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Boeve, Ken

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Narrator's name: Ken Boeve
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Place of interview: Hull, Iowa
Interviewer's name: Sarah Bartz
For: Northwestern College, History 351: America and the Vietnam War

SB: Okay, so Ken. Can you start off just by telling me what growing up was like for you?

KB: Well I grew up. My mother passed away when I was eight months old. So I grew up under her family and my grandmother had nine kids- nine, ten kids at home anyway so she took me in. I stayed there until about nine- ten years old. And then I moved back to my dad's place because he had remarried and my other brothers and sisters were there. So I moved back there and well went through high school and everything else. Graduated from high school and I was very young for my class, so everybody was usually going to college or going to service.

So I had a guy come to me about going along with him to Sioux Falls, first take a test for the service. I was only seventeen so I didn't do it, and I first didn't do it. When he was ready to go, I called him, "Do you still want me to go along?" So I went along with him. And then I got interested in that and then I went along to Sioux City and I got into that one. And I took tests and I did pretty good on the test. They got back to me that they would like to see me join. And I did. That was in April and I went to basic training – I guess right after April – for about six weeks at in Texas. Then I went – from there I went to Aurora, Colorado for tech school. I was in ammunition – ammunition... I forget what they called it now. But it was – it had to do with armament. I had choices of armament and transportation and another one. I thought the other two didn't sound very exciting. I wish later on I would have taken them. But I got into armament and went to tech school. Learned different things that I had to do and it's more or less you trained to learn but your real training is when you get involved with it.

SB: And what year was this?

KB: This was the '66 when I went into basic training and stuff.

SB: How was basic training for you?

KB: Not that bad because I was a farm boy. I was used to working and running and throwing bales and all that. Maybe the worst part was the running part but for the rest of it was not – I didn't think basic training was that tough. But I was, like I said, raised a little different. I was used to taking care of my own stuff; I was used to washing clothes. I knew how to do all that. I didn't – some of the kids didn't know the first thing about it. I knew how to do

them all; cooking – everything if I had to it was no problem. So I didn't think basic was that bad. Some of them really had it tough.

SB: Yes?

KB: Some of them were baby fat yet, and I thought oh boy. I felt sorry for – one kid was from Des Moines, Reginald was his name. I thought he had never done a thing in his life for himself. [Laughs] He had a – I think he had it tough and they picked on him too. They knew it so they picked on him. They had to toughen him up a little bit. I didn't think it was bad at all. It wasn't easy, but I knew it wasn't going to be easy. It was okay.

SB: Did you – the guys you were with in basic, did you guys all get along really well?

KB: Oh yes.

SB: Yes?

KB: Yes, you – they – that's part of basic training. You learn that later on that it takes maybe a few days, maybe a couple weeks for everybody to start working together. That's what they want you to do. They don't want no arguments from you. They want you to work as a group. And it takes – probably took us two weeks before we started saying "They this" "They that" where everybody was saying "We". Then you know that it was – you could tell it was we not – when you start talking that way they know you're working together.

SB: Sure. So then you went to Aurora, Colorado and tech school. How was that for you?

KB: Good... Tech school wasn't that difficult. Because it wasn't like something you have in algebra where you learn the next step, next step and everything else. It was something you have to learn because the things we worked with was for your own protection. So you'd better learn it. Because I worked with the – first with the armor with the guns on the plane and things like that, but then later on was the five hundred pound bombs and two hundred fifty pound bombs and napalm and rockets and things like that, that you can't make a mistake with. You – when you're fusing a five hundred pound bomb, you'd better do it right. And those – it wasn't – after you do it, it doesn't seem so bad. But when you first started, oh boy. And of course you don't work on the real thing right away, but when you work with the real thing you know what you're doing. You have to. It went real good; I liked it, and I'd never been to Colorado before. We had a lot of time off, not a lot but enough. I don't know. It was for a few months but I liked it. Matter fact, when I got married, I went back there to look and it – it was so different. It wasn't the same but that was alright. Tech school was – had some very good instructors. I think that helped a lot. It was just okay; I liked it.

SB: Then when did you get sent to Vietnam?

KB: I got sent there in May of '68. But before that there was a lot of training. After tech school, what they did was they put different guys together. Because I was in the squad of four guys

– I mean four of us, there weren't five of us. Me and three others. They let you kind of feel each other out, who like – what you like to be with. Who you trust and don't trust, that type of thing. Pretty soon there was four of us. They didn't mix-match us for a while, a month or two. Pretty soon the four of us knew we wanted to be together, because we trusted each other. It's just something that you'd know. There was a couple guys that the rest of us – the other three, two also, if we ever switch we don't want him and him. Don't want them, can't trust them. It was one guy that if you gave him something to do other than what we were trained for, like when we're not in school there was things you got to do on the base for work and this and that. Maybe you get sent to shovel. If he was working with something he didn't like, he'd break it so he didn't have to do it anymore. And he'd do the same thing, he'd break something three or four times. Boy, you can't trust someone like that. What we were working with, when you'd do your job, you'd have to do your job.

We all agreed that we wanted to stay together and we never ever after that split up. We went to Vietnam together, we trained together, we stayed together, everything. Its just – we just – and it was right, they knew what they were doing. Because we worked with jet aircraft and there was four positions, kind of, of the four in the squad. There was the cockpit man, left wing man, right wing man, and the crew chief. They decided I should be the cockpit man. I don't know why, but I didn't mind it. I learned all about it before I ever got in it. You can't get in that cockpit until you learn about it because there's too many things. I remember climbing up the ladder the first time, looking at it. There was – safety's always first and they have – between your legs there's this stick with the trigger on it for the gun and there's got to be a safety pin there and other safety things because they set off the bombs from buttons. You don't climb in until you check that. The seat has two levers on it that should pull and the safety pins got to be in those explosive canisters, they'd blow the seat away from the plane if the plane's going to go down. And you got to make sure they're in because you don't want that to happen on the ground.

You learn that and I crawled in it. I remember – I looked at everything. A lot of my circuit breakers were on my right, while my lights were on my right and there was a couple on my left. It dawned on me, while I didn't know it before; I thought this is not the place for me. I remember look over the edge of the plane down the tarmac. There the three of them were talking, I was going to say, "Hey guys, we got to switch." Because a lot of the stuff was on the right side and I'm left handed. [Laughs] So I looked and I thought no, we're going to get this done. Try doing something when you're right handed, try to do something with your left hand for a month instead of your right. Its – I learned it, but I have to learn things through the plane because you're in the dark once in a while when you're in there. You have to – there's oh, fifteen, twenty breakers. You have to know which one's which. You can't pull the wrong one with bombs and stuff. You have to know them. It's just like driving your car. You learn all the – you know what gear you're going to shift. You know – you do a lot automatically, but circuit breakers, you learn them. Anyway, I was left handed and I learned it. So I thought, okay, we – I told the guys when I got out I said, "I'm left handed but I'm going to learn it. If it's okay." Yup, it was all right.

And we always stayed together, we were – it went very good. We got to Vietnam very good. I'm the last one left. The other three all died of Agent Orange problems. First one died

within four years, I didn't know it until just a few years ago. Before 2000 anyway, I found out the three guys I was with are all gone, kind of tough, but it's okay. I would have liked to see them. We did a lot of things down there, I don't know if you even know about that.

SB: Yes, Yes.

KB: Well, we got there, I suppose maybe the first two days, we didn't do anything big really, anything that was dangerous. We did things slowly and surely. And the – it depends on how busy it was – on how busy it – how things were going, how busy the war was or where they were flying, where the action was at. So we kind of had two other, three places that if we were getting attacked pretty hard, they had to protect us. [inaudible 10:25] We had – we protect ourselves. We had 1500 Koreans with us, but we had sister bases or camps that if we needed help, they'd have to come help us and we did the same thing with them. That was – it was set up the whole country that way. We were farther north and the further north you got the worse it got. We were there 59 days, we lost our first member of our squadron. We didn't have a very big squadron. If you understand what a squadron is.

SB: [Affirmative sound]

KB: We have five schools in Hull, for instance, Western has four [inaudible 11:03] grades, it's a high school. So each class would be a squadron. Then you get the other high schools, you've got smaller grades, each class is a squadron no matter what. And the squadron is not like you go freshman on up. Squadron – each class learns its own thing. So some squadrons are quite small. Like we've got a new high school now with the small classes. Now our squadron was a small squadron. We pretty much all knew each other. We were probably fifty, sixty guys but we all knew each other on a first name basis. If you knew them close and that, you knew their first and last name. If you knew them closer than that you knew their family. The three guys I was with I knew everything about them. So we were very close.

I don't know. There were different times we'd do things that you – it's hard to do, bombed different things and so on. It wasn't easy. But like I say, we lost our first guy in July and you go through different things. We made it to Labor Day of course and you've got to Halloween, Thanksgiving, and Christmas, that's a long time, but there's a lot a things that happened in those days. Weather was terrible. This is about 100 degrees out today. It was always like that there during the day. The only difference was you'd be looking half a mile, it looked like it was raining because the humidity was so high. But you get used to that. I don't know how we ever made it, but you get of course your younger. I was only eighteen, nineteen there. You're younger and you get used to that.

There was other squadrons on that base. Some were transportation squadrons. Some were – they had different names of course, but ours was a fighter squadron. It was the 174th fighter squadron. That's just like it is. You call someone a farmer DER, farmer means [inaudible 12:45]. We were a fighter squadron. That's what we did, we didn't work our own planes. Somebody else did. We were mainly just the armament and the bombs and all that kind of thing. Again, there was no squadron [inaudible 12:58] and there was very, very close friend

from Rock Rapids. Harold was his name. He was the only boy in the family. He had two or three sisters. There were different things you remember. That was one of them. I got to take a sip of this. [Takes a drink] On February 28, he had a head injury – he died on March 17. That was tough. I don't know. Another close friend went home, name Paul Ben from Hull. So, that was tough. It makes you mad, pretty angry. That's another whole story. That's why I said when we talk about things one time, I wouldn't make it though. But we got home in May. May 13 to May 13.

And I went over there. You talked about that a while ago. I went over there on C5A transport. It's a huge jet. Tail section's probably four, five stories up – high and you could put an eight lane bowling alley in there for the width. It's well six lanes, and the length, its long. You could – it's could carry equipment you can't believe. I didn't think that thing would ever get off the ground. There was only seven of us in there and the cockpit wasn't a cockpit. It was a room. I mean, you could get up and look out windows, look down. We – the higher you fly the easier it is to fly a plane. It takes less fuel that way. We were a long ways up. I remember when we were getting close between – we took the northern route, Alaska to Japan. We got close to the Russian border and it was a huge storm down beneath us. I looked out the window. It was always four of us in the cockpit. I looked out the window and oh I suppose, looked like the size of a – I don't know – a couple of fifty cent pieces and it was supposed to be a huge storm and goll we were a long ways up! And that was good; the higher you are the more safe you are really. Until the thing comes out of fuel then you're in trouble.

When we got there, we had landed in Japan to fuel up and then we flew from there to Vietnam. Again, the runway was just long enough to handle that – it was a huge plane. And – I remember crawling back through the equipment just checking things; make sure they were still okay. I don't know why; the bird was on the ground. It was stopped, but I got to the back of that plane. You know in a lot of those planes a great big back door opens up. This was still shut. The C130s have that kind of door, they're a prop job. This is a jet aircraft, just huge. And I kept going, working toward the front, checking the equipment over. I had this certain smell. I go, "What is that smell in here?" And I thought, we've never had that before. I kept working toward the front and all of a sudden it dawned on me. It's a walk-in door where you – well you've seen where people walk out of airplanes. They take a door sitting over the side and you walk down the steps. Well the only door that was open was that one and I got close to the front and all of a sudden it dawned on me. It was the muck and the humidity and the heat from that country from outside. And it just – I stuck my head out that door and I thought, oh my God I can't make a year of this. It was terrible. I don't know, maybe it was just a bad day. It smelled terrible; it was just terrible. I thought, this is going to be one long year. At least I hoped it was going to be a year, I didn't want to go home in a bag.

We got everything – we didn't have to unload. Transportation guys did that. We got there and we were there about three days before we started getting our assignments. Everybody slowly trickled in for our squadron. Everybody came in different planes; some guys that didn't have to come with equipment came on a commercial flight or commercial plane. I don't know how many came on that plane, but it wasn't a huge plane either. We all got

together and we all came from different directions and got there, started doing our thing. I don't know. We had our problems.

Like I said, we lost our first guy after fifty-nine days and – had a guy here this morning and his birthday is on that day. He came for some stuff about the VA. I helped him with it and it was on his birthday; that's all I can remember it was February 14th we lost our first guy. He thought we had a big party – that's how I can remember. I said, "No, we lost Brown our first day." That first time. We found him hanging in the trees. He was beat up, pulled apart pretty bad. I knew he had a wife and two kids that he was not much older – we had very young pilots. I was only about 19 years old and I right away thought of his wife and kids, two boys, not very old but one not very old. You don't worry about him, he's gone.

You learn that, death is something you – after you're there – we – I get together with – oh a matter of fact it's this week. It's the second and fourth Wednesday of every month, we've been doing that for a few years now because we – some of the guys had problems. The best way to talk about your problems is another veteran. You can't talk to another civilian, it don't work. We started that by accident. There was a few having some issues that had to be addressed. A lot of our issues were the same, and while I was talking to this one guy I said, "Why don't we work – meet together?" I said, "I think that might be better." He said, "We'll try." So we did and that worked great. It just worked great; now we still do it. We've been doing this for years. Lots of times we get together we talked about the weather but once in a while somebody comes up with something that we talk about.

Sleeping. I had that for a while. I don't know what does it and I haven't had much of it lately. They – I mean this past year. You have what you call flashbacks. I don't know if you've ever heard of flashbacks. PTSD. All of us there had that, except one didn't have it as much, but one was a sniper. He had problems. I can see that. We just talked about it, different things. Why? And you can have all the counselors you want, you can have all the psychologists or whatever you want – psychiatrists, whatever. If they weren't in it they won't understand it. It's something that you just – and it helped all of us. There's only four, five of us; we don't want more. And what we talk about in those four walls stays there. We talk – there's some things we really – really no one ever going to find out and that's okay. But the – it's one of the best things we've ever did. As far as us guys are concerned, we thought about a lot of thing you did down there. Some things you just have to swallow get used too. Because you know once in a while your bomb – when you're bombing you're going to hit women and kids. It's going to happen and you just live with it. Some of the guys, they didn't do what I did, but one was a – always worked nights. He rode around in a jeep; he was more or less military police. He said some stories once in a while that he'll deny or evade it.

Like I said a while ago, after you're there a while – and I talked to these guys about that – I said, "You know, maybe I'm a little different." A death didn't scare me. No, them either. I said, "What scared me was the pain I might have to put up with or the agony if something happens before I die." I said, "I'm not afraid to die and I don't" – I thought I was strange. Funny thing was when I brought it up. Yes, they thought so too – and they – but they just didn't want to bring it up. I said, "Yes, I was not afraid of dying. It didn't bother me one

bit.” The sniper too – he was on the Zone¹ he had it tough. And there were certain times, he had a lot of time off, but in between times he had it tough. I mean, he had to be *good*. And he hasn’t – since he got back. Before he left he fished, he – and everything, he hunted. He hasn’t picked up a gun since he’s been back because he can’t do it. Maybe he’ll try, we’ve talked about it, but nope, he won’t do it. That’s okay. It’s okay, it doesn’t – there’s nothing wrong with not doing that. But there was different things like that that – I don’t know.

Just like I said, when we found that first guy hanging from the tree, by then I knew I wasn’t afraid of death. When I saw him hanging I thought, it’s over, it’s done. You don’t pray for someone who’s dead, you pray for him before then because once someone has died – if someone says, “Pray for my soul” – so he died, it was too late. The praying for someone like that it’s done, it’s over. There’s so many things as a eighteen, nineteen, twenty year old – there’s so many things you can learn over there, not good, not bad. Some are real good.

But a lot of veterans are called heroes when they come back; a lot of veterans don’t like that. A hero is someone – let’s say someone else, not just going down there. A lot of us were the subjects of things coming back instead of the object. We didn’t want to be the subject and a lot of veterans had to go through getting normal according to the public. It wasn’t – a lot of – many veterans – I was really surprised; I was home about ten years – got divorced within a year after home. They just could not cope; they couldn’t adjust. I think – that’s what we decided, that’s what all of us that meet together. One’s divorced, he thought so too. He said he just couldn’t adjust to his new life and new wife – his wife. He looks back; he says if I would have tried harder maybe, but there’s a lot of guys that got divorced after they got back. Its – the people don’t understand; they ask you questions you wish they would never ask and you don’t answer them, not if they’re tough. You just look at them and say, “Well if you want to know what it was like, why didn’t you go?” I don’t know, some people don’t understand it and the ones that do won’t ask. It isn’t easy; it isn’t easy, but I don’t know. There’s a lot I could sit and talk for a whole afternoon if I had these other guys we’d really tell you something. One would bring something up the others remember, you know, with everything’s that’s happened.

Dreams and nightmares, I used to have a lot more. Finally got my wife used to – I had my first wife yet—I just finally got used to, I says, “Just wake me up.” So I’m screaming or howling or crying or whatever and having a bad dream, just wake me up. Just make sure I’m awake. You roll over and go back to sleep. She does that. I lay in bed, try to get back to sleep or sit on the edge of bed, try to just get it out of your head. If not I come in here, sit here for a while and I go back to bed. I don’t have them near like I used too.

Another thing was these flashbacks. I thought that was strange too until I got with these other guys. Veterans speaking to veterans is so important. I’ve told different guys that are having problems; I says, “Get to the VA and try to get in a group. Not a very big group, keep it small, keep it personal.” I can be walking across the yard and like I’ve said I’ve had – it’s getting better. I think because you get – all of a sudden it happens maybe one or two seconds, and a flashback is something you did down there that wasn’t good. It’s just like, it

¹ Probably referring to the DMZ or demilitarized zone; a DMZ is ideally a stretch of land between two opposing sides with no military forces, supplies, or equipment. (Langhals)

jolts you. Just like taking a low cheap cord where you got two little stands, you take the ends off and tie one to each ankle and plug it in and pull it right back. It just gives you a jolt; it just – but I never have it.

I said to this one guy, we get together, I says, “I’ve never had it when I’m driving.” I said, “I’m so afraid of that for a long time. Tractor. Pickup. Car.” Then the counselor sitting there, who – its – we switched counselors. The one we had first was really good and I think they knew it. They moved him up to Aberdeen; they had some problems there. Now we have a lady that says, “If it didn’t – if your flashbacks come with things that had nothing to do with driving, you won’t have it when you’re driving.” The other guy sitting there said, “Okay.” Then he understood why he got his quite often when he was driving. It kind of scares him; he says, “I can’t stop driving though. They only last for a second. That’s all it takes as long as you don’t jerk your wheel or anything like that.” He says, “I’m not going to stop driving.” Your dreams at night are close to reality; they’re really something.

You can watch all the movies you want, I have never watched a movie that was even close to what happens down there. They can’t get close to it; I saw one movie – it was in the last two years – and I think it might even been on public TV. *We Were Soldiers*² I think was the name of it; I caught it halfway through. They had couple instances there for what, two three minutes and then I later on saw it was on another station one time. I really didn’t want to watch but it’s one of those things that you know you shouldn’t and how do you explain it, it’s something I knew if I watched it I might have problems for a week or so. But I wanted to watch; I don’t know why. But I did and that was the only movie, that ever had a couple of episodes of a minute or two and that it that even came close to what it’s like – what it’s really like down there.

I don’t know we cope with it. Like I said, a lot of us don’t want to be called heroes. Heroes are somebody that saves somebody else’s lives and I don’t know, there’s just different little things that – you get disconnected between veterans and civilians. I’ve been to Legion and there’s some of those guys that are real good and that’s okay.

I know a veteran down there, when I was there, his brother was back in the States and I knew him quite well. And his brother maybe going to get orders to come to Vietnam. I said, “You write your – his – your parents, don’t right him. Write your parents. This is because he might not tell them that it’s a very good chance that if he was in Vietnam his brother would not have to come if his parents objected.” I tell him to knock that chip off his shoulder. I says, “There’s no body going here going to tell him he shouldn’t have made it.” I haven’t run into one Vietnam veteran that looks down on somebody else for not being there. I have had veterans say, “I was in the Vietnam era but I didn’t go to Vietnam.” You can tell they talk that way and since I’ve, like I said, met with these other guys, I tell them. I said, “You’re lucky.” I said, “We don’t look down on you at all.” I said, “I’m glad you didn’t have to go.” You know, we don’t look down on someone that didn’t go over there or – I said I’ll look down on somebody that tried not to go, that I will. Because then some had to take his place. I remember that like Bill Clinton one time, he – when he became President. He

² *We Were Soldiers* is a 2002 Mel Gibson movie about the first major battle of the American part of the Vietnam War in the La Drang Valley. (Gibson)

went to England. He took – he got a deferment and everything else and the deferment was up he went to England so he didn't have to go to the service. Well somebody went in his place. He can talk all he wants about it. Someone went in his place. The – I'll look down on those kind, but anybody else. No, if they didn't get orders to go, if their brother was there, that's fine. We don't like – there's some guys only went five, six months. They go, "Well yeah, I wasn't there a whole year." That's fine. I know some guys that went back for a second tour, but yes, they were – a lot of them were cooks. Until they got sent further north, then the cooks had to carry a gun and that was different. Then there was a little different deal. People down there were really good people.

And the – another thing, a myth they had the Vietnam veteran was drugs. I don't know of one bit veteran in Vietnam that horsed around with drugs. Not one. There was a myth and I think that the news media maybe blew that up. Probably found one that was, but on our squadron and all the guys I knew – I worked with quite a few – but our squadron, but I didn't know of one veteran, one officer, enlisted, anybody that was on drugs. Never knew one. And they always say that the average – that a lot of young veterans in Vietnam were very young. The average age for the Vietnam veteran was twenty-five. There were a lot of older guys there too; it wasn't just young guys.

Veterans in Vietnam saw more combat action in one year than any conflict before or since that because they can move them around when they had a hot spot. They were done with one spot. It was really, really bad for them to do that. They'd pick them up, bring them to another hot spot. In like, World War II, they had front lines. Here there was no line. They were there all over; there was no lines. You know, one line was beating the other, the other would back up and the other would come forward. That's how they did that. We didn't have front lines here and so many times now you hear – like when we get involved in Iraq and Afghanistan, the first thing that the enemy will say, "You're going to get into another Vietnam." We learned a lot from the Vietnam War. It taught us a lesson. There's things we do different because of it.

So that war wasn't – and when we – when that war in '72, there were no America soldiers there. The treaty was signed³, the Communist break – make treaties to break treaties. They make treaties for their sake and they will break treaties. The reason South Vietnam fell to the North because there were no – there were no veterans, no army, any veterans there anymore. They show this helicopter taking people off the top.⁴ They said that was military, no it wasn't. There was no military planes there no more, no military helicopters, nothing. They were picking up all these people off the top because the VC, which is Vietnamese Communist, knew who the ones worked for the U.S. government and other governments also, not just ours. They knew those people and they knew they were going to be in trouble if the North, if the Communists invaded. That's just what they did; they broke the treaty and came down South. But whatever, people don't look at it that way. If they would have left us

³ The Paris Peace Accords were signed on January 27, 1973 ending direct U.S. military involvement in the Vietnam War. However the fighting between North and South Vietnam continued for a few years. (Isaacs)

⁴ Two years after the Paris Peace Accords, South Vietnam's capital, Saigon fell to North Vietnam. Boeve is referencing the infamous pictures of Americans boarding a helicopter leaving the U.S. embassy building as the North entered Saigon. (Kislenko)

alone, kept the news media out of there, we could have finished that war in two years because we had done a lot of damage. We'd done a lot of damage with blowing up a lot of things that – when the enemy hides amongst women and children, you're going to get the women and children, that's understood. If you're going to hide there, so be it, and then the people learn don't hide the enemy amongst women and children. They did it and that's their fault, not ours. Not at all. No, I don't know, there's a lot of different things you'd look at when you get down there.

I remember when Harold died, when I only had about two months left, I thought now somebody's going to pay for this bad. I don't care who, I don't care how many, and I don't care how often. We had it in April, about the third week. The weather was really good. It was nice for us. We were [inaudible 32:51]. We found out about one, one thirty in the afternoon. I was on the fight line and we were getting our fighting done for the day. You know, the war doesn't stop at five o'clock. [Laughs] It goes twenty-four hours a day and people have to rest and so on. It just – you can't – you know, that's just what it is. People seem to think, well the war's over at five, no it isn't. But I found that out – and that – we had a good morning.

We had – actually between the four of us and one other individual, we got credited for the killing of twenty-two, because it was on the [inaudible 33:24] twenty-two enemy soldiers and they were accounted for. When they're accounted for, they can get in the area we hit, that we got into, and they can count them. When they estimate when it isn't safe to go in there, so they can estimate. Estimates to me were always high. They want to make things look good. And at four days later, we had the very same thing. Weather was perfect. It was that time of the year, the monsoon season was over and it was time to back them up and hit them hard. Then we got credited for twenty-eight. I'll never forget. I was on the flat land. I jumped up and down. It's odd if you think of it that way, but – oh how do you say it? Its, looking back on it, before I came to grips what really happened. Those two were the most happiest days of my life. I mean that.

I don't know. Some people look at, say "Well, I've had -- Oh, I was home about five, six years. I had two different people ask me almost the same question within about two, three months. They must have found out what I was responsible for. The question, more or less, was: "What did it feel like to kill another individual on purpose?" That was one of them. The other one said, "What does it feel like to take another person's life knowing you're going to do it?" I didn't answer either one of them. Just because there is two answers to that question and both of them are right and they are as opposite as day and night and yes and no. Like I said, there was those two days. I – because I did jumping jacks. I was so happy, I cried. I was happy and when we found Brown and when Harold died, some of those guys. I didn't shed a tear. Like I said, death is there. It's done. They're probably in a better place than we are now and that's okay. These same guys I meet with [inaudible 35:38] One of them. I think the others thought the same, they just didn't bring it up. After five, six years, I think of something like that. I forget. We've been finding out, not only through this group, other veterans that some take one year, some take ten. They come to grips with what they did and then they start realizing it's the worst days of life and it's hard. It isn't easy because you did a lot of damage and those people had souls just like we did. Uncles and aunts,

families, just like we did, but they're gone. But that's war. There's nothing fair in war, and I wish the media would leave it alone. The war wouldn't have lasted. A lot of people would've been saved, but it will have to [inaudible 36:30], just like when they dropped the atomic bomb on Japan. It shortened the war and saved a lot of lives. It did. They should have left us alone. They can't have news media get involved with military camp. Politicians got to stay out of it. We were in a war that they didn't want to win and you can't do that. You went into war; you win it, you want to win it. That's it. We put up a lot of stuff like that.

There was actually one time I saw an individual – I never had to pull guard duty because what I was in. I didn't have to ever pull any other duty besides what I did. I had to be awake to what I was doing when you're fusing bombs and all – wiring bombs and all that kind of stuff. Matter of fact when I have a five hundred pound bomb, the bomb itself is safe I can take a hammer and beat on it. I'm – it's going to be safe. I could have a plane land if he had trouble with his landing gear and he couldn't get it down and the bombs were not dropped. Well, first thing we do is if you go over the ocean, the Gulf of Tonkin and drop them, but if they won't come off, then we're asking questions, "What do you got? Did you do this and this?" "Nope." Because you can drop – you can land with your running gear up to sparks can fly. Those bombs will not go off. We know that. But you take a bomb, you take a fuse. You touch the fuse – I get the fuse ready. I'll check it all over and some of them are armed with weather vanes. When the bombs – I don't know if you saw pictures of bombs in the air, how they go down nose first.

SB: [Affirmative Sound]

KB: Lots of those bombs on the further – front of them, there's some wire in there that's all disconnected. Then that weather vane starts turning it, and the more it turns, that's when the – that's when it's armed. You could probably sneeze by some of those and make them go off. But I did that and I put the delay element into the fuse which would decide when that bomb when off. If it went off just above ground or the instant it touched or if I wanted to penetrate a parking lot – spent parking lot penetrated. A heavy bomb will penetrate maybe just a little bit, but it will blow up somewhat of what's there. That's what they delay of them did. Then you put that into the bomb, and you check the three together. Then you wire it and its ready to go. You do all kinds of those and you just – you just have to know what you're doing and those things can do so much damage. You can't believe. We used them to clear trees out an area. We have to clean an area out for some troops, we'd drop a bunch of those five hundred pound bombs in there. It would just blow the trees apart. It cleared the area up for them. That was nice – that was nice jobs doing that. You know nobody'd been hurt, this and that.

I don't know. It's like I say, "If you just sit a long time talking. Different things would come up and" – but like I know – like I said when they asked that question about – it was the happiest day of my life and the worst day of my life. When you come to grips with what you really did. But people don't understand that. We're, like I said, we're the subject of a war and not the object. There's a lot of different things that happened that you put up with when you get back. You hope you can get back in life. It takes a while, but I don't know. I think

sometimes when people have PTSD problems, if they can handle them. The longer they can handle it the better they'll fit back in, I think. That's my guess. I just figure that if they can handle that long enough and keep things to themselves until they can sit down with someone else who understands, that's one big mistake they make. See, now they come back from Afghanistan and Iraq. They come in country and after two weeks they're in country, they don't see their family. They're in country, they're deprogramming them, talking to them, "This is what's going to go through your – this is what's going to happen." They didn't do that with us. I talked to World War Two guy one time and it took him thirty days to get back from Europe. I says, "Why?" He says, "They put us on a ship." Let's say the ship held a thousand people, and they put two thousand guys on there, but that – just to get them back. They had to share beds and figure out who was going to sleep what hours. I says, "The best thing that ever happened to you." He couldn't understand it. I says, "For thirty days, you sat down with veterans and you could talk. What you did. What you didn't." Some veterans have it bad, some didn't, but the bad ones could sit and talk to somebody and understand what they did was okay. I says, "We didn't have that." I said, "It's the best thing you ever did." I said – "oh yeah, but we talked a lot." I said, "They didn't do with us." I says, "On Monday, I'm killing people. Monday night, I get ready to go home. Tuesday, I go home. Wednesday morning, I'm home. Two days before that I'm in a completely opposite life from where I am. You can kill people on Monday and you get home on Wednesday. You scratch somebody in the wrong way, you're in trouble." It's just – I said, "They just dumped us." I said, "I wasn't – my time in the service wasn't up, but they didn't care." So I took my leave time and everything else. I was done. I didn't have to go back. Oh yes I did. Thirty days, I had to go back to bring some stuff back that I – they wanted back some time. They let me know and I brought it back.

Another thing that – you know there was Agent Oranges. They sprayed a lot of that. Agent Orange is called that because of its color.

SB: Right.

KB: They have – there were three different colors, but most of it was orange. There's another one that's kind of a yellowish-green. I think they call that one Agent Yellow, they do – I thought more green than yellow. That was something I think they really should have warned the veterans down there. The initial equation for that stuff was put together. How they made it as strong as they did, I don't understand. But I read an article one time. It was made five hundred times stronger than it was – the original equation. Not two times, or three times or ten times. According to this article, it was five hundred times stronger. It would kill trees that were a foot and a half to two feet trunk size. It would kill them in a matter of days. Just dead. It was strong stuff. They'd have people walk through that stuff. Have veterans walk through it. They would say, "Stay out of there for a week. Put your poncho on. Don't eat in that area." And that's why the three guys I was with – Hodgkin's disease, I don't know. They didn't tell me. They weren't supposed to tell me. I found out about it, yes. Davis, I

⁵ Part of the U.S. defoliation plan, Operation Ranch Hand, the U.S. military sprayed approximately 19 million gallons of primarily three herbicides, named Agent Orange, Agent White, and Agent Blue. Agent Orange received public criticism during and after the war with documented health effects among the Vietnamese and U.S. Vietnam war veterans. (Gaspar)

don't know what. Jerry has the same problems I have, walking. He told me, "Don't stop walking." He had a teaching job. He said, "I don't get enough exercise." That was before 2000 and I know that because my dad was living yet. He said, "Don't stop walking." He says, "The best thing you can do is keep walking." So I try to. I have a tough time some days. Some days I have a good day and some bad.

I wish I would have got a chance to talk to him. Matter of fact, I was reading the paper here one morning and it was '98. I should have kept it and here it was his name. I thought I'm going to go to that. They must not had it in the day before or whatever and the funeral was going on. It was around Correctionville. So he was around by Sioux City somewhere. I don't know if it was Correctionville, somewhere around that area. No, further south. I would have gone, but the funeral was going on as I was reading it. I would have really gone. I should've just changed clothes, flew down there yet, and found out where it was at. Oh, it would have been over anyway. I wouldn't have caught that. He gave me a lot of good advice. He was teaching at NCC. He got a teaching job. He just kind of said, "Ken don't stop talk—walking." And he was walking bad. I get days like that. That's all right. I'm still around doing things yet. Why I'm the last one, I don't know.

Heard a story one time about a guy. It was World – no, Korean or World War II. Five guys together, good friends, asked to be together, stayed together. They went through some pretty tough times. One time there was twenty some in their group and they were the only – about seven of them left and those were five of them. They bought a fifth of brandy of some kind, something that all five of them liked. I don't know what it was. I don't drink; I really don't drink. They made a pact that the last guy living would break the seal on that bottle and go to each one's grave, take a little bit of glass, pour it over the grave and sip the other one themselves. Then, I don't know, he had – all five guys, the last one living had to do that. That was the agreement they made. He had to wear so much that he would have been the fourth one, not the last. Tough. Whatever. But I'm surprised I'm even talking to you about that stuff.

SB: Can I – Going back to some of the things you've mentioned, can I ask about the story of Brown?

KB: Yes, he was – I don't know. We found him hanging in the trees.

SB: Had he parachuted from the plane?

KB: Yes, yes.

SB: Okay

KB: And why he – why he parachuted out – when he got out, what he did. I don't know. So I wasn't – I didn't see that part. Because when I talked to another guy at the fair about two years ago. And I says, "Where you there" "No." "Oh okay," I says. I would always like to find someone who was right there when he ejected. Because I had heard that he shouldn't have ejected and I don't know if he panicked. Because I don't think he was hit yet, but it

was pretty bad. I don't know. That's why I wondered. I know of another guy, Ron. He's only – Ron Heitritter – he's only four, five years older than me. Which at that time seemed like old, but when you're eighteen and another guy's twenty-four, he seemed like an old guy. He wasn't with it either and I never figured out who was with it. They said he ejected going too fast and he wasn't hit yet. He didn't radio or anything that he was having trouble. But they were in an area that was – it was A Shau Valley.⁶ We had a lot of trouble in the A Shau Valley. That was further north. It – there was always trouble there. I don't [Laughs] They – B-52s were the things that really bombed that area. That really did a lot of good. They should've hit them earlier with B-52s but.

SB: Is that the plane Brown was in? Was he in the B-52?

KB: No, he was in the F-100. No, B-52 is a huge plane. It drops tons of bombs.

SB: Yes, okay. I was wondering.

KB: No, we – no, we just go up with fighter planes. We never –

SB: Sure.

KB: The bombs they had were the same as what we did. Because I saw them once, I thought, it's not different from what we got. They maybe loaded them different, but I never had to do that. No, he was always in a fighter plane. That's all we had was fighter planes.

[Long Pause]

SB: So then they had obviously cleared the area after -- the area was clear enough for people to go retrieve –

KB: To go get him?

SB: To go get him.

KB: Well, they'll let you know. Someone who knows what's going on in that area, no matter who it is. If it's us or someone else. They'll let them know if it's safe to go in there to go see what's going on. If it wouldn't have been, they would have had a wake. He'd maybe stayed one day, two days, who knows what. But it was just nice they could get right in there.

SB: Right.

KB: They made sure of that. When someone goes down, they try their best to find out if he's alive. To get him right away. Because if he is alive and there's enemy there and they get a hold of him, it's not good. No, he won't be a prisoner. He'll probably be missing in action.

⁶ The A Shau Valley is in northwest South Vietnam and contained some of the worst fighting during the war, including the bloodiest fight, the Battle of Hamburger Hill (Battle of Ap Bia Mountain). (Camacho)

He won't might live. There should have been a lot of people that were prisoners, you never heard of them again. But that's war. Because they don't print that kind of stuff.

SB: So then, what kind of plane did – were you in?

KB: F-100s.

SB: F-100s. Okay.

KB: I don't know if they even use those anymore. You know, they got the new stealth now and the F-4C. The F-4C was a good plane. I was in the F-100. The F-100C. There was different models of them. That was the C model. I liked it. I liked it, it was a nice plane.

SB: Did you ever have to eject?

KB: No. No, I did a lot of flying that year. Figured out one time how many miles – of different things, all the way from cargo to – well if I count the time I took my R and R⁷ in Australia. That was nice. I went – I wanted to go someone where they talked English.

SB: [Laughs]

KB: [Laughs] And they – you've got to listen close to them because their English isn't like ours. "Hiya mate! How you bloody well doing?" You know, those kind of things. You learn it after about – I was there about seven, eight days. It's really got life. I always told my wife, if we ever move from this country, that where we're going. People were really great there. We really needed that. Held off as long as I could. I went in the early part of February. I was there six, seven, eight, nine months. I always thought, I'm going to wait until late so – I don't know. I put up with everything there as long as I could. But I also – whenever they had anything come up – like in September. We got there in May and it was on my dad's birthday. I left for the Philippines. They always – before that for a while, I think they did it just to give somebody a break. They always had two openings come up and it was always two guys who go together. Why here this time, one time, only one opening. And someone said, "They're having trouble to find somebody to go." I said, "Forget about it. Fine I'll go." I said, "I don't care if I go by myself. Anything to get out of here."

So I went by myself to the Philippines. Field training – they weren't going to teach me anything I didn't know. I'm not saying I was smart enough, nor were they going – they were going to treat – teach me anything I didn't know. Because I wouldn't be there doing that if I didn't know everything I had to know. Then school's from six in the morning till noon and being the idiot I did not stay on base. I stayed off base, air conditioned room, swimming pool, had an eating place next to it. Nothing like you have around here but for the people there that was nice. It was a fancy place. I would get to school about nine-thirty, ten in the morning. Classes started at six in the morning and got over at noon. But after about four, five days the instructor after the class got out, "Would you stay here a minute?" "Okay." So

⁷ R&R stands for rest and recreation or rest and recuperation, usually lasting three to seven days. (Glossary of Military Terms & Slang from the Vietnam War)

I stayed. He said, “You didn’t come to class.” “No.” I says, “I’m young.” I says, “I party all night.” I says, “I’m going to get some sleep.” He said, “You’re going to get in trouble.” I said, “What are you going to do? Send me home?” I said, “I know where I’m going back from here.” I says, “I know where I’m going. I know what I have to do.” I says, “You haven’t taught me anything I don’t know, but if you want to discipline me. You just send me home.” I said, “I’ll take it.” [Laughs] He said, “I guess I understand.”

SB: [Laughs]

KB: [Laughs] I never forget that. I mean I was a young kid like that. I should never have done that, because that was authority you were talking to, but I just said to him, “You send me home.” That’s – I said, “That would be terrible to send me home.” I went there, then I went to Australia and Japan. I was going to go to Japan. We were going to wait till – what was it again? – we were going to have ten days left. So we got back from Japan around the first of May. I was going to go there for a week because I got paid to go to Australia. That was R and R. When you go on leave you don’t get – you leave your pay stops and then you’re – so Harold, the one that died March 17. He and I had planned on going to Japan; wait till we had a week left or something like that. We were going to go down there – seeing Japan well there was a few different places you can order clothes. We didn’t have any clothes for here, you know. Got to go home, yes some of our old clothes course will be there. But you can get suits. You get measured up, tailored fit you know and that kind of thing. We were going to get. We were going to save our money up – you didn’t make much money in the service. We were going to save our money up, we were going to get. But you could buy them cheap there. I mean compared to the States, you could buy stuff so cheap there. We were going to get a bunch of clothes. We were going to look good. We were going to look good when we got home. But he didn’t make it so I just cancelled the leave; I wasn’t going to go by myself to that. That was him out there. Otherwise I’ll admit one more time there too. That was – those were the good times, going to Australia and going to the Philippines. Ran into Sioux City – a guy from Sioux City in the Philippines. One from Sioux City and from somewhere else down that way. So it wasn’t that I didn’t – but I was always that type of guy. My wife even says that I can talk anybody anytime. I can talk to the drunk on the street; I can talk to the Pope. I says, “I can talk to anybody.” [Laughs] I says, you know, “I can always do that.” And there’s so many times you believe – you can’t believe how small a world is. You just talk to somebody and it’s smaller than you’d think. I ran into guys that were born and raised in Hull at the State Tournament. Everybody wanted to go back. I said, “I’m watching the last two – the next two games.” We could watch four games, I only saw two yet. I said, “I want see the rest of them.” So I moved to the end and sat by a guy. He was the superintendent in Ames somewhere and thought. I said, “Where you from?” “Hull.” I said, “I was raised there!” I said, “How about that?” I just happened to sit by him. Told Bev when I got back. I said, “That guy’s from Hull once. He lived a three quarter mile from where I used to live. But he had sold some ground.” Small world. See, just start talking.

SB: [Laughs]

KB: I got that so often. But like I said, there were good times down there too. Australia, I would never have got to see Australia. Down there and the Philippines. And we had good times in

'Nam too once in a while. But I asked that question to a guy one time. I says, "How come we don't dream about those? Why is it always dreaming the bad dreams?" Don't know – you just don't. I says, "I think of them, but I don't dream about them." I said, "Wouldn't that be nice? You dream about the good ones. You lay in bed laughing in your sleep." But no. We had some fun down there. We had to. We had to make our own fun.

SB: What kind of stuff did you guys do?"

KB: Well, like I said, I don't really drink now at all. [Laughs] But when I was that age down there, you couldn't – it isn't like going uptown at night. There's no uptown. That's – one of the guys we meet with, he said something about the few different times about going uptown. Finally I stopped one time. I interrupted him; I said, "Where did you go uptown?" "Well," he says, "Just off the camp there was this town." I says, "After five o'clock at night we didn't – we had no place – there was no uptown to go to." I says, "We'd have gone uptown but we wouldn't have come back." I says, "It wasn't safe." I says, "We sent the people that worked with us off base at night. They couldn't" – we hired Vietnamese, but they couldn't stay at night.

They never realized when we sent them home our security all changed. But they didn't know that. You don't tell them that stuff. And we had thirty days left. There was four guys that came back on base or camp, whatever, with – they had homemade grenades type of things and other stuff. At night, it was about midnight or something and they didn't realize we had dogs. Because the dogs when that morning were put back by the ammo dump – well, a lot of people didn't – I had, like I said, top secret security clearance. I knew about it. I didn't even tell the guys I worked with that I had top secret clearance. Now that so odd, we trusted each other but when you had a clearance you [inaudible 56:26] You don't tell anybody anything. And I got a list about a year and a half ago. I'm trying to get some stuff done with the VA. And I asked for all my papers and I got a thick packet about that big. And I got a list of all the people who had secret and top secret clearances and one of the four guys I was with – the three guys – he had a secret clearance and I never knew it. I never knew it. I thought that was kind of odd. And I knew some different names on that. I remember the guys. I thought, I didn't know they had that.

But anyway they send them home one night, the dogs come out. Every guy's got his own dog. That dog is his best friend. It is. I mean, that – that dog is – I don't know how to explain it. It's almost like it's a son or a daughter to him, that's their dog. And they know that when they let that dog go very good chance that dog would not make it because the dog would be the first thing shot. But that dog senses things so well. How I don't know. They even sense the smell of the people it seemed like. They started acting up that night. They done other times too, but this wasn't very far from where I was sleeping. We were very close. And before they came, didn't realize security changed. They got much better of course. And the dog let them know about it and then all four of them were killed. Three of those guys worked on the camp every day. They were VC. They were the enemy. They worked with us every day. They knew that country better than we did. You know, they were – they were going to hide. If they did that in this country right here and I was living here and I was the enemy. I would – I wouldn't know where to go to hide from the enemy. You

know, they come one year and leave. They don't know what's going on in this country and we did the same thing. That was different, but whatever. But anyway – those three came on.

They were all – they were all killed and I remember how three of them died. I don't remember the fourth. Some guy said to me some time, "Maybe you'd better not try to remember that." I says, "Why?" He says, "Maybe your mind – now some guys will block out things in their mind that they don't want to remember." I says, "Well I remember one of them was shot in the black – back. You know, the guy – with the M-16, it's a high velocity shell. When you're shot in the back, there's a little hole. What comes out just blows everything to pieces. One was shot in the knee, blew the rest of his leg off. The other was shot in the back of the head so you can imagine what happened. But I said, "I can never remember that fourth guy." He says, "Don't even try." He says, "Maybe there's something you're not supposed to." So I give up on – I give up on that, but I always remember three of those guys worked with us every day. They were the enemies. And that – they wouldn't have known about how the security changed, they would have probably known how a better way to get in. But they didn't. They thought everything was the same during the day and night as during the day. It was – It really changed. We sent them – one guy had a little kid about this big. He was, I think, about ten years old. For ten he was just a – he wasn't very big. He had seven or eight kids. This was the last one he had. The rest were all killed and his wife also were killed, but – because of the war. That's tough. We hid that little kid. Things that would last, you know, if he didn't eat them right away because we made sure he always had something to eat. Apples, oranges, or whatever we could get that would last a day or two or whatever, in case he didn't -- so he didn't have to eat it all at one time. He would take them along once in a while. He'd take them once; he was there about a month or less. He took his little kid along and he really wasn't supposed to do that. With a little kid that age, it's easy to watch. He isn't harming anybody. We just said, "You take him along more often." Because what does he got to do when he's not on the camp with us during the day. "Just take him along." He loved it; good little kid. Like I said, we made sure just about every night; somebody would give him something to eat when they go home. Hopefully he ate it and somebody else didn't, but he would eat good when he was on the camp too. I don't know, it just – because you don't know if his wife and kids were killed by us or someone else because things happen. It was a way different war. Those are things, nice things, you remember.

I wonder, we have had guys from – two from Hawarden went last year that I know very well. I know it's one of those two but I know them quite well. His trip said go back there, he started it out of Yankton, I think, or Vermillion. They weren't going where I was and I want to go where I was, as close as possible in a way. I said, "No, I'll take another one sometime." They then went down the last year and they says, "Things have changed and things haven't changed." He says, "Some places they cleaned up. Some places are still bad as they always were." He says, "But the people were the same," and a matter of fact, they talked to some people who were the enemy, North Vietnamese. And we – and they talked about a lot of different things and then, a matter of fact, the one, whose name is Alan from Hawarden, he says – How does he say that again? This, I think he was a North Vietnamese or VC, he says, "You remember that flag, such and such." They talked about it; they laughed. He said, "You guys would blow that thing up and we'd kill one up there the next

day or two.” He said, “Yeah, you remember that.” They were enemies. They laughed. There was also, I don’t know the guy, he was a pilot. He shot down another make and very seldom did they have fights over – in the air because makes just didn’t match us. We have pilots were much better trained and our aircraft were much better. Always was, always – they got to keep doing that. He saw the plane go down and he saw the guy eject. “Thank God,” he says – he was in the plane. “Thank God you made it.” He was happy to see him make it, okay? They figured out over the years, he tried to figure out the day it happened. He knew the day. He finally figured out through channels and all, everything’s always so secret, yet who knows why. He finally figured out who the guy was and he went to Vietnam and met him. They – They’re – And now this guy comes here and they’re the best of friends. Now isn’t that odd? They’re in a war fighting each other and he told him, he said, “I was so happy to see you make it.” And I guess just couldn’t – he just couldn’t fathom that, here they were supposed to be big enemies during the war and when he saw him eject, he was so happy to see him going to make it. It’s something.

No – why they have that stupid war and why’d we even have it? People leave – get the leaders out of it; that’s what we should do. If they declare the war the leaders and Congressmen go first. Let them do the fighting. I bet we won’t have very many wars. No. They just – people are really – basically, everybody’s good. We just got that certain percentage, it just makes it worse for all the rest. No, I was on educational TV; it’s about the only good thing on anymore. They had them on and another thing they had was probably thirty, forty, well maybe a few more than that, veterans of their – North Vietnamese and VC and veterans of our branches of the service and different ranks of both sides also. All together talking in Vietnam about the war, laughing about some things and so on and so forth, but the North Vietnamese, they – all the ones that were sitting there – agreed that when Richard Nixon stopped the bombing of the supply routes in Cambodia and coming from the North with the B-52s, because our news media said it was terrible. Well war is terrible, but they said when he stopped the bombing of the supply routes into Vietnam. He says, “We had a better chance.” He said, “If he would have kept bombing another three months.” He said, “We’d have gave up.” He says, “We couldn’t take those B-52s bombing our routes.” He says, “We’d be going along” and all of a sudden they hear the [hissing sound]. That noise, that’s from bombs coming down. He says, “We’d look up and here’s B – those B-52s we’d drop in hundreds of bombs. He says, “You couldn’t hide. You couldn’t go.” He said, “They were terrible.” He said, “If you would have kept bombing.” He says, “There’s a very good chance the U.S. would have won that war in another six months.” Because they had it in their head to bomb the heck out of those supply routes and that’s just what they did. That was really interesting to know that if they would have left – see another media, news media.

You know, you talk about – I was there about maybe a month, maybe longer, I don’t know. In the chow line, and you hear some guy talking, “You hear all that noise last night?” No, you can always tell what guy’s been there a while because you get used to it. You sleep through it, but you can hear – you got 4th of July, you got those little ones that go up and go boom, you know – you hear those, okay. You’ll sleep through it, but incoming mortars make a real screechy noise, but not very loud. They aren’t loud at all, but if you’re sleeping, you’ll wake up. You couldn’t sleep. There’s sometimes, some guys that had – you got a

makeshift locker – from the explosions coming pretty close, your locker would shake. It's on the floor, not an upright one. It would shake. [Laughs] And, oh at first I couldn't get my sleep, but you get tired enough where you sleep through it and get used to it and it goes. You just – you hear that one noise [hisses] and you wake right up.

The first, second night we were there; the first time we got hit. They gave us our helmet, we didn't take our helmets along from here. They gave – we got – a flak jackets is like a vest. About like this shirt – a flak jacket is real thick lead. And told us where the bunkers were. The second night we got hit, oh boy, I never went off the track in school but there was nobody in high school that would beat me to that bunker. If I ran that fast in high school, I'd have been the track star. I ran for that bunker. There was a pond thirty feet from where I was sleeping maybe and I jumped over it on the way to the bunker because I knew where the bunker was. I hit – I cleared it. Next morning got up, looking things around a little bit. Not “got up”, I think I stayed awake the rest of the night. I saw that pond and I looked at it and I thought how in the world did I jump that thing? It was like quite a ways, I never get – never got my toe wet. Jumped all the way over that sucker. I saw that and thought how did I ever jump over that thing? But that was, I think if there was ever a time I was afraid of my life, then I was still afraid of death. That time we got hit that second night and we had few nights, we had probably the same thing, but it wears off. After that I didn't run to the bunker no more, because if you had to run from here to that red building where the bunker might be, if it was that close, and if something landed out there it's going to get you. You might be running toward it instead of away from it. Lots of places we had, we slept on mattresses, [cell phone ringing] you'd be better off to grab your mattress and just wrap it around you, if you had that and be better off. I don't know, just things like that and sometimes we knew there was people on camp because those bunkers would have little wire things laying there and [cell phone ringing again] I don't know who this is. No matter which way its set, there'd be a sharp point. Like a number 9 wire sticking up and they'd be laying there and there were certain guys that would have to go through them things almost every day to check if they had to use them that night especially after the other ones would go home at five o'clock, four o'clock, whatever they had to go home and check for that stuff if [home phone ringing] same person I bet you. And another thing they would do is take razors [home phone ringing again] stick them in side of the bunker.

[Phone announces who is calling] Steve King? Hello. Yes, yes I see that. [Long pause] If they can that would be nicer and if I'm – if I don't hear or see anything in a week, then I'll probably sneak up that way. [Long pause] No, no. I'll wait and if when I do need them, absolutely need them, then I will – then I'll come and get them. Otherwise I'll wait for him because that's what happened last time. He got a new one sooner or later. Yes, did you just try me on my cell phone? Okay, I'm in the middle of an interview here with Northwestern that's why I didn't answer you so I thought I'd better take this one. That's okay. No, that's okay. [Laughs] That's all right. Thank you. Okay, thank you. Yes, bye. [Hangs up phone]

I don't know if you know Steve King or not. He's running events at [inaudible 1:10] I

⁸ A flak jacket was a heavy vest, usually filled with fiberglass, to protect from shrapnel. (Glossary of Military Terms & Slang from the Vietnam War)

thought – I didn't know it was him – didn't recognize that number at all. Whatever. What were we talking about?

SB: The razors that they put –

KB: Oh yes, in the bunker and then finally one of them caught it. They would somehow make a little – a scratch or hole, whatever you call it, in the bunker and stick razor blades in there so if you leaned up against it, it would cut you. You know, slid past it or put them on this way so if you slid past it, it would cut you. And then they have to watch for that. For those guys that had to do them kind of things, knew what to look for. Because one of them was asked one time, what are you looking for? And he explained; I remember those two. There was more things too. They explained what things they had to look for. They said, we have guys coming on this base that are our enemy. He said, “we never catch them going in or how they get in I don't know.” He says, “But they get in there.” I don't know if they ever did catch any; I never saw or heard that they caught somebody doing that. I didn't – that's why I thought I'm just going to stay where I'm at. [Laughs]

SB: So, where was your base located?

KB: In [unable to translate 1:11 Perhaps Qui Nho'n Phu Cat inaudible] Area⁹ up in Central Highlands for the North. We weren't far from the coast. We weren't on the coast though. I wish we would have been. I think that would have been nice. I don't know what the ocean would have been like, but maybe if you had time off, you could have gone swimming or something. I've seen pictures of G.I.s doing that, but we weren't – we weren't that close. We were at little Qui Nho'n, there was a little airfield there too. Then about a block, half a block, from what they called the terminal I guess, there was a building like a – You know what a chicken coop is?

SB: [Affirmative Sound]

KB: People lived in that building. They had a chicken coop and that's the first time I saw – I remember when I was little in Sunday School seeing different pictures of people like that. They had a swaybacked hog. You know, I mean, our hogs have straight backs, this one was all swaybacked. It must have been an old sucker. That – the hog – thing lived in the chicken coop with – that they called home, right in with them. That was their status symbol. I said to somebody, “What in heaven's name do they live with that thing?” They explained it to me; that's their status symbol. He – It's not nice to say maybe, but he said, “You remember years ago when Negroes down South had a house that was a – terrible and everything else, but they had a brand new Cadillac in front?” “Yeah.” He said, “That's their status symbol. That hog is that Cadillac.” He said. [Laughs] I [inaudible 1:12:26] love Qui Nho'n but Qui Nho'n was made – we flew – once in a while I got on one had one like when I went down South I got on a small caribou plane. That was a small cargo plane. You wouldn't even get your – Yes, you might get your car on. That's about all the big it was. It flew just above the trees, I remember sitting in the back. A buddy was like, “I don't know about this darn

⁹ Qui Nhon is a coastal city in central Vietnam. Containing a main road connection with Saigon, the U.S. Air Force established a base and supply center. (Corfield)

thing.” I says, “Well, one thing about it. It goes down we don’t got to go down very far.” But it flew just above the trees, but if somebody is going to shoot it, it would be out of view by the time they shot it. Never had any trouble. I hitchhiked one of those. I don’t know why I did that, but I – since I was in the Air Force, I went from one base to another and I had – when I had to go to the Philippines instead of taking a flight, I hitchhiked. I just thought I’d see a little more. I hitchhiked from one base to the next and that was when I got on a couple of those caribou. That’s the last time I rode them. I didn’t – I thought, no I’m not going to take on of those again. It was fun. It was fun. I got to the Saigon and I was so glad. I know it was safer down there, but I don’t know, terrible, filthy, I thought – what I saw. I was supposed to wait a day and a half because I did a real good job hitchhiking. I went standby. Standby is when you get – you give up your ticket on the commercial flight to the Philippines and the first flight out that has a seat you can get on. Well sometimes you don’t get on right away. You may wait two days, maybe longer. I took a chance, stayed right there in that little airport. I think about three, four hours. I was on a plane to the Philippines; so I got there early, had a whole day at the Madarangi Inn. God, I was blessed. Air conditioning, and swimming, and Gee! Yes, and of course they got all their girls down there. They send them to your room; I says, “No.” I says, “I [Laughs] – But whatever, that’s the way things are in them countries. But it was a nice – it was really a nice hotel. I – well of course I wasn’t used to having that for a while. It was fun. I had a good time, especially when I ran into those guys from Sioux City. That was fun.

SB: So have you ever visited the Vietnam Memorial in D.C.?

KB: I might some time. This guy, World War II guy told me about Gerald. He lost his son in Vietnam. And then our legion – and I gave 250 bucks to it. It’s the freedom flight they called it. Then our county legion gave 250 to it just to cover the costs of – or did they give more than that? I write the check out for them. I forget. We covered a few of – make sure that they would keep going. Yes, then he went saw his name and I said, “Someday [inaudible 1:15:19] I hope I can make it down there.” But he had to see his son in name. He had to see it. I don’t know why he had to, but I’m glad he did.

SB: So with the Agent Orange, was that something that your plane dropped? Or how did you get exposed to that?

KB: No, that was flown by – how do you explain it. You see these crop planes that fly over and spray?

SB: Sure.

KB: It was flown by planes larger than these crops that spray. Like this caribou plane, I said – Those type, when they fix them up, with sprayers and that’s how they would – The crop – the planes that did that. Our planes would have to fly escort. Once in a while, if they were in an area that – that’s why they would spray the area because there were problems. And they would fly escort with those planes to watch them, so that they had no problems.

SB: Sure.

KB: No, I was always – No, we – where we were, it was like our bomb dump and stuff. I don't know how far away that was. I often think about that. How far back they sprayed because they couldn't – it had to be far enough for sniper couldn't sit in it, shoot at us during the day. We wouldn't got nothing done. But it was still – around it was sprayed quite a bit. There were certain places; especially where our bomb dump and things like – The odd thing was, we never had anybody – course they didn't know it either. But it was there, it was always – I know it. Like you say when you take – keep things secret, you keep things secret. And our bomb dump was never bothered. We got hit. They never hit that area. I often thought, why don't they hit that? Well they probably didn't know it was there, you know. Because we did have one – what was the name of that? Nha Trang¹⁰ was the name of that place. It was quite a ways away. I got to look at the map sometime. Their bomb dump got hit. We could see it from ours. I mean, that's a – that was a long ways. It, oh, an explosion. I said to somebody. I says, "I bet you're a quarter mile away from that you could feel the vibration." It had to be. Oh, what a sight that was. You talk about 4th of July. [Whistles] Bombs going off like that, really something. But see, somebody must have let something slip that's where the bomb dump was and they hit it. Ours never got hit while we were there, not even close. Not even close. So I guess, they just didn't know about it. Plus, we had 1500 Koreans with us too, but they didn't know where our bomb dump was so – you don't let that out. Bomb dump is where everything is stayed. It wasn't a dump; it's a storage. They probably have some little misleading for some people. I don't know. No, they wouldn't – most guys would understand that. But there was a lot of stuff stored there. Why did they put it in one place? I never understood that. I would have put it in two, three places, you know. If one place got hit, that was it. That was all you had. So, no, ours never got hit. I remember writing some people one time. I said "I had some spare time so I went down to the bomb dump." They thought, what the heck you go there? It's the safest place in the base! [Laughs]

SB: [Laughs]

KB: Yes. I forgot about the old bomb dump. Oh, there were different things. One time we had a – we had a guy, he was really good mechanic. For some reason there was a V-8 engine in the supply. Why it was there I don't know. None of the trucks had V-8s. He almost talked his first sergeant into putting a V-8 into one of those vans. He was going to hop it up. He was a good mechanic. He was good. But they wouldn't – his first sergeant wouldn't let him do it. Had a jeep for a little while there, you can – not many guys got jeeps. I don't know how you got them either, but I seen this one sitting there for a while. I don't know if somebody just went home, left it set. Finally for a little while, we had our own jeep. Nobody asked any questions. [Laughs] We hauled more stuff around with that thing. Couldn't go very far. It was still around the camp because it wasn't safe to go off-camp. No, it was interesting.

SB: Out of curiosity, what's your opinion on Jane Fonda?

¹⁰ In 1968, Nha Trang, a city in central South Vietnam, was attacked along with nearby cities by the North Vietnamese, but eventually the U.S. and South Vietnam pushed the Communist forces back. (Zabecki)

KB: Oh, no. If Jane Fonda would have done that – that happened during World War II, the second she stepped off the plane in this country they would have arrested her. No, there's still veterans I see once in a while that – I think she still tries to make excuses for it. Forget it. What she did was wrong; there's no way to undo it. I understand there's been book signings or something where veterans will walk through and spit on her and more power to them. No, when she sits in North Vietnam on a tank and our veterans are fighting in the south. No way. No, you can forgive it, I'm not saying that. But I'm not going to forget it. No. No, I can't forgive her for it because I know she's – I can kind of tell when she talks about it, I seen a couple times, it's been quite a while, that she kind of says she shouldn't have done it, but she doesn't come out and say it though. I can forgive her but I don't have to forget it. No. No way. Like I said, if it had been a different time, a different war, she wouldn't have got by with that. There was no way it would have happened, but we have our news media. It's different. We still have our liberal news media.

SB: So then, once you got back, is that when you met your wife? Is when you came back? Or did you?

KB: No, I knew her before that.

SB: You knew her before?

KB: Yes, I don't know how long before that. We were engaged when I left.

SB: Okay.

KB: Yes, yes. Because we were at the – we were going to get married in June. I was gone so we had to put it back to after I got back. Then we got married – oh, after we got back, we got six months. Six months later. I know some guys – one guy was here just before you got here this morning. That's why I was late for my other meeting. I must have [inaudible 1:21:49] later. I haven't seen him for a while. He had his birthday last – well when I told you about. I don't know if I told you earlier, he was here. His birthday is July 14th. That's the same day Brown had died and he had some VA papers he needed some help with. I said to him, "Don't give up." I says, "I'm not saying you fight the VA, but they're very hard to work with. They don't help veterans any quicker than they have to." That's not good. When you do what you're told, you do it right, and then when you want something back from them or you think you should have – and they don't – you almost have to fight them to get it. And you're going to fight them – sometimes a lot a veterans don't get what they want at all. Some veterans need help and some veterans that don't need help get it. I don't understand them people. I don't know. I haven't had much trouble with them, mainly because I think Jerry sent a letter to them – He might – He knew – He must have known that Gus and Obi both died of Agent Orange problems and I think he sent them a letter with my serial number because I got asked to go into the VA. And I have not run into any veteran yet that was asked to go to the VA. I have an idea that Jerry sent them my serial number, and I never did ask him that when I talked to him. I think that's what happened. "You get him in too, check him out." I – and one year when I knew Morty here, I noticed for a while I was almost getting anything I wanted. You just – asking. I thought, gee this thing is changed. I had my –

you might call it a routing paper, but it wasn't that, just different things that I had to go that day. I'd go about twice a day now, every year. They ask me to come – they set it up, “You coming? Okay.” I noticed the top corner had something – I was just looking the papers over, sitting there nothing to do and they at the top, certain numbers, they had POW¹¹. I thought, what the? POW, that's the prisoner of war, but wonder what it stands on this thing? So I got – when I had to go and I said, “What do these numbers here – What's this?” “Well you're prisoner of war.” I says, “No, I was never a prisoner of war.” He says, “Well that's what this says.” That's what I thought it was but I thought maybe it meant something else. “No.” I says, “I was never a prisoner or war.” I says, “That's why I'm getting treated so good here, for the last year and a half.” I should have kept my mouth shut maybe. I don't know. He says, “Well they've got that on there.” I says, “I don't know, but I didn't put it there.” I says, “I am not a POW.” I said, “I will never take the place of a POW.” I said, “I will never take credit for that.” Like I said, I should have kept my mouth shut maybe, but I – because I – sure, all of a sudden for a year, a year and a half, boy I got anything I wanted and I never noticed it. I just happened to look at it, I thought, what's this on here for? POW? Well, I was never a POW. I says, “I thank God I wasn't.” Nope. I'm glad they – well, who put – I don't know, I don't know if they ever checked that out, they never told me. I should have asked them. Boy, did I ever gain. Whoever – they probably had two, three guys' papers there and kept typing the same thing on each paper or something. I don't know. But like I said, I didn't know if all of a sudden, boy, I was getting treated pretty good.

SB: So, do you have any closing thoughts?

KB: I had a guy that asked me if I'd ever do it again. I would. Not because I liked it, because you have to. Someone's got to do it. I've had some guys like, “I bet you'll never do that again.” I says, “I never thought about that” until one guy said one time, “I bet you'll never do that again.” I said, “I'm afraid I would.” I said, “I know I wouldn't like it. If I – But I, you know but” I said, “I'd probably do things different.” But you know, if I had to go through it just like I did, not knowing what was going to happen I'm – thank God I didn't know what was going to happen or I would [inaudible 1:25:47] one day to the next sometimes. But yes, would I do it again? Yes. I have never ever run into a veteran that was sorry he was a veteran. I have never had that. I've said to different guys too, I says, “I know a lot of guys went through a lot of things, but I have never had a veteran say he was really sorry that he ever joined the military.” I've never had that. I know a lot of guys wish they would have. I think some of them are just saying that. I've had guys that, when I tell them some of the things that I did down there that weren't too bad, I got one up north, he said, going “Oh, you didn't have it so bad.” I looked at him; I didn't say anything, but if you only knew. I just – some of those kind of people, what they do is – I think they're trying to make up for what they didn't do so they make it sound like you didn't have it so bad. I did say to one guy, I said, “Well I'll tell you what; I wasn't home by mommy and mommy making my bed and mommy washing my clothes and mommy making my meals, like you had.” I didn't like the guy very well to begin with, that's why I did that. [Laughs]

SB: [Laughs]

KB: It wasn't right to do that, but I – I thought, you aren't going to pull this on me, guy. Because I don't think he had any members of his family in. I had – I got about ten uncles, they've been – oldest one probably been about 90 by now and the youngest one's 70. Because I had, like I said, my dad had nine brothers and five sisters. My uncles between – Between my uncles and my dad's brothers and my five aunts, their husbands, of all of them, there was only about four, five, and [inaudible 1:27:32] six of the fifteen, nine of them were in service. But the next time I get together with the Korean vets, I really want to sit down, talk to them. I never do that. I did once, one had to kind of have a – what was it? It was one of my uncle's funerals, that's what it was. And I asked just a few questions, "Which two of? Did you go to Korea?" One didn't, there was two of them, they both – because three of them all went to the Korean War. There was – course when we got that many kids, a lot of them are close and I forget what he said again. He died now. And but Art's still living and Al is. I've said I'd like to get you guys together and just "What'd you do? What did you have to do in the service?" I don't know if they had it, you know, good. Which is fine, or if they had it tough that they don't talk about it. Because if they had it tough, they find somebody else that did. If you find somebody else that really didn't have it very good, it's so much easier, you can talk about anything and it won't bother you. But like when I sit and talk to you, it's different, but I can sit and talk to anybody that went through what I did. You can sit and talk [inaudible 1:28:38]

I don't understand why and matter of fact, I got a magazine somewhere here in the last few weeks, it's on *Time* magazine or one of them other *Freedom* magazine, I don't know what it is. But they cannot figure out – there are more Afghan veterans right now that have committed suicide since they've been back than killed in Afghanistan. Did you know that? And in August – there are fifty-nine thousand names approximately on the Vietnam Wall. Have you ever seen it? It's in a vee. See the first name starts in the middle and they go away to the side. They go say the first and last names are next to each other. There in August of 2010, yes, August of 2010, the veterans that they know of, Vietnam veterans that have committed suicide outnumber the ones on the wall, names on the wall. They can't figure out why and there's some that well, there's some of them that didn't see a lot of combat, but in my estimation you only have to see it once. I mean a bad situation.

Take it – we have a guy, north of Hull, his brother-in-law's son committed suicide and he was the first one there to see it. And that's the only one he ever saw; he has never in his life before that or since that, seen a situation like that. I mean, he put the gun under here and pulled the trigger. So you know what it looks – oh, you probably don't, but anyway. He had to go to psychiatrist for a long time because of that one incident. I thought of that later on, there's a lot of veterans that have one incident in a combat zone. So many be those things bother some of them.

Some guys – I know some guy, he's at the lakes now. He got a divorce. He never got remarried and I know that he was a type of a guy that you wondered if he had – when he – before he went to Vietnam, you wonder if he had a mailbox in the other driveway then. You know he was just too squirrely. But when they – they watch for those kind and when they probably figured him out they put him in a situation. He was on a helicopter, small one; he was the gunner on there and that is a – it was one of the most worst places you want to be.

You can get shot at and shot down quite easy. But that's where they put him and he was shot down. The first time him, the pilot, and another guy made it. There was only four on so one didn't make it. And then the second time, he was sitting on the ammo box. He said, "The ammo box had holes in it." "Why it didn't blow up, I don't know," he says. But he talks about it quite freely. I sometimes wonder if he holds a lot in. That if you ever really got him to get serious about it and but he had it bad. And he is – he went to a psychiatrist when he got back, but there was – they didn't know what he was – like I said, his driveway didn't go all the way to the road before he went into the service. But he helped a guy go to a car auction one time; he had paid for that so he took the job. He walked around there talking to every people. He says, "I'm crazy and I got papers to prove it." That's the kind of guy he was. [Laughs] He says, "I'll tell you what. I'm crazy and I'm nuts. I got papers to prove it." And the people would just look at him, you know, but like I said, he was kind of like that before he went into the service. So I don't know if the service made it worse.

But like I say, you can see something every week. Or maybe see something in one year. How do you measure the degree of how it affects you? Because that one might affect you just as much as ten. You know. Or does it stop? No, it's just like I said, when I saw. When Harold died and then when Brownny died, I didn't shed a tear, but I shed a – I cried when I found out we could – we get – in four days' time, we had right at 50 we were responsible for. I was so happy I cried. I was just -- and I thought of that later. I said, "Why did I shed tears when I was happy but not when I was sad?" Because it doesn't bother me that they were dead because they were gone, they were die, it was done. And when someone's gone, it's over. That's all there is too it. That's quite simple. [Laughs] So maybe that's why. I don't know. We talked about that, us guys. Like I say, our meeting went – I went – Our meeting – when meeting Wednesday morning. I'll tell you what. That's got to be awful, awful important before I got go. I've – I had a VA appointment one or two times and they were like, "Where were you?" "Well I had an appointment." "Oh. Okay." But I mean, I can be planting corn; I can be doing something that really got to be done. Quite bad and boy, I'll tell you. I don't miss those meetings. Those guys worry quick. We have one Iraqi guy in it. I'm really surprised he came. That's the only one. The rest are all Vietnam. And the guy with the – who was the sniper. He didn't come very often. He should. I think there's things he's got to take care of. We don't bring them up; he's got to bring them up. We don't go ask any more questions. We might needle him a little bit. That's it. He's got to know what he wants to do.

SB: Right.

KB: And this Iraqi guy. He's still with his wife. He's got a kid. He's finally got himself a job. He's doing okay. He's missed a couple and I think maybe because of his job. And that's okay. But he had a few issues and I think he thought that he had things going on because of being in Afghanistan – he was in Iraq. He wasn't in Afghanistan. Iraq. We explained some of the things to him. I said to him once. I said, "I seen different things of Iraq on TV. The news and stuff. When they showed different clips." I says, "I see what you guys had there." I said, "I'd trade you." I says, "Vietnam was hot, muggy. It was just not good." I says, "The lowest temperature I ever saw there was probably seventy-five there in the winter time at

night.” I says, “Up in the revetment¹² once, we had—some guy had a thermometer sent to him. Revetment is the area where the plane sets in and it’s got wall about this wide filled with gravel and sand. The walls are steel and it’s big enough for the plane to set in. And the floor is steel until they smuggled in some cement. We got it, it was called the Red something – Red Horse guys, whatever. But that, when it gets to like a hundred, hundred and ten with humidity, it’s hot! And this steel all the way around and as I said, we had – one guy had a thermometer. Hung it in the back of one of those Revetments; it got up to hundred and twenty. It wouldn’t go no higher. It was up there almost all the time on hot days. That’s hot! We never can get any eggs. I wish we could have got some eggs sent to us and broke them on the plane wing and see if we could have fried it. I think we could have got it done. It would have took a little while, slowly let it get hot and flip a little bit. I think we could have done it. It’s hot, but we got used to it. And I asked him, I said, “I would rather have been in Iraq than Vietnam.” “Oh, shit,” he said, “I seen Vietnam. I’d rather be there.” I said, “Why?” “Well, you had moisture. It was wet. It was so dry and sandy and blowing.” I said, “You know. I never thought about that.” “Oh, yeah,” he said, “That sand would get in everything.” I said, “Where we were, the water got in everything.” [Laughs] I says, “And then it got moldy.” You get something sent to you, but you never tell anybody. You get something sent to you, maybe took too long. I remember one time; it was some kind of cake or something. I thought, don’t do that. And it was – we didn’t eat it. [Laughs] It – they don’t keep stuff like that cool when they mail it. And then, I think I just sent something back, not – don’t do it. But it doesn’t work quite as well and this and that, I don’t know what excuse I made. I didn’t want to make it sound like they did it for nothing, you know. Something like that, I just – canned stuff, or something that’s preserved works better, you know. No, he had said, he’d rather be in Vietnam. I says, “That’s really strange.” I said, “I’d rather have been in Iraq.” And he saw enough to – not as bad as I thought, but maybe he wasn’t telling everything yet. He hasn’t been there for a couple months. And then we had one guy, he hadn’t been there for – we don’t know what happened. I bet you eight months. A couple of times we’d say to the ladies that [inaudible 1:37:0], “Where’s George?” “Well, he called. He couldn’t make it.” “Did he say anything?” “No.” Well, he finally made it, not the last time, the time before. He got caught driving; he had drank too much. But he was driving for the other guy. He said, “I really didn’t drink that much, but the other guy, I knew he couldn’t drive so I thought I’d better drive for him. And lo and behold, we got pulled over.” And he said, “I could have gone to this thing where – where they got to blow in something, or some breath-something.” He said, “I could have been out of that by now or something.” I said, “Why didn’t you do that?” “Well, I wasn’t that guilty.” I says, “You were drinking, George.” [Laughs] And he just – “You were drinking; you can’t do that.” Well he says, “I was good enough to drive.” Yeah, well I don’t think that but whatever. So he kind of fought the system. So they put him in a program and then he talked to our mediator, whatever you want to call her, and then after about fifteen minutes of talking about it, she says, “You must not tell anybody that.” Well, whatever. That doesn’t – those things we can talk about, there’s some things we won’t. “George,” she says, “I think your problem is you’re too stubborn.” And he is. He’s stubborn. “George, you aren’t going to get out of the program for a few months if you don’t start working with them.” So maybe we’ll start seeing progress, but he’s going to have to get his license and everything. He walks to work, got to walk a

¹² The Oxford Dictionary defines a revetment as a retaining wall or facing of masonry supporting or protecting. (Revetment)

mile to work. He isn't happy. [Laughs] But, that's the way it is. But it's a nice group; it really is a nice bunch of guys. And I bought – we got – our daughter lives in Grand ?, we got her a house there. She loves that little town. She doesn't work there, but she loves living there. And about two blocks from it is where one of the guys I meet with all the time. I told her about it finally. I says, "Just go over. Get down to old Francis." I says, "He'd like to meet you some time. He doesn't have any kids. He's married." I don't know if she's going to do it or not. Nice fellow. Well, over all a nice guy. We all get along so good, but we understand each other, so. Yes. Other than that, what else do you need?

SB: I think we've covered most everything here. [Looking through papers] Got some good experiences and you touched on everything without me having to ask, so that's great. So.

KB: Well that's when they asked that one time, about a year ago, about speaking at some assembly at the college. I said, "I don't know if I'll make it through that. If I get started on something" – I said, "I don't need my notes. If I get my train of thought going, I stay on the right track with my train." I said, "I'll just keep going. I says, "But it would be nice to have someone with me." I says, "In case I can't get through something. Then somebody else jumps in." But I think that some people should know what some veterans go through. Like I said, a lot of veterans don't want to be patted on the back and called heroes. And there's so many people that they seemingly are trying to make up for what they didn't do in the past. Don't make up for it; we don't need that. We don't want – we don't need nobody's pity, nobody [inaudible 1:40:26]. We don't want that. Most veterans I know do not want that, but – maybe someday everybody will figure it out, just why things are the way they are. But we're still around; we're doing good and I just hope that they keep fighting for – we got a good country here. Because that's why people still trying to get in this country; this is not a bad country. They got to start telling the good things about this country once. We got a good country; we're good people. There's nothing wrong with us. We aren't perfect; we're not saints, but we're good people. You go – I've gone to a lot of different countries and I've seen what some people live in. Some people – some countries live in fear twelve hours of the day. The other twelve hours they're sleeping. You don't have that here. I mean it. They're afraid, you know. God, I wouldn't want to live that way. I'd fought and died – people – there's some of these countries, I don't know. These Muslims, right now. A lot of Muslims are good Muslims. It's that small percentage that's going to – not good. Not good. The one in Libya right now, the leader they have went to school in Pennsylvania and he is not – He's a diehard Muslim. If they can get those countries thinking that way. A lot of those Muslims are good people. I'm not – they're not bad, they're not that bad. It's just some of those small percentages that are going to make the rest look bad and that small percentage of Muslim are so – oh what do you call it – terrorist type that they are going to try harder to get their way. And that ten percent is going to rule the other ninety. And the other ninety, if they'd just speak up, this country got the silent majority too. If they would just speak up, you wouldn't – but they had one on TV one time. This Muslim was sitting there and his hands were together and wiping his hands and putting them in the pray mode and then just wiping and wiping them. "How peaceful a people we are," he says. While, then – this was something like 60 Minutes or something like that, I don't know what it was. But anyway, after the program, they had one of – about six, eight weeks later. They didn't tell this guy. They followed him around without him knowing about it, watching what he

was doing. They caught him two, three times, standing on podiums, hollering to the top of his voice, "Death to America." How peaceful is that? They had him on TV, showed him the film while he was sitting there. Then they showed him what he was doing. He just sat there and looked at it. He didn't know what to say. He says, "This is your peaceful? Now you understand why Muslims are getting a bad name?" You know? He just – I think the interview didn't last very long. [Laughs] So – But, I don't know. It's just like when I got in service, I hardly ever knew a black guy and one of my best friends in Tech school was from Harlem, New York, came from Puerto Rico, moved to Harlem. Where he came from, he said at eight o'clock at night the policemen left the streets, it wasn't safe. He says. [Laughs] And I could trust him; I knew I could trust that guy. I like him. Well yeah, all the guys did too, I wasn't the only one, but I knew I could trust him. I knew it. I mean, he borrowed my stuff, I didn't care how long he borrowed it, he always brought it back, Thank yous and this and that. I knew I could trust the guy. But where he came from it was tough. He told me some things where he lived, I thought, gee I got it pretty good where I came from. But that was about the first time I ever really knew a black personally. I knew of them, but I mean personally. Nice fellow and he actually didn't want to chum around with black guys. We asked him one time. He says – Cosmin was his name. He had Cosmin, ten names and Torrence. And "why don't you hang around the black, you know? Because we like you. We aren't this because we don't like you, but you never hang around with" – he had a lot of different black guys in our barracks. He said, "I get a bad name from them." He said, "You know this one guy – I forget what his name was, he knew him – he goes out at night. Ten o'clock at night, its dark out, street lights are on. He's got green pants, yellow socks and probably a blue shirt and his sunglasses." [Laughs] He says, "You don't need sunglasses to act black at night. You know, I says, I just don't need that. You know." He was just – I don't know, nice fellow, but there was more of them. Well, yes. Yes, in the service, you don't look at color. Not at all. Koreans love this. I was so glad they were there. Man, when things got tough. They had a three year hitch and after two years, you got to be getting loony- toons in my book. They had a three year hitch and some of them had it pretty tough and a – I often wonder how them guys went home. What they were like, if they deprogrammed them or what. But they came once in a while in our – you know where we slept and stuff. We talked and they – they thought we were just wonderful, us Americans. Oh, we were great. Little did they know, we told them, "Well we're glad you're here." You know, we told them that, "You're great too." You know it's hard to communicate because –

SB: Yes.

KB: They'd know a little language, but we didn't know no Korean. They knew a little English and we'd communicate. "We're glad you're here." And "Don't leave." Fifteen hundred of them, they were tough. They were tough. Yes, they captured ten of them on a helicopter and that happened more often. They wouldn't call in until they were maybe half a mile out ready to come in to land, how many they had. And they probably had two left because they would ask questions to the VC they would catch. They didn't get no answers. Way up in the air like that, they'd shove them out the door. Yes, now that's – well, those things you don't hear about on the news. You don't see that kind of stuff. It happens. By the time, they get to the last two; they're just telling them everything they want to know. [Laughs] And if they can't get it out of them then, where I slept, about half a block from where I slept, there was an

interrogation building, if you want to call it that. They would cut ears off, anything, the Koreans. Some of them, they hurt long enough, like I said, they were getting almost to nothing – they started getting crazy. They didn't – I didn't see it. One of the guys said, he had one guy had eight, ten ears on a chain around his neck. Why you would want to have eight, ten ears, I – this is war. But I mean, I never saw that, but he said, "I saw it. He's got eight, ten ears. Why do you got them?" "Oh, we got interrogation," he says. [Laughs] The only thing I got out of something like that, I do have a pair of sandals that came off of what we called gooks. They're made out of – the bottom is the shape of a foot, kind of, and the bottom is cut out of a tire. The flat part of a tire, did you ever see those? And then they have slits and they have a slit here and there and then here where your big toe come out of here. Then of those, and then those pieces that go across are inner tube, pieces of inner tube about this wide. And how they got those cuts in that tire to slide that inner tube through there, I'll never figure out. Its just – you can't move it. They must have some machine or something to slide. I don't know how they did it. And then the backside, I hate – I don't wear floppies. You got to put your toes down to hold them down and they have [inaudible 1:47:54]. But anyway, then in the back, they had one go behind your heel. Then another one back here went in front of – on top of your foot. Then – and I thought, boy those look like good shoes. I could use those. I shouldn't have done that, but I did. I still got them. They stay on your feet; they're going to last. But they wore those. Those were their shoes. And I could see, they wouldn't step any nails. They're not going to go through there. Yes, I got that. I didn't feel guilty about keeping that either. Still don't. Wife don't like it. They're in a closet. I had them at the lake, but Laura didn't know they're here. She bought me a pair of slip on sandals, more or less, that are – when you slip them on, they kind of go around and they're kind of a cloth mesh or something. She wanted me to wear those more often. I think I wore them once. I'd rather wear them other ones because they stay on and they're – they – they're good shoes. That's the only thing I ever took off any – any person or anything. It was not [inaudible 1:49:05] I just saw that, I don't know why. I – I can use those. [Laughs] It maybe sound crude to you, but that's just the way it is. So, yes. Anything else you want?

SB: I think that just about wraps it up.

KB: Does it really?

SB: Yes.

KB: Oh, okay. Like I say, if you continue with this and they want somebody to talk, I would probably do it with two, three guys with me, but not by myself.

SB: Okay.

KB: I don't know. I think they talked to the superintendent in the school about it and then he – I think he gave the name, and I don't know about that. I thought about it. I said, "Let me think it over." But I thought, and I told him, "I'm not going to do that. Too tough." Too tough. So, but it's been good. I hope you got what you needed.

SB: Yes, thank you so much. You're very interesting story and –

KB: Good.

SB: Yes, so thank you.

KB: There's a lot of things I could have told more, but this is enough.

SB: Yes.

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