally made it there, I landed in Cam Ranh Bay. Another formation, they put people up into groups, sent me up to Da Nang. I was in Da Nang for a short period of time. Had my first rocket attack in Da Nang, and that's after being in country just a day or two. So, you go from the Northwest United States, and in a matter of ... say a day and a half you're being rocketed. That was a shock.

Speaker 2: Let me ask you a question. Obviously the war really is in a draw down phase. We know we're going to be leaving pretty soon.

Bob: Yes sir.

Speaker 2: What is the general morale? The feeling of the fellows who are still being sent over there at this late date? What did you talk about among yourself?

Bob: Just about everybody had the cartoon with the soldier in the rowboat rowing away from the shores of Vietnam saying, "Will the last person to leave Vietnam please turn out the light." Just about everybody had that. The other one you saw was the boots, the combat boots with the helmet sitting on top of the boots. With sort of like the cartoon eyes underneath the rim of the helmet saying, "Short." Meaning the time is short. They still, I never ran into somebody who did not do their job. Well, wait a minute, I take it back. There was one or two that were pretty disgusted with everything.

They had been in the Americal Division was, I think, Central Highlands, the middle of Vietnam. When they were sent home, some of them I believe, still had a few months to go on their tour, and instead of being sent home with their division they were sent down to Mui Ne, which was the 3rd Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division. Some of those guys had seen some nasty action, and wanted to go home, and now they're being sent to another unit. They weren't happy, but I can understand that, I can really ... but even though they might not have been that happy they still did their job. They just ... everybody grumped, well that's just given. They may have grumped a little bit more, but they still did their job as we all did. I can honestly say that, yeah.

Speaker 2: I guess the thing that would go through people's minds is, my gosh this war is ending, and yet I don't want to have the notoriety of being the last person to die in this failed war. I mean, did you sense that? Did you hear a lot of that?

Bob: No. It might have been on people's tongues, but nobody ever really talked about that. We lost one helicopter pilot very close to the end. Then we also lost a gentleman that I really didn't know, but they said he was ... from what I was led to believe, they said he was probably the last active duty death in Vietnam. But nobody really ever talked about that, they didn't. They still did their jobs, as a matter of fact, I think I might have told you before. I was driving my detachment boss, a major, someplace once, and just off the top of his head he goes, "Bob, what do you see?"

I hated when he did that, because you never knew what you were supposed to answer. I gave him a couple of goof ball answers, and he says, "No." He says, "Tell me what you see." I started rattling off Vietnamese, Vietnamese in Jeeps, the little scooters pedicabs, the water buffalo and things, and he says, "No." He says, "No Americans." When he was there as a first or second lieutenant, a number of years before, he said, "There were Americans everywhere." He says, "You couldn't go any place without seeing a bunch of Americans." When I was

there, even though there was still thousands of them all through the country, you didn't see Americans.

I didn't have anything to base that on, I was never there earlier on where I saw a lot of Americans. I just didn't ... I just thought the few that I was saw was routine. When he says, "There's no Americans," I was sort of taken aback a little bit by that.

Speaker 2: Were the staffs that were still over there, were they skeleton staffs? Just was there just lots of material, and lots of things still lingering that were reminiscent of what had happened a few years earlier?

Bob: Yes. I was stationed ... we finally left Da Nang, and I ended up in Bien Hoa. Bien Hoa was where the 3rd Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division was still there. They were still doing some missions, they were still being sent out. My unit was asked ... they needed some people for flight status. For observers to take pictures, things along that line. When you're young and stupid you sort of have a ... the word sort of slips my mind now I'm sorry, that you're infallible. That you won't be hurt, so a couple of us volunteered for flight status. They gave us our physical, and a couple days later said, "That's the helicopter you'll be assigned to. When that flies a mission you go with it." That's what I did.

We flew over places that looked like there would be little ponds, but they were prior bombing missions that had filled up with the monsoon rain, and now they're all over the place. I did see wrecked airplanes and helicopters, I guess that had been shot down months or years before. They took the parts that they could salvage from them, and just left the junk. I'm trying to think ...

Speaker 2: Well now this ... Go ahead.

Bob: My unit was being phased down. The major that was in charge of that was being sent home, but a couple guys in my detachment were also sent home. They replaced the major who was leaving with this major that I was driving around for a while. They were still doing a job, but with a reduced staff. Sometimes I feel I was lucky, and then maybe not so lucky. I did a number of things at the end there, that probably another individual ... or those missions or jobs may have been spread out over four or five individuals at the peak of the US involvement.

It kept me busy, lots of lost sleep, lots of war stories to talk about. If I ever get with some individuals who are so inclined to that, I know individuals who aren't inclined to do that, and you have to respect that. They saw some nasty stuff. I was lucky enough that I saw some stuff, but not the nasty stuff.

Speaker 2: What were some of the jobs and functions you did in this period of time?

Bob: Originally, when I was assigned to the unit I was ... well what I was at trained at Fort Holabird was called image interpretation. It was regular black and white photographs, infrared photographs. There was a thing called a moving target indicator, MTIs. At the end there though, there wasn't a lot of call for that. What another piece of the detachment needed was, what they called order of battle analysts, and they asked me would I like to be on the job trained into that. I wasn't doing anything where I was, so I figured well okay. They showed me how to do that, a real throw the oatmeal against the wall, and see what sticks type of training, and so I did that for a while.

With the reports that we had I briefed when they would insert a Ranger team into an area. I was supposed to show them any photographs that I had taken, or that other people had taken of the area. Plus any reports that we would have had from Vietnamese that had been in the area. Just so the guys know what the hell they were getting into. Very late in the game, I had a really young hard charger come to me, and said, "Major so in so sent me with my team." There was him and four or five guys with him. He says, "This is my last mission in Vietnam." He says, "Send me to a hot one." I said, "Buddy, if I had any call I wouldn't send you anywhere."

He had already had the coordinates of the mission where he was supposed ... the set of coordinates where he was supposed to go. I gave him the best information I possibly could, and he left that night for his ... him and his little squad left that night. They were some really really super hard charging guys. I never heard what happened to him. I guess all that was, what do they call it classified after you came back, but I hope he did well. I had my fingers crossed for him.

Speaker 2: During this period it was supposed to be a Vietnamization of the war. Did you see the ARVN troops? Did they seem to be acting in force, and with the energy that they were supposed to be picking up the slack with the Americans really turning the war effort over to them?

Bob: What I saw yes. I was there with the 1st Cav for what they called; I think it was the Good Friday Invasion. You got the impression that things were winding down, and it was just a walk in the park. For some reason the North Vietnamese decided they were going to come through a little piece of Cambodia, called the Parrot's Beak. It was almost sort of like it was pointed at Saigon, and they came through there. We didn't know they were coming, they overran a provincial capital very close to the Cambodian border. They came down, and to another provincial capital like a county seat, and they came to another place called An Loc.

The ARVN met them there, and with US air power knocked the crap out of them. They took a nasty beating, ARVN really performed very well. I was not assigned to one of those ARVN infantry units. After the 3rd Brigade went home my major asked a couple of us he says, "Guys." He says, "You can go home," he said, "But I would like you to consider going with him to this other unit." It was called the 3rd Regional Assistance Command, they called it TRAC, and there was a working relationship with ARVN. I met a number of sergeants, senior sergeants, maybe a couple low ranking officers.

I never saw any big high ranking ARVN officers, but the folks that I dealt with. I didn't speak Vietnamese, but they spoke English pretty well. They had been doing this for ten years, and they were savvy enough and hardcore enough that they were able to survive. I had a couple guys in my unit that used to get mad, and they'd say, "That." Can I just say about anything I want, and you can edit it out?

Speaker 2: Sure.

Bob: They would say, "That damned gooner can't speak English," and I would say, "Well how much Vietnamese do you know?" They would get pissed off at me, and things like that, but that was just where I was sort of coming from. I went with this major to this unit called TRAC, and you know that they actually, they sort of booted up my responsibilities. Now, when I was on these missions and would see things, or would interview or debrief pilots, I was authorized to make the first recommendations for B-52 Arc Light missions. The ground war for the Americans was really phasing out, but the air war was still going strong. I was just an E5, SPEC 5, and I was an liaison with a Air Force captain.

I would give him the coordinates, the box, and I'd give him what we had saw, what other people had seen, and he would say, "Thank you," and disappear into his little compartment. They never let me go into their area, he always met me at the door. Which was fine, I don't mind that. Many of my Arc Light missions were secondary. If for some reason the first, the primary mission was for whatever reason scrubbed, they would send the three bombers to a secondary mission, and some of mine were hit. As a matter of fact, one of the units that I flew with was a few miles from ... TRAC was located at a place called Clay Plantation, but the 1st Aviation Brigade was still flying out of a very reduced perimeter back at Bien Hoa.

These guys had said, "There's this stuff going on out here, can you do something about it? You know, if you're any good." I wrote the mission up, and gave it to the captain, and my goodness that night there was a mission. Just a couple clicks away from where these guys were sleeping. When I went over the next day they were really pissed. They said, "You scared the living [ja-he-zus 00:22:56] out of

us." He said, "It rattled us right out of our bunks," and I said, "I'm sorry, I should of told you, but I didn't know it was going to be a primary mission, most of our things are secondary." Now, you know the stuff that you give me does just not get pissed away. Somebody at least to me will do something with it, and I'm sure the captain from the Air Force will do something with it.

It's just a matter of how they prioritize the mission as it goes up the chain of command. To hear an Arc Light mission, it was three B-52s. They would hit a ... say a half mile by a mile and a half rectangle, and there wasn't much left when these big guys got finished with their job.

Speaker 2: The interesting thing from my reading of Arc Light was that certainly in the early years of the war it went clear up to Johnson. Who he was literally micromanaging the targets of what was allowed to be bombed, and what was not going to be allowed to be bombed. Primarily to not in sense the Chinese or the Soviets from coming into this war, and starting World War III. I understand that under Nixon, by the time that he was in command, and now we're getting down into this period of 70. That he finally ceded the control to the soldiers, the Air Force.

Who were making the decisions of what to bomb, as opposed to a politician back in White House, eight thousand miles away. Did you get that sense? That you guys were finally in charge of at least the bombing campaign at that point?

Bob: Yes and no. I don't know what the chain of command was after I gave the captain this, you know my intel. It seemed to be things happened pretty quickly, if there was something that had to be acted on. I don't know, but I'm sure it didn't go back to Nixon or Henry the K or any of those people. It may have went as far as CinCPac was back in Hawaii. I had one chance interaction with them, if you want I can tell you that it was sort of silly. I think the way that they were able to turn the missions around, or would happen pretty quickly, I'm sure they kept it pretty close to the vest, and pretty close in house.

Speaker 2: In fact, that what you mentioned here a minute ago is that that was one of the ... I never saw such a crazy quilt of control. You'd think that guys that were there in Vietnam were calling the shots, but yet there was an admiral back in Hawaii in CinCPac that was actually head of some of the operations in Vietnam. I'm not sure how things ever even really happened efficiently.

Bob: I would imagine early on when there were, "A lot of Americans" there, there were commanders of this and deputy commanders of that, and generals and full colonels running around all over the place. When I was there [inaudible 00:26:15], trac was being run at the time by a three star general, and I saw him all the time. I saw his special assistant, was like a first lieutenant, or a second

lieutenant right out of West Point. Probably in the past they'd of been so far up the ladder that you would have never seen ... they'd of been ghosts. With everything being so reduced, case in point, it was this general, his chief of staff I guess was like the lieutenant.

I'm sure there were very few chief of staffs that were a lieutenant. There was lieutenant colonel, there was my major, there was two staff sergeants, two E6s, and then just a couple of us E5s ... SPEC 5s, and that was pretty much it. It was doing this third regional assistance command job. Before I forget, let me tell you about my little thing with CinCPac. When we flew there was a Loach, a light observation helicopter that sort of buzzed around. These poor fellows were actually trying to draw fire. My wife's cousin was one of these guys, and early on he was killed. There was a Loach buzzing the enemy, there was a gunship a little bit further up just waiting for something to do. These guys were a little bit nuts.

These gunship pilots were some really crazy characters. Good guys, extremely good pilots, and really knowledgeable and very Army, but they were a little nuts. A little bit higher up was the CnC ship, the command ship which is what I was on. Also, if we would see something odd they had these red reaction forces that they would insert. One day, the Loach flew over this area where there was laundry hanging out. Laundry, with these bunkers that we thought were sort of abandoned. The guy reports this, we see it he circles back, and the laundry's gone. First you see it, somebody was dumb enough to put it up, and then when you go back they've been dumb enough to take it down.

They went in, hit the area put some guys on the ground, see if we could get any documents or things. Low and behold they bring back this tube. It's about yay long, what's that three and a half feet, four feet, and I can't make the circle, I'm sorry but maybe three inches or so in diameter. There's a little clear plastic dome on the front, and these little fins. We're not the smartest people in the world, so we go, "What the hell is this?" We take it back, hang it on the radio room wall, as we would hang other things. One time we intercepted a courier, and one of the rounds from the gunship wedged into his AK-47. We couldn't get the banana clip out, and there's a round in there so ... Anyway, getting back to the story.

We hang this thing on the wall, but I just happened to put it in my little report that was given to this general the next morning, every morning he got a briefing, about the unit finding this thing. Next thing I know my major, who was a ... he was a soldier soldier. He was a major, and he made you cut your hair and things like, but he still was one of the GIs type of guy. He goes, "Bob, tell me about this tube you guys found," so I tell him about it. He disappears, and he came back a couple hours later, and he says, "General so and so wants you to go get that, and have somebody fly you down to Saigon, and somebody will meet you at such and such a place, and that's all I'm supposed to tell you." "Okay, boss."

I go get it, take it down there. This guys come out of this prefab metal building that everybody that's been there has seen, and we had it bouncing around in the back of this Jeep. He takes it, and he goes, "Guys this is one of the first operational SA-7s that we've been able to find." It was a shoulder launched missile, that the North Vietnamese were using now with the helicopters. We had it hanging on a wall, we got it bouncing around the Jeep. You know, the damned thing could ... Never said I was smart right? Anyway, that order came direct from CinCPac.

When I got back I told my major I said, "Okay, it's been delivered, was that what he said it was?" He goes, "Yeah," he says, "That order came right from CinCPac." When we briefed the general he about jumped out of his chair, called somebody who called somebody, and went to them, and it came right back to us. That was my one brush with the really high echelons of the Vietnam War, sitting back in Hawaii.

Speaker 2: I imagine you saw a number of the absurdities of war. Some of the kind of crazy things that go on that shouldn't but do.

Bob: When the armistice was signed in Paris. I think it was signed on the 26th, 27th or so, to go in effect that midnight. Well, that would have been the next in Vietnam. There was an international control commission that was going to take over, and sort of be a buffer between the Americans and the North Vietnamese and the VC. Ships, Canadians, Hungarians, Indonesians, and Poles, that was the membership of this international control commission. They had to paint three big wide white stripes on their helicopters, and the first time we saw one of these, and I had a picture I just never thought to bring for you.

First time we saw one of these, a couple of us gave each other the elbow, and said, "I would not want to fly in that thing," with these big white stripes over some jumbo canopy somewhere. That's just like a huge bulls eye. That was, I guess, one of the absurdities I'd seen. Off the top of my head I can't really think of much that somebody else wouldn't recognize as just the normal craziness that went on behind the scenes.

Speaker 2: You mentioned, because at this time those Paris peace talks were going on. Trying to get each side to finally agree to what would become the final ... end of the war between these, the North and the South. I think I remember, it was right around ... The North was just stubborn as the devil on they wanted to leave troops in the South, they wanted to not have to dismantle their army, and were not budging at all at the table. I believe Nixon, and it may be part of the Arc Light bombing, he got so frustrated that he ordered bombing resumed. I think it was Christmas eve of 72, and only within a week or two of this they suddenly were

back to the table, and getting off of their high horses. Were you there at that time?

Bob: I was there at that time, but I believe that was missions they were flying against North Vietnam.

Speaker 2: Right, right.

Bob: Really, the joke was pound them back in to the third world, but they were already third world. You can only blow up a wooden bridge, or a dirt road so many times. I did not see an increase in my area, because we were still doing the helicopter missions. We had an aircraft carrier sitting off the coast, I don't know which one it was, I'm sorry. The Navy was flying some missions, we actually called in a couple of Navy Phantoms when our air ordinance was not available at the time. I also saw them from a distance, we could see with binoculars across the way that something was going on at the Air Force base, Bien Hoa Air Force Base, and they had trucks out there.

They were foaming this runway, just piles and piles of this foam. It looked like your mother's washing machine had overrun itself. Then we saw a Navy Phantom, you could always tell with the drooped tail, flew across sort of wobbling, trailing a little smoke. It made a come around, and he hit the runway and just disappeared into this foam. The foam was some kind of a fire suppression, so he wouldn't burst into flames or something. Like I said, we still had this aircraft carrier that was doing backup for us. We still had the secondary B-52 missions, so the Nixon thing I think was directed directly at North Vietnam. If I'm wrong ...

Speaker 2: I think that's correct.

Bob: ... but I think was straight North Vietnam.

Speaker 2: You're in this, this one year tour?

Bob: Yes.

Speaker 2: In 72 to 73?

Bob: Yes.

Speaker 2: Were you with the literally the last troops that were leaving the country, and literally turning out the light, so to speak?

Bob: Almost. We didn't think that there would be any, that the Paris Peace Accords would affect us. Because of, we'd get the newspapers that somebody's parents would send back, and we found out that the North Vietnamese were even arguing about the shape of the table. We're figuring, well if they're doing that we're going to be here a while. It almost seemed like it was a ... happened so fast that everybody's going, "Woe, what the hell." Everybody was given an X plus day. The signing of the Peace Accords plus so many days is when you would be authorized to head to Saigon. You'd have orders to come home, I had an X plus ten day.

I can't remember what I had for breakfast, but there's a number of things that you can always remember for things like that, so I had an X plus ten day. It was just surreal, one minute you're planning these missions, and involved in some of this ground interdiction, and shooting up trails, and bunkers and things like this. The next minute there's a couple helicopters from another unit flying overhead trailing red white and blue smoke. Totally cool, it's like this is being filmed on some Monty Python thing right? Pretty much that was it, it just ended. We started burning things, burning files not burning things. Turning equipment in, we were turning a lot of equipment over to the South Vietnamese.

There was a school a little Vietnamese school on the perimeter of our base. I had never been there, but I got a box, and just started throwing pads of paper, and pens and pencils and rulers, and I had a box. A nice little box, little cardboard box full of stuff, and after I did that I just walked across the compound. I walked into this little Vietnamese school, well knocked on the door and then I walked in. All the little kids were startled, because I was 6'1", 6'2" back then, and all these little ... and they just couldn't figure what had gone wrong. I just walked up and gave the teacher this box of stuff that we weren't going to use, and she was just dumbfounded. I just turned around and walked away, and that was about the last thing I did for Vietnam.

Oh, I did go down ... well I had to go down to Saigon, but now guys are coming into this Camp Alpha. You probably heard that, that was where you got your last orders, and they inspected your baggage for drugs and weapons, and things like that. A lot of these guys are coming into Camp Alpha, and it fell apart a little part. I didn't exactly leave on the tenth day later. We had to do something, so we almost like Mash or whatever, like you were talking about. We got a Jeep, and figured let's go cruise around. We were just driving around the area, and here comes this ... We stopped at this intersection, here comes this gray ... I guess Navy was gray vehicles, because Army was pretty much green.

This gray, I guess we would call it now an SUV goes passed, two of them, and in the van are these guys with these pith helmets. I almost couldn't even speak,

and one of the guys I was with he goes, "Are they North Vietnamese, or Viet Cong that are being driven into the area?" I guess that has some lower level talks about the ... implementing the Paris Peace Accords. I got a picture of that, but it's not really clear if you want to see it. I was just ... I'm almost still flabbergasted to see that. It just happened, blink blink blink, and it was over.

Speaker 2: What was the mood of the Vietnamese people in Saigon? Was there joy, or was there anxiety, and certainly with all the Americans leaving we certainly had, if nothing else, had an enormous economic effect on their country. Give me your take on what you saw among the people in the city.

Bob: It looked like a little bit of happiness, but I think under the skin there was a lot of anxiety. They had been doing this, if you figure for the French, and then the Japanese, and then back to the French and the [inaudible 00:42:09]. So they've been doing this for what thirty, forty years or so. I think many of them just figured that this was going to go into a new phase of the Vietnam/American War. I don't know what else to tell you there. I didn't really talk to anybody face to face after a certain number of days, but actually after seeing these two possibly North Vietnamese with the pith helmets; I think the guys understand what I mean by that, drive passed us.

We just sort of went back to Camp Alpha, and waited for our time to leave. When that happened, another little quick story. We got in line ... line up to leave, and then you figure you're getting on the bus to take you to the plane. They dumped your whole duffel bag, went through it one more time, no drugs, no pornography, no weapons, anything like that. There was a couple guys that were foolish enough to try and do that, and they got hauled out somewhere. After they dumped all our stuff, put it back in the duffel bag, go out to the bus. Which isn't your traditional bus; it's got a lot of wire across the glass for grenades or whatever.

The bus takes us to the plane, we get on the plane, and again it's still a little bit surreal. The stewardess or somebody, somebody said that there were reports of sniper fire at the end of the runway. Just put another notch in your seatbelt and hold on. The pilot of this, I guess it was a traditional air, the 707 back then or something? I'm not familiar, but he goes to the taxi way, and normally if you'd be leaving BWI or [inaudible 00:44:24] something you'd taxi, turn, stopped. Pulled out on the runway, turned and stopped, and then taken off. This guy goes down the taxi way fast enough, and I was on the right side, that when he turned I thought the wing was going to hit the ground.

He held his turn till he got to the runway, and just accelerated from there. That was pretty much, I guess, the end of the surreal Vietnam experience. A Flying

Tiger Airlines pilot, and the guys know who that is, and you do too, acted almost like a fighter pilot to take this airliner off the Tan Son Nhut runway. Hey, whatever, we were done.

Speaker 2: Just out of curiosity, in that year we all know that most of the troops got an R&R during their year tour, at least one. Did you get out of country once during that year period?

Bob: Yes, I did. Didn't think about an R&R, but we had a compound where we came to at the night, or whenever missions were done. There was a few fellows in there, and it was protected by a wire fence with an MP, and a push button combination lock. We dropped off our reports and things in there, and then they wrote them up during the night for the general's brief in the morning. I come back from a mission, pushed the buttons, nothing happened. I guess it was like getting a wrong number or something with a phone. I stepped back, and I did it slower, and nothing happened. I figured okay, three's the charm, I did it the third time and nothing happened. You're tired, you're dirty, you're hungry, you just don't want this last aggravation.

I stepped back, and in best TV cop drug raid, I kicked the door open. It wasn't a big thick door, it was maybe two pieces of plywood okay? I walk in, and guys are reaching for their guns, for their weapons. I walk in I said, "It's just me." My major was sitting at his desk, because he's the one that did the final briefing notes for the general, and he just goes ... So I walked over, and I stood there and he says, "What the hell was that?" I said, "Well, I used the number sequence," He goes, "Oh." He says, "We changed that today," He goes, "Nobody told you?" I said, "I've been gone, I was out."

He goes, "Okay, but another thing," he said, "How long have you been here?" He says, "You were here when I got here back with the 3rd Brigade," he says, "And you're still here." He says, "Did you have R&R yet?" I said, "No, never thought about it." He says, "Well you go to so and so, and you get them right now." He says, "To right you up some orders," and he says, "I want your ass out of here." He says, "I don't want to see you for a week." Well, I didn't have any money, my checks were being sent home to my parents, because they never knew where you were going to be, it was still a paper check. Where am I going to go?

The Australians had pulled their troops out a little bit before that. We always said Nixon threw a hissy fit, and said people couldn't go to Australia for R&R. I had heard that was really nice to go to Australia, and they said that was great. Now I had my choice of Bangkok or Hawaii, and I had decided I would go to Hawaii, but still no money. Here's a nice little story for you, things that little gray cells hadn't thought about in years. I went to try to get some money at the

finance shop down in what Bob Hope called, The Puzzle Palace East. The whole MACV Compound in Saigon.

I go, I walk in there completely with just a few military MPCs military script, and I asked the guy, and I said, "I'm supposed to go on R&R, I got these orders but I don't have any money, can I get an advance?" He says, "There are no advances on pay for R&R. You should have planned appropriately." While I'm talking, this guy sitting at a desk sort of lifts his head up, and looks over at me, and does this, you know like ... So the fellow who told me I couldn't get an advance he leaves, and I pretended to leave and then I stopped. This guy walks over, and he says, "Are you from Baltimore?" I said, "Yeah." He says, "I am too," and he says, "I could tell by your accent."

He goes, "How much do you want?" I said, "I don't know," I said, "I've never been to Hawaii." He goes, "How about five hundred bucks?" Well, I'd never had five hundred dollars in my hand in my life, and he writes this little ... some kind of little piece of paperwork, and he says, "Take this to the cashier, and have a nice trip," and he just turned around and walked away. So I took it, and I'm thinking this is a joke right? I took it to this cashier, and the guy gives me these greenbacks. I hadn't seen greenbacks in eight or nine months, because you weren't allowed to have because of the black market and stuff. I got this flight that went to Hawaii, and it was terrific. I'm flying back ... Oh, another story is that okay?

Speaker 2: Sure.

Bob: We get on, I believe it was United Airlines ... United? Pan Am, Pan Am had a regular route that went, I believe, Bangkok, Saigon, Manila, Guam, Hawaii and San Francisco, and then you just turn around, it was just their normal route. We get on this jet, this actual airliner instead of a Flying Tiger Airline, and there's five or six of us that are going to Hawaii. The rest of the plane is empty, literally. There's good Army guys, military guys, we're sitting in the five or six seats that we were assigned. The stewardess walks back, looks at us, shakes her head and goes, "Guys spread out." Like The Three Stooges, spread out.

We got up, and lifted up the armrests on a couple of things, and laid down, and put two or three seat belts on, and went to Hawaii. It was just so funny, this four or five guys sitting there in this completely empty airplane, or jet airliner. Coming back, that was hard to do. Coming back I was flying back, and when the first seatbelt light came on for coming back into Tan Son Nhut I was just looking out. Again, there wasn't many people on this plane, but we spread out, and you could sort of sense somebody standing here. I turned around, and there was this stewardess looking sort of over my shoulder, out the window.

Of course, from the air Vietnam was green, and with blue water, and with all the [inaudible 00:52:59], and she says, "That's lovely down there." She goes, "Look at all those little ponds," and I said, "Ma'am they're not ponds, they're just bomb craters that have been filled in with water," and she got pale. She just walked away, but, "Look at all the little ponds."

Speaker 2: Did you ever have a chance to see any of the beautiful areas of that country in this somewhat ... I can't say somewhat relaxed mode of the draw down, because obviously there was still a war on. Did you ever see any of those areas?

Bob: Yes, I did. Again, it was probably because just being young and stupid. When things were winding down, but before the peace talks, before the peace treaty was signed. Me and this other fellow who had transferred over that the major asked to transfer over with him. We had stand down day, they weren't going to fly, it was maintenance and things like that. We just grabbed a Jeep, and just figured we were ... The plantation sat right off of Highway 1, so we knew Highway 1 South went into Saigon, let's head up this way. We knew it was Xuan Loc, and some other places.

We drove up there, literally with the few people that we say just staring at is like we were aliens, which we pretty much were. We had the dog in the picture with us, he came along. We were just acting like tourists. It was green, it was pretty. I mean there were farmers, and water buffalo, and rice paddies and things. We came to this T, and the right one went east, and figured it wasn't too much further till we got to the beach. But, figured lets head north a little bit. We drove north a little bit, and we do have our weapons, we're not completely stupid. We drove a little bit, and next thing we hadn't gone too many kilometers, too many miles, and this small tank.

There was a field, some kind of a plowed field, and then a tree line. Some woods, heavy woods, and this tank comes out of the woods with a bunch of guys on either side of the tank. It was ARVN, and I told this guy, I said, "I think we've gone a little too far." We turned around, and as they say, "Didi Moud," back the other way. I think I've got a picture of that too. A couple of ... My boss had been there before, and he had some contacts in this other little town. They weren't allowed to drive, officers weren't allowed to drive, and he just said, "Would you ..." This was a major saying, "Bob, would you mind driving me?" That's just like he was, he really didn't give you an order. He just sort of suggested it, and you just sort of did it.

He took me to this place that he never really said, but there were four or five Americans there in civilian clothes. I think he had known them from his previous tour. I believe they might even have been CIA guys. They invited me in, we had

this terrific meal, and my major and this, as it appeared to be their leader, talked over some maps in the far corner of the room. Then after dinner we got the Jeep, and drove him back. Driving through all that area it was very nice, it was something. I did see the areas that were dusty, blown up, water filled, bombed out, the fire bases.

So I saw, not the real nasty stuff. There was a lot of guys out there will pat you on the back for really being able to handle that and stuff, I didn't see the nasty things, but the bad things were enough. Enough for the kid from Baltimore.

Speaker 2: Yeah. As you're on that flight out Tan Son Nhut then, and you're looking out what's going through your head when you realize that phase of your life is over?

Bob: If I remember right, I was so tired that I just ... Because this Camp Alpha was ... there were people coming and going all the time, and you just didn't really sleep. You were geared up, things like that. I think I slept. I know that we did go to Japan, because as we were sitting on the runway in Japan the pilot came on and he said ... or the copilot, or the first officer, or somebody, and he says ... and they knew these were freedom flights, and he says, "Guys." He says, "Instead of going the great route taking you to Alaska," he says, "We're going from Japan straight into Hawaii." Big cheer goes up from this completely packed plane right?

He takes off, and what can you do? It was sort of night, if I remember right. Pulled the thing down, and fell asleep, and I must have been out for a long long time. Because, when I woke and lifted up the shade it was daylight, or becoming daylight. I guess you could say, as God as my witness, I looked out and there were a couple of icebergs. Not big ones, but from what you could see from twenty thousand feet or so, and there are these icebergs. They almost looked like the sides of your white tile over there in the corner. There was this sort of low rumble, or murmur that went through the plane.

Other people were lifting up their stuff, and looking out and going, "I don't know of any icebergs floating around Hawaii." We ended up landing in Elmendorf, Alaska. Why would I remember that? Elmendorf Air Force Base, Alaska. A stewardess after a while came back and said that they had some minor problems, and going to Hawaii would of been a longer distance, and they wanted to go to a shorter distance to Alaska. We're going, "Well of course." I mean, that's no problem, but when you just left Vietnam, and you look out and there were a couple icebergs. I didn't get a picture of that, I'm sorry.

Speaker 2: You land back in the states. Now, I suspect you still had some military time to serve, or were you out at that point?

Bob: Another story? Do you mind?

Speaker 2: Yeah, no please.

Bob: We go back to, I guess it was Oakland ... I don't know, because I'm really fatigued. I say I guess it was Oakland, because that's where everybody else said that they thought you went back to the states. We go there, and they take us, the guys on my plane was mixed. Mostly, mostly Army, probably a few Marines, maybe a few Air Force guys. They take us to this huge hangar, and they start breaking you down by service and rank. They said, "Air Force guys come up here," and they did something paperwork wise with them, and they dismissed them. "Navy, Marines come over here," they did some paperwork at these desks, and they dismissed them.

Now what's left is all these Army guys, and they said, "Army." How was it? "Officers, and E6 and above come here." Now there's, I don't know, twenty of us left, maybe less than that, and the guy comes over and he says, "Where are your khakis?" The class A khakis, starting to get a little rank by now. He says, "You guys have summer issue clothing," he says, "Before you can be sent on your way," he says, "You have to go to such and such a place, and be issued new clothing." I'm thinking, no I don't. I mean, I've done all this stuff ... There's a difference with the guys that have been in a little bit, and the guys that were just getting started.

They made us line up along this wall to go catch this bus. To go back to some Army base to get winter clothes, winter class As and another whole issue of clothes. I just happened to see this nonmilitary looking bus, a regular Greyhound or Trailways Bus or something like that that said airport. Don't know what airport, I still don't know what airport. I just figured I'm going to do enough until somebody tells me to stop. I got on this bus that said airport, sat down, hunched down, and I watched the guys that I was just with being taken away in this other military bus, green ugly looking bus.

After a while couple people get on this other bus and it's dark. He closes the door, and away we go. I'm figuring, I have no idea where I'm going, not a clue. He wanders through some streets and things like this, and he pulls up to this ... something that looked like the old Friendship Airport with a little curved driveway. I get off, and I go in, and it must have been the middle of the night, I don't know, I have to admit I do not know. There's a number of ticket counters, but they're all sort of dark. Not completely dark like your studio, but just sort of subdued gray.

There's one that's open. There's a lady standing there doing something all by herself, and I believe it was TWA, I think. I walked up to her, and she looked surprised, and I just said, "What do you have going east?" She said, "Well we have this plane going to Dallas, but it's already boarded." I said, "Oh, okay thank you." Then she goes, and this is I guess a counter story to a lot of the guys that came back and got spit on, and nasty things happened. From this lady on they couldn't have been nicer. She says, "Wait a minute." She got on some telephone ... Oh, and people are going well how did you pay?

Well, I still had some money left over from R&R that I should have turned in, but I had shoved in my wallet. Probably would have gotten in trouble if they caught me Saigon, Camp Alpha but they never asked for wallets. I paid her, and she says, "You have to hurry," she says, "You got to run down here, and do this and do ..." For some reason or other I remember her directions. I get to this plane that they were bringing back to the gate. It hadn't pulled away far, but they were bringing this plane back to the gate. They're opening the door, as I'm sort of jogging up to. The stewardess opens the door, and says, "Welcome aboard, find any seat that's available."

All the other people, they're just sitting there looking at me. I guess they must have told them we're going back to the gate for somebody, and I got on. I guess they were expecting Nixon, Kissinger, somebody, but I got on, and I got in the seat clipped in, and fell dead away. I woke up in Dallas, the landing gear was coming down, we landed in Dallas. I got off, and all I could think about was I have to hide from the MPs, because you stick out like a sore thumb. You're in khakis, short sleeved, summer uniform in February. I stayed in the bathrooms a lot, and other things, but I called my mom.

I called home, and she goes, "Where are you?" I said, "Well, I'm in Dallas," and she goes, "What are you doing in Dallas?" I said, "Well it's the only thing they had going east, I can catch something to Friendship from here." I did, and they met me at the airport. My grandfather didn't meet me at the airport. The World War I guy, before I left at Fort Lewis, I got a bunch of postcards. They were ... grandmother and grandfather were elderly, so I got a bunch of these Fort Lewis postcards, and periodically overseas I would send them a postcard, and wrote like I was at Fort Lewis.

I guess once my mom finally knew ... My mom was his daughter. I guess when she finally knew that I was back in the states, she told him that I was away in Vietnam. My mom and dad, and uncle and cousin, and aunt met me at the airport, and we drove back to my grandfather's house. If looks could kill. He gave me a look that was just ... like, "You didn't tell us where you were," and I said,

"No, I didn't." So, I guess that's all the stories I have. Stories you have inaudible
01:08:27].

Speaker 2: Well those are some pretty great stories that you've shared with us Bob, and I want to thank you for sharing those stories.

Bob: Well, thank you guys for doing this film. It's terrific.

Speaker 2: I really want to thank you for your service over there as well.

Bob: Well, thank you, thank you. I appreciate that.