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Bert Brewster, interviewed by Stephen D. Rees, Jr., Part 1

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**Transcript of an Interview
with Bert Brewster
by Stephen Rees
July 7, 1999
Waterville, Maine**

The following interview was conducted for the MAINE VIETNAM VETERANS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT. Tapes and transcripts of project interviews have been deposited at the Maine Folklife Center at the University of Maine at Orono, where they are available to the public in accordance with the Center's policies. Some restrictions may apply to the use of these interviews by researchers. The Maine Folklife Center should be consulted concerning fair-use guidelines.

Reference copies of the tapes and transcripts are also available in the library of the University of Maine at Farmington and in Special Collections in Ladd Library at Bates College, Lewiston, Maine.

Monique Leamon of Casco, Maine, transcribed the recordings.

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Views and opinions expressed in these interviews do not reflect the views and opinions of the University of Maine System or its campuses.

Listener discretion is advised.

BB:Bert Brewster

SR:Stephen Rees

Tape One, Side A:

SR:This is July 7th, approximately 4:45 p.m., Stephen Reese talking with Bert Brewster at his office in Waterville, Maine. This is the University of Maine at Farmington MAINE VIETNAM VETERANS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT and I like to say hello and thank you again for doing this for us.

BB:Oh, you're welcome, glad to do it, yeah.

SR:This interview should take about an hour and a half to three hours, anywhere, it just depends, and during the course of the interview it's going to be split up in about three sections, preservice time, basically family, anything else about education, background information basically. And then move into the service sector where, you know, when you served, talk about experiences there, and then kind of end it up with what happened afterwards, how you ended up in Maine, so.

BB:OK, great.

SR:And also, just a quick reminder, at the end....

BB:Can I ask a favor, too? Is it possible to do it by six o'clock?

[Unintelligible - both speaking at once]

SR:If we don't fit it all in, maybe come back another time.

BB:OK, so we give it another time? Sure, I, no, I'd really appreciate that because....

SR:OK, I'll keep an eye on for six. And real quick, this is just a reminder that there's a release form, I'll go over it in detail later on in the interview.

BB:OK, sure.

SR:So, with all that said, starting with basically family information background, where were you born...?

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BB: I was born in Owl's Head, Maine, and I was born a month after my father had died, which is kind of a significant family experience for us. Was raised in Owl's Head by my mother and grandmother and an older brother Don, who was actually sixteen years older than I am, who shortly after I was born entered the Navy in WWII, so I think 1943 he enlisted. So his being away like that was a big part of my young life growing up. I lived in Rockland until I was I think eight years old, then we moved to Philadelphia to be near my brother and I went to school in Philadelphia, went to LaSalle College for probably five and a half years. I was going to school at night which is basically what happened to me because this was during the time of the draft, this was, like I graduated high school in '59 and I went to LaSalle the next year, and I had put in five and a half years of my classes, I was going to be an accountant, and got drafted. This was the draft time so, and I think they really wanted me pretty bad, so I, yeah.

SR: Did you have any other siblings?

BB: Just the older brother, that's all. Really raised by my mother and grandmother and then the older brother Don, who had moved to Philadelphia with his wife, he had married right after he came home to Rockland, and then he moved to Philadelphia, and then we followed not long after that. Because, my mother had gone to school in Philadelphia herself and they had lived in Philadelphia and they felt that that would be a great place for me to grow up and get an education and had more opportunity than I would have had in Rockland, so we got down there, so we got down there.

SR: Was your brother still in the Navy at this point?

BB: No, he wasn't, he had, let's see, he came home in '45, '46. No, he got right out. There's an interesting kind of correlation between us because his WWII service was something I always saw as very positive and I really, and I admired him. And so getting drafted was not something I wanted to avoid, I mean it was really something, it seemed like that was my obligation and I should do it, my brother had been in the service and I felt, well, you know, I wanted to

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do my thing as well, so it was not really a negative thing at first, except it interrupted my life and, you know, kind of took me away from something I'd worked hard at for five and a half years, so I wasn't too happy with that. I did, I did try to postpone it, I did try to put the draft off. I was living at home with my mother at that time and was her only child, you know, and so tried to say, you know, why should I be drafted, you know, no, they wanted me. I was, my, the company I worked for while I was going to school felt that I was a valued employee and they wrote a letter and said that, you know, I should be given [unintelligible word]. I had also enrolled in the seminary at that time and felt that, you know, perhaps as a religious person I should be allowed not to go. But they didn't, they wanted me so bad it was just unbelievable, I just, the incredible experience I felt this had to be, you know.

SR:At what year did they start to try to draft you?

BB:Sixty two, '62 I think, and then '64 I finally went in. So, yeah, I think it was '62. I mean I had, you know, I had signed up and went through the whole thing at eighteen, went through that whole process, and all my friends did and I remember going through that whole thing with friends where many of them stayed up all night the night before and drank huge amounts of alcohol and they would go in hung over and somehow would not be drafted because their health was so terrible. Because I was such a wonderful religious guy I didn't do all those dishonest things and I ended up being drafted so, made me question.

SR:So was that something common, though, people avoiding the draft in that way, because I've never heard about it?

BB:Pretty much, yeah, pretty much. It was not an unusual thing for people to try to, one guy I remember drinking gallons and gallons of water and just bloating himself up, another guy gaining tons and tons of weight, and I mean all kinds of things like that were going on because there was that, I think there was always that mixed feeling about, you know, if you go in the service you're going to get drafted.

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A lot of people enlisted in the National Guard at that time and Air National Guard and Naval Air, from my friends in Philadelphia, there was, because right outside Philadelphia was an air base and I can't really remember the name of it right now, but that was another way out. So you'd put in your three or four years and then you didn't have to, didn't have to go, so to speak.

SR: So what finally made you decide that it was the time to go ahead and just be drafted.

BB: Because I'd lost every appeal that I'd made. The only thing I got was, I got an extension so my mom could move back to Maine, and that was the one big thing. She had been planning on moving back here anyway and had retired from a job she had for many years, and so I just asked, applied to see if there was any way I could, you know, maybe come back to Maine for a period of time, get her settled and she had built a house up here in Owl's Head and, just, could I come back. And that, that, based, they accepted that. And I came back, I don't remember the exact months, but I do remember that I came back and I think, in January or February I think, I finally went in, in Bangor, went into the Army in Bangor, got inducted with a bunch of Maine guys. Which was kind of fun for me, you know, because I was new to the state and everything else, *[unintelligible phrase]*.

SR: So in your schooling though, going back to that, did you ever talk about Vietnam, was that ever something that came up in conversation?

BB: All, oh all the time. You mean, what, before getting drafted?

SR: Before being drafted.

BB: Yeah, oh yeah, that was a topic of conversation all the time, yeah, was what was going to happen and, this is before numbers, it was before the lottery but that was, that was what people were basically looking at was that, you know, this was not a good thing and nobody wanted to go. Among my friends nobody really wanted to go with any great enthusiasm, you know, so,

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and that's two years out of your life. And interestingly, most of the guys that I was drafted with were college students, we were all from New England and most had college educations, and most were draftees. There were only a few enlistees in the group that I was with. It was a really, really interesting group, very high functioning, bright group of guys that went in from, basically from New England. But it was interesting, it was fun, it was a great group of people.

SR: So you received your orders and where did you go from there?

BB: I went to, let's see, I started in Bangor where I got sworn in, spent four or five miserable days at the Bangor YMCA, they kept us at the YMCA, and we went through all the process and I remember, I remember sw-, I do remember swearing in. And then we went from, we went to the Bangor airport in the middle of the night and we flew to Fort Dix, New Jersey, in the middle of the night in a DC-3, I've never forgot that, I've never, I never had experienced anything like that. Landed in the middle of the night and then just stayed up for days, I think that was it, and got processed down there in New Jersey, got our uniforms, got kind of assigned to companies, and then got separated. I do remember spending like four or five days just sort of in processing. Then I remember getting sent to an outfit, a unit, in a barracks, nasty wooden barracks, I still remember that. And it was cold because it was winter, and we got winter gear, and then we spent like eight or ten, twelve, I don't know how many weeks, we spent in basic training which was really miserable for me because I got sick, I got pneumonia, I got the measles and I lost about fifty to sixty pounds, I mean it was unbelievable. Nothing fit me, my clothes didn't fit.

SR: And they still wanted you.

BB: It was awful, I mean it was really, it was the most worst experience of my life. I never, I was cold all the time, I was miserable all the time, they were miserable to me because it was the, I guess it was

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the way they do basic training, but it was just, it was really terrorizing, you know. And I was terrorized, I have to admit, I was really, boy, I was scared. And I would not step out of line, I did what they told me when they told me and, you know, and, you know, it's funny, memories come flooding back. I remember having to eat so fast that, you know, I couldn't get anything to eat and the food was terrible, and the conditions were terrible, and the people were nasty, and that's what I remember about it, you know. But, you know, somehow you did it because you had to do it.

SR: Did you still feel like this was something you should be doing?

BB: Yeah, but I didn't like it. I made friends with a man named Merle Alley and Merle was a lobster fisherman from Addison, Maine and we were kind of, really became friends, you know, I really liked him a lot and we stayed in touch for a while, and I remember that every night he would sit on his bunk and he would cry, and he'd just cry because he was so homesick, you know. And I remember I had some of those same kinds of feelings like, oh, God, this is awful, this is not where I want to be. And it was, like I say, it was cold and miserable. I couldn't shoot a rifle straight, I never quite got that, I couldn't, I was not, I'm not well coordinated so that when you had to run and jump over hurdles with a rifle with a bayonet I was just scared to death I was going to kill myself because I couldn't coordinate running, jumping and holding the gun up at the same time. I screamed my lungs out because I thought if they wouldn't, they'd know I was the one that wasn't yelling, and that's where I got the pneumonia and everything, too, so it was really, it was just, it was awful, it was not a good experience. I used to sit, this is interesting too because this sort of follows out, I was very religious, you know, and I always wanted to do the right thing, so I'd sit at night in the stairway and I'd read my bible, you know, I tried to, I wanted to do the right thing, you know. And so that was, that really actually did sort of sustain me, you know, and then I made friends, I made friends with several people and we'd go to church on

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Sunday morning and we'd sort of have a little, there was a group of us that kind of supported each other and we were in the same kind of bag. And that really did kind of help me, I made some wonderful, wonderful friends, you know [unintelligible phrase]. Interestingly, that's where I learned what a gay person was because a couple of these guys were gay, you know, and I didn't have any idea what that was all about, you know. But it was one of the things that was really interesting about this, that they turned out to be among the most supportive of the group of people that I was with, you know. The other bozos were just, you know, kind of rough and tough and, but I liked these guys, though, I got along well with them.

SR: Now, you mentioned that other people attended religious services with you, were they the same religion or was this a cross...?

BB: It was a cross, you know, it was really a cross match. I think, I think at the, I think in basic training it was not divided up into Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, no, no, I think it was divided up because we used to go to a Protestant service, but later on it was just, it was, you know, combined, so, we had a chaplain with us in Vietnam. Neat guy, wonderful guy. So he was, he was terrific, he was really a terrific guy. And because I was a, I became a medical corpsman, then he was assigned to our outfit so I had some responsibility for him, watching out for his safety and things like that, so.

SR: So you finished basic training, where do you head from there?

BB: Went home for a couple of weeks of R & R, and then went to Fort Sam Houston, Texas for medical training. I think what happened was, you know they did a lot of testing of, you know, I.Q. and things like that and everything else. And I think if you came out fairly high, which I did, I came out high on the klutz rating, but I also came out high on the intellectual rating, and so I went to the medical school, which was the one thing I think that really saved my life in a way was that, you know, I got into

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something that I could manage. I honestly don't think, I know I couldn't have ki-, I say I couldn't kill anybody, I've had the experience where something close that happened, but basically I didn't want to kill anybody and I figured, my brother had been a corpsman so that kind of connection continued on. So I went through twelve weeks of medical training, which was wonderful training and really, you know, made me somebody who could have been a hospital orderly or corpsman or as nurse, you know, basically we did everything, give shots and take blood and enemas and all kinds of stuff that you wouldn't, you don't even want to think about this other stuff that we all did, you know. The last thing they did, this is great, telling stories, the last thing they did to us was, in medical training was they built up to, if you did everything to yourself, and I mean we gave each other enemas, I mean it was unbelievable, some of the guys loved that, some of the guys thought this was great, but, you know the, but the last of it, they saved the cathertization class for last, okay? Well, I mean I remember there's like five hundred of us and we're all marching and we're saying like, you're not touching me, nobody's doing this to me. Because the idea was you had to do everything to each other, and you know, these people are so sadistic, like they marched us into class, they showed us the movie, they showed us all the things, they showed us the tubing, told us everything we had to do, and then of course they get up there and go, now you're going to do it. And everybody, you could see, it was ready for mutiny, I mean people were, and then they rolled out a dummy with a little taped up weenie that you, but that was the, that was the last day of training.

I mean these people were just so sick and sadistic that this was the kind of stuff they did to us. But we had great training, it really, that was really a lot of fun, and the eight weeks or twelve weeks in Texas was really not bad. You talk about hot, but I remember we acclimated to it, I had a great time, took a trip to Monterey, Mexico, you know, did some USO things, there was a pool on the, on the, it was nice, it was clean barracks, it was still the old wooden barracks but it was much different, it was much cleaner and, you know, a lot nicer surroundings than basic training. Basic training was just kind of

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nasty, you know, it wasn't, it was not nice. But this was pretty nice. And then we got assigned, again got a break, and then we got assigned to permanent units and a bunch of us went to Fort Devons in Massachusetts which was really nice. We went to a, what was called a mobile infantry company, and we had, number one it had very nice barracks, basically nice conditions, it was really a much better kind of outfit. And we were assigned to the medical platoon that was part of 1st Division, 2nd Infantry, which was an infantry company, this mobilized infantry company that had been there for years. And, I'm trying to think what else to say about, it was just, that was a good experience. We actually had dorm rooms and it was neat, you had a roommate which, there's, you know, kind of funny stories about roommates and stuff like that, but it was really, it was really a great experience. And I stayed there for, oh gosh, I stayed there for maybe six months, eight months, maybe a year before, and then, however it worked out, it was October of '64 I think that they, they shipped us to Vietnam, I'm pretty sure that's how that worked out. And I was there through '64, '65, it must have been '65, I was there through about six months into 1966, and then my two years was up and then I came back home, was able to ship out after only about six months, which was really, really a blessing. I mean, that was enough for me to go through that, so.

SR:Where were you sent when you got your orders for Vietnam, where did you fly in to?

BB:Well, it's an interesting story, we didn't fly into anything, we went by boat.

SR:Really?

BB:Yeah, this is kind of a funny story, too. Nobody told us where we were going, didn't let us know. This is about the time that Johnson is mobilizing the first division, about five hundred thousand went. The only clue you got was if you dyed your underwear green, you were probably going to Vietnam. And I dyed my underwear green. That was the big thing, you had to take your white t-shirts and dye them green,

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everything had to be green. Well, you know, kind of a clue, duh, you know, why would you do that, you know. So we had to do that and then, what's the second thing that hap-, oh, then the second thing was we took all of our equipment from Fort Devons, drove through Boston to the Boston Navy base in the middle of the night and loaded it on ships, and then got in busses and went back to Fort Devons. Now still, nobody tells you anything, you can't, because they couldn't tell you, I think it was a secret. So we went back to Fort Devons and waited, and waited and waited. What I remember was that the night before we were to fly out of Logan for California, something happened that, they gave us like a stretch, a pass, I guess I had twenty four hours. And of course I was in Maine, I was living in Maine, you know, with my mom, and I just figured I'll try to get home, you know. I really wasn't into hitchhiking but I got to the bus station and the last bus out I caught, and it turned out to be the bus that stops at every stop. So I got home, I don't think I got home until after midnight and then I had to get on a bus the next morning to go back, so that was my last, I had my last experience with home. But we flew out then, we flew to California, flew over, it was at night, we flew at night with full field outfit, I mean rifles, bayonets and everything, with, on airplanes with stewardesses. Unbelievable. Yeah, yeah, full field packs and everything, we just took off, you know, just like this, you know, you had to keep everything on for the, whatever it was, six hours to California. It was just ridiculous. And the other thing that was sort of, it was kind of funny but it was also tragic. You imagine, you imagine like three or four hundred guys on this 747 and these poor stewardesses, you know, I mean we were brutal, it was just aw-, I don't know how they ever survived. And they flew us into Oakland Army Base, I don't where we landed, went to Oakland Army Base and got put on, the General Blaxford was the ship, they were using these old WWII troop ships, and we were put on that and I remember two, well, I remember things like I remember the Red Cross was there and they gave us doughnuts, I remember we were down in this hold in the ship and there were like four bunks one on top of the other and this thing was packed, there were twenty five

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hundred of us on the ship. No equipment, the equipment was coming around through the Panama Canal. And then we took off, I remember going underneath the Golden Gate Bridge, I remember seeing this giant sunfish in the water, and then, this is like the worst experience in my life, this whole trip. And then we got out and it was like two or three days out and the ship broke down, and then they drifted and they drifted for a while, then they got the ship going again, and then they'd go on. And, and, so, you know, things were okay for a little while, we're on the Pacific. And then it got like really stormy and people got sick. And of course we're corpsmen so we had to, you know, we were handing out those, whatever people take, Dramamine, whatever it was, we took care of that. I didn't get sick, but what started to happen was there were too many people, we were just so crammed in together, and so it got like really, like, you know, you didn't want to talk to anybody. And I remember that the guy in the bunk on top of me was, I was reading my bible, and he said, you're nothing but a pussy, you know, look at you, you know, you don't do anything and you think you're so good. Well, and my reaction was, well, you know, you don't know anything about me and, oh, they said some really, and then the guy said to me, he says what are you, you must be gay. Well that was it for me because to be gay I'd figured out was not good at that point in my life, so I said, I'm never speaking to you guys again. Well, can you imagine on a ship with twenty five hundred people, and we would literally walk around the deck and if they saw me coming they'd go the other, and if I saw them coming I'd go the other way, and we would, until finally, I don't remember how it all worked itself out, we had some kind of big blow up at, at the end, and it all sort of came out, you know, we all kind of, and then, and then we were friends again. But it got worse and worse in terms of the surroundings because we ran out of water, we ran out of food, the ship, you know, would break down and then it would go on. I do remember we got around Hawaii but we didn't, I thought we were going to go to Hawaii, I prayed we'd go to Hawaii but we didn't. I sat on the deck and I read *Hawaii*, I had taken that with me so I sat and I read *Hawaii* for weeks going around, we never got to

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Hawaii. And then, as I remember, and I think this is the God's honest truth, we got off of Japan and a typhoon came, and it blew us to Okinawa which is where we were going. Really, I think that's, what I remember of the story is that if it hadn't been for that typhoon, we would not have really made it. Not that I wanted to make it because by that we're thinking, so we're going to Okinawa, is this where we're going? We landed in Okinawa, and this is like a tragic story of my life, but it was like, things were so bad that we got off the ship and the whole bunch of us, and there was this little PX wagon on the, on the, wherever it was, the base there, whatever. And everybody came running, we ran to this PX wagon because nobody had had anything good to eat, and I remember I stood in line for hours and I got a hamburger and I got a milkshake and I went and I sat all by myself with my hamburger and my milkshake and literally if people would come near me I would growl at them, you know, it was like, get the hell away from me, you know. You're not getting, you know, I guess it was French fries, one of the guys is going can I have some of your French fries because they'd run out, no, screw you, you're not getting my French fries, you know, I was like that, it was like, I felt like an animal, you know, this is my stuff, you know, get away from me. And it, and it was, it was just because it was so horrible, it was a horrible trip, it was just, I mean it was just the worst experience in my life. We took cold salt water showers because they ran out of, imagine.

SR: Do you remember how long you were on the boat?

BB: It was a month and a half I think, I may be exaggerating a little, but about a month and a half I think we were on it, at least a month because it was, you know, I can remember it was divided up into weeks and, it was just terrible. I don't know, I don't know if you've heard other people talk about that kind of situation, but they flew us back, but going over we went, oh, I dreaded the thought that we'd go back by ship because it would have been a month to come. Some of the guys figured out, this is really interesting, because we were medics some of the guys figured out how to get into the officers mess. That,

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and they would get like some pretty good stuff. They used to come back with cans of, what's the, fruit cocktail. We'd all sit around, you know, and try to get some of that. Played Monopoly for weeks, that was a big thing. Played poker until everybody ran out of money, then they played Monopoly, all kinds of stuff. Stole from each other, someone stole my bayonet, I didn't care, I wasn't going to stab anybody anyway, but you had to be really careful of your stuff because, you know, somebody would come along, they'd see your stuff and they'd steal it. It was bad, that was a bad experience. Then we landed in, we went, we left Okinawa, we went to Saigon, to the harbor, and we disembarked in those landing carriers, I do remember that, I can still picture going on those things, climbing down the side of the ship and then going into port, going into the port on ships and then being taken to a holding area outside of Saigon someplace, I can't remember exactly where it was. And we spent maybe two or three weeks there until our equipment arri-, until the equipment came, and we got kind of acclimated. I mean, there was no acclimation, I mean none of this, I don't think any of this was planned. I think it was just, it, you know, it all came about right. They, we ate C-rations, they finally figured out ways to get water to us, uh, what else? Oh, dug foxholes, Jesus I dug foxholes, and we got mortared at that point. This is where, to me this is where a lot of what became denial for me took over because we got mortared in the holding area and I remember that, I remember I was scared to death by that whole experience, and then, and then that was it, and then I wasn't scared, I really wasn't scared any more. And it was the weirdest experience, I mean, you know, afterwards when I learned about denial and stuff like that, I thought oh my God, I was really, I was in denial. We went from, then, let's see, we stayed stuck there, and then we went to Phuoc Vinh which was, we were in the Bien Hoa area, in the iron triangle area, and we were like on the, I guess it would be the eastern part or the western part, eastern part I think, of that. And then there was little town called Phuoc Vinh where they were building an air base. It was a secret air base, and I always remember my mother sent me a clipping once about the secret air base at Phuoc

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Vinh. So we were there and we set up an aid tent. Had some crazy experiences - the first few nights we set up perimeters and everything and they would, the Vietcong, it was a Vietcong area, I think that was basically what it was, and they would infiltrate at night and we had somebody to stand guard duty every night, and I'm just not good at that kind of thing, I just don't stay awake and I really had a hard time, you know, kind of being alert the whole time. On the edge of the perimeter there was a village, I mean a little village, and there was a church. And what would happen is they would, the VC would stage in the church at night and they would come in. They must have had tunnels too and stuff like that because they would come in and, you know, they'd sort of pop up and everything like that. But what happened one night was they had, I had been in this hole watching for them, supposedly on guard duty and just trying to stay awake, and just all night long, and I think they were shelling or something like that, or there was shooting that was going on, and I finally was able to crawl into bed up in the tent and I fell asleep and I, and I came to and it was like I couldn't feel anything, and I thought, oh my God, I'm dead. And all I could hear was this Gregorian chanting music, and I thought, oh, I thought I'd gone to heaven. And it was really funny, you know, because I couldn't feel anything, it was all black and I couldn't see anything, and I thought, my God, it's Catholic. And they were right, you know, they were really right, I mean it was the weirdest experience. And then, and then I remember laying there and thinking, I didn't know what was going to happen next and then, and then somehow it must have started to get light because I could see the holes in the tent, and I kind of woke up and I said, what is going on and they said the church would play this music in the morning to get people to come to worship I guess, or let the Vietcong know it was getting light so they could get out of our area. And, and, and so they would, and they would play the music until people came to church and then they would go back. But I never forgot that, it was, God, you know, I've died. And, but it was not, I wasn't afraid, I mean it was just like wow. So that was one experience. The other things that happened were, I got stran-, this is, my

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experiences are kind of funny and sort of tragic, but, but I got, we had no water to wash in for quite a while so I had saved up in, I had a tarp over a jeep and I had saved rain water, because we were there in monsoon time, so I saved rain water, and I had gotten all my clothes off and I was starting to wash myself and I got sniper fire, so I had to, I had to throw everything, I dived in the mud, and it's, you know, it's like, it was so stupid but I thought to myself I'm really going to kill that guy. I don't care about religion or anything any more, you know, I couldn't even take a bath. We used to wash in our steel pots, I don't know if you've heard these kind of stories about this stuff, this is kind of interesting to me, it's the kind of things I'm interested in, but we used to wash, you'd get a steel pot of water in the morning and you'd wash your face and you'd wash as much of the rest of you as you could, then you'd shave, okay, and then with the water that was left over you'd wash your underwear, and then if there was still water left over you'd wash your fatigues. That was until we figured out how to get stuff into the village to get the, there was a laundry in the village where they would do your laundry for you, so we, until we figured that out that's what we used to do, isn't that crazy? And there was a lot of, there was, I remember stupid things, stories I guess I feel like I should tell. I remember that I just, I just couldn't get into this military thing, I never, I, like I lost my rifle once and I had to go, oh, and I thought I was going to, because you know, I thought oh my God, I'm going to get court martial and everything, so I remember spending like half the morning trying to figure out where did I leave this thing. Luckily I'd left it near the mess tent and luckily nobody had come in and picked it up. I just, that was, that was really scary to me. I just couldn't get into the military stuff. I did aid station work, I was, I did medical records at the aids station and I did, you did all kinds of stuff, I remember giving shots and, that was a big thing, and taking care of guys. Basically we airlifted most of the guys out because we were close to Saigon, so we did a lot of that. And I remember the night that one of the, because you had to be so careful at night, one of the KPs got up and, it was

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the, it was the cook, I don't know what the deal was, the cook got up and one of the KPs shot him right through the butt, so we had to bring him in and treat him and then air lift him. But it was kind of funny because we all sort of joked about whether was he going to get a purple heart or a purple ass, or was he going to, so we had a good time with that. What were some of the other things that happened there? One of my funny stories is about, in fact the picture behind you on the wall, when we were going to one of those area, that's on, that's on Route One that goes up north of Saigon, it's the one that in that movie, Good Morning Vietnam, it's the one they send him on to try to get him killed, and what had happened was we were in convoy and the convoy had gotten hit at the front of the convoy and the rest of us, I was laying under my truck, I drove a two and a half ton truck with a trailer full of medical supplies, and we're laying under the truck, and nothing was going on where we were, you know, and it was really hot, and it was really sticky and it was really miserable.

And this guy came out of his house, because there were houses right along the road, and he said, you thirsty, you know, you American, you want some beer, you know, and oh yeah, you know. So we went in, we sat down and we drank beer and we cooled off and then I guess the war ended and we went back and took off.

But I always took pictures of the kids because I thought they were so beautiful, you know, I'd take a lot of kids' pictures, and we'd give them candy and C-rations and stuff like that so, anyway, that's another one of those stories. A bunch of stories around that, I was trying to think what else I could tell you. So, we went from Phuoc Vinh, we would be at, oh, this was funny too, we were like a blocking force for the airborne that was north of us, and we would go and set up perimeters and things and then they would drive the VC towards us, you know, and I remember that we went to a place called Do Huat [sounds like] and that we had the cha-, we took the chaplain with us, the chaplain [unintelligible phrase], and his chaplains assistant, they followed.

The reason I remember this is because I mean I really liked this man and I really respected him, but again I couldn't stay awake at night and I was supposed to be on guard duty watching him and making

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sure that he was okay. And I, and I just couldn't stay awake and so I crawled into the back of my truck and I went to sleep, and I remember him coming out, waking me up and saying, you know, what are you doing. I said, well, I was sleeping until you came and woke me up. And he said, you're supposed to be on guard duty, and I said well I really don't think it's necessary, chaplain, because, you know, I just don't think anything's going to happen to us back here and if it does, you know, come and get me and wake me up and I'll, I'll do, what was I going to do?

I mean number one I had no ammunition, I refused to carry ammunition, I was at that point trying to get rid of the stupid rifle that I kept losing because it was so heavy and I didn't want to carry it, and I was bargaining to try to get a 45 pistol to carry, so at least I would look like I had something. I would have thrown it at somebody if I had to, but I refused to shoot anybody. So I, so it was kind of like one of those things, but I always remember that he was a li-, he was really angry with me after that because I didn't, I really didn't take him seriously and then I felt kind of bad. But, it was just like, God, it was so crazy, you know, what am I doing out here in the middle of the jungle with this crazy minister, you know, and his assistant, and why couldn't he stand guard duty, you know, why did I have to stand guard duty over him. I never could quite, I never worked out, again, I never worked out this whole military thing, this was very, very hard for me to get into, you know, to get into the spirit of it. I remember we had a Lt. Calafont [sounds like] who was our, like a, he was the lieutenant in charge of the medical platoon. And I remember telling him once, we were driving back in the back of a jeep from someplace and I remember telling him, I really am not going to do anything you tell me to do, because this is all stupid and you're stupid. I mean it was just, it was like a crazy experience, I don't know where that all came from but it was like, this whole thing is so crazy, you expect me to follow protocols and things like that. He was mad at me because I wasn't writing my monthly reports, I was supposed to write monthly reports of how many people we saw. This was like, I'm not going to do that, you can't make me do that, you know, I will make you do that. But it was

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like, they, I think in a way discipline sort of broke down but in another way, you know, I still tried to respect him and the doctor and they were good people and everything else like that so, anyway. This is kind of fun because stories, you can just, I can just tell the stories that keep coming.

SR:What were some of the typical duties you were expected to do per day?

BB:Let's see, I got up in the morning and I had to run the aid station, so I would get up in the morning, get the charts all out, if there was somebody that had to be seen that day, I'd get the charts out. When they came in I'd have the charts ready for the doctor, give the doctor the charts, write in it whatever it was that they did and stuff like that. I, I really, I, what I remember most was we might do that for the morning, might do sick call in the morning which, which as I recall could be almost anything. Like guys with their teeth or, I mean infections, a lot of sunburns, bad, bad blistered sunburns because the guys would try to get out, you know, and get the sun, but you really were talking major, major sun, especially once the monsoon was over, it really turned very, very hot. We had snake bites but we used to air life snake bites to Saigon again. A lot of scorpion bites, especially at night, we'd get a lot, because they'd crawl into your bunk, so you had to worry about that, you always shake your stuff out at night. Broken ankles, sprained ankles, stuff like that basically. And most of the stuff, if we couldn't treat it we'd fly them out, fly them by helicopter out, so we did, I really did a lot of that type of thing, you know. And then, because I was an aid station medic so I didn't travel around as much. When we'd move, I had to be responsible to carry medical supplies and stuff like this, which is a twist in my fate because I'll tell you something else that happened to me. When I was, when I went to LaSalle College I was studying accounting, and I was the only accountant in the entire brigade. And what they did was they set up PXs for, every brigade had a PX, so who got asked? Which is the best thing that ever happened to me because it meant that I went to Saigon to buy supplies, I got thir-, I was given

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thirteen thousand dollars, and a trailer, and a truck to haul it with, big trailer. So I, I remember the first time we went in to set it all up was the first time I'd had anything fresh to eat for weeks really, and we, you know, we got to eat at a nice, there were restaurants that were GI restaurants. And then the second time I took a truck and a trailer and I just got in a convoy and went in. And this really, for me this became the highlight because we used to go in, I'd go in, and I could take one of the other guys with me which was a real treat for them, I'd go in and I'd stay for a week at a hotel. And that was when Saigon was really wide open and you could really do anything and you could enjoy yourself and they had the little tea bars, you could go in, the little tea girls would come and sit in your lap and, you know, you could do anything you wanted with them, and you'd buy them tea and they'd cut your fingernails and they'd do all kinds of stuff, and it was really a lot of fun, you know, and there were hotels we could stay at. That was really a lot of fun, and I would go every, every month I would go for a week, week and a half, to Saigon. Used to fly down, we'd bribe our way onto airplanes with C-rations and they'd fly us into Saigon so we didn't have to, if you're one of a convoy you have to worry about getting shot. If you went in an airplane I guess you just have to worry about falling out of the sky. So that was a lot of fun. We made friends with a hotel owner who was, his son was here in the United States and he would put us up, first he put us up at a hotel in downtown Saigon, then in a hotel out in the outskirts and then he had a, he, for the TET new year he had two or three of us, because I'd come in regularly, he had us to his home for the new years, and he had a little motel area next to his house and we got to stay there, and then had dinner with his family. It was really a wonderful, wonderful thing.

SR:How would you describe U.S.-Vietnamese relations at that point?

BB:Well, it was wonderful at that point, where we were. It was very, very nice. In the village of Phuoc Vinh, because we bought all kinds of stuff, everybody bought a little foot locker and we bought the little

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dolls to send home, and we bought all kinds of other stuff. I used to buy some PX supplies, if I couldn't get them in Saigon, like cigarette lighters and flints and cigarette fluid, and stuff, some stuff you couldn't get, I used to, I'd buy it from Vietnamese people and I'd sell it, you know, back to the guys for a small profit, you know, to help to keep, you know, it kind of helped to keep the thing running and I could get some extra stuff and stuff like that. And then, so we had good relationships there, we did the laundry. Sodas, we couldn't get sodas all the time, you know, or they'd run out, the PX supplies, so what we'd do is, this is really kind of funny, take my ambulance, I drove an ambulance too, and in the back you had like blanket sets, so, and this was sort of iffy because you were buying kind of black market stuff, and of course there's always the risk that somebody put something in the Coke, but, you know, anyway, so we, I would empty out my blanket sets and I would fill that with Coca Cola, we'd go into the village, fill it with Coca Cola and then go back and sell it in the PX. And I used to buy ice too, I remember I was able to buy ice, somebody in the village sold ice so I used to buy ice and everything like that, it was really kind of fun, you know, I really had some great experiences with that.

And we got to know Vietnamese people, always very friendly. I really never experienced, only once do I remember being really scared, twice. Once was in a bar and we were in there with the girls and everything, and it was a nice bar, it was right in the middle of town, but there were some Vietnamese guys came in and they were angry, you could tell, they did not want you with the girls. Because I remember kind of going to the bathroom, you know, trying to look and see if there was a window. The other time I was really scared was, because, they wanted cigarettes. Cigarettes sold for a dollar ten a carton, and I bought cigarettes by the case. So number one, the first sergeant who was a kind of a slimy guy, he had a deal where he would, every time he went to Saigon he took a suitcase with a case of cigarettes, imagine the money he made, you know. And then the second was that I had figured out that I could at least make enough money to pay for a nice hotel if I could sell some cigarettes, so I would do

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that too, I'd sell cigarettes. So anyway, I'd be at the PX and I'd be buying some stuff and I used to take taxis. Well the taxi drivers would work for the black market. So I remember once I had a beautiful Sony radio and the guy turned to me after I got in the taxi cab and he said, you, you know, you sell radio? I said, no, getting ready to go home, I really don't want to. Oh, he said, I want to buy your radio. He was driving, you know, and he's driving and he's driving, I said, you're going the wrong way, I mean I knew Saigon by that time, I said you're going the wrong way. And he said, I want your radio. I said, oh jeez, you know, I'm looking around and I didn't see anything that was familiar by that point, and he got way, way, way off in some place and stopped beside this house and he said, I want your radio, how much to take, you know, well, I paid seventy dollars for it, probably take a hundred if I could get it, you know, so I said a hundred dollars.

Oh, too much, too much, you know, I said, well, a hundred dollars. I don't know where I was getting all this from, you know, it was kind of like he's going to kill me and I'm haggling over, you know, so he went in this place and I'm thinking, oh my God, better take whatever he offers me. He came back out and he said, something that, it must have gone even higher than that so, something like that because he said, you take a hundred and twenty five or something like that, because I was arg-, I guess I was arguing that I really didn't want to sell it, and I said, yeah, yeah. So I took a hundred and twenty five dollars, so he paid me a hundred and twenty five dollars for the radio, and then he gave me a list of stuff and he said I'll meet you every day if you will get such and such things, you know, so I would go back and buy stuff and then he would come and meet me and we'd go and sell it and that would be my money to, you know, pay for stuff. Because we could buy, you could buy ice cream, you could buy like fresh meat, we couldn't get any fresh meat or anything, and you could buy milk, couldn't get any milk, so we could buy like canned milk and stuff like that. I used to buy all that stuff. So anyways, that's what I did, that's what I did during the war. I really, actually I had a good time with a lot of that. The funniest stories about that is going back, because I

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had a good friend, Bob Bronto, we were very close, and he and I went to Saigon once with a jeep and a trailer and decided that, because it was a long trip back and it was getting really hot that we would buy like a case of beer and we'd put ice underneath the seat of the jeep and we'd keep beer in it. And so we, and we drank all the way, and he drank a lot, I would drink just a little bit, you know, he drank a lot, and I was driving. And we got to a place where it was like a VC village and we had to get through it, so what they do is, you'd stop and then the first person would go through real fast, and the other person was supposed to be on alert, and he had a rifle, and so we're driving through the village and I heard this shot and he slumped over in his seat and I thought my God, my God, he's dead, and I got to the other edge and I went to pull him back in his seat, he was just, like that, you know. I said, what happened, he says, I fired the goddam rifle he said, and he'd shot himself. So I remember thinking oh you fool, you know, I was so worried about him. But that was, that's just funny stuff, all kinds of stories like that. Yeah, *[unintelligible phrase]*. All right good, keep going.

SR:Let me take a second, just turn this tape over.

End of Tape One, Side A

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Tape One, Side B:

SR:OK, you were just mentioning that you did keep in touch with a lot of these guys.

BB:Yeah, yeah, and, and especially the, like especially Bob Bronto [*unintelligible phrase*], you know, we did, we, Christmas time we'd always correspond, and then on the thirtieth anniversary we got together. And what was so fascinating was that one of the tragedies for me was that on one of those trips to Saigon there was, it was always a thing where, I mean I always could go because I had to buy stuff, and so other guys would kind of dicker to go with me and stuff like that, and I remember that Bob had gone with me on that trip and we had a great time in Saigon, really just, we'd found a hotel down in the Chinese section of Saigon that was just fantastic, you know, and everything, oh we had a great time. So we're coming back and about half way back the word came down that Jesse Miller had gotten blown up taking troops or somebody, he had to drive, and he drove my truck. Well, that devastated me because I felt so guilty, like oh my God, this guy was driving my truck and he died, and I remember after that, that and one other experience were just really devastating to me, where some of, where friends were killed, you know, and that one I wasn't right there. Another one I was there when they were killed, but it was kind, it was like, oh, I just couldn't get over it and I had this intense sort of spiritual struggle, like why him, I mean, you know, is it some sort of, like he was black and I was white and that didn't make any sense to me, he was no better or worse guy than I was, and that sent me into an incredible tailspin, especially with my religious faith, I just couldn't fit all that together somehow. I became, I was very sad, very depressed, very guilty over that whole thing, and it went on and it followed me after I came home because any time I had anything to do with a Black person I would just bend over backwards, whatever they wanted I would give them, and it was all that guilt over Jesse dying [*unintelligible word*] I felt, dying. Here I was in Saigon having a good time and he got blown up. And I, you know, I went back, and I have a picture of the truck, you know, all blown to hell,

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you know, and it was just like, he must have gone over a land mine and it just, pshh, I think it just blew him out of the truck. And it was just like, oh, I couldn't get over that. Well, it turns out that when Bronto and I got together we talked about that, you know, and I told him, I said, boy, Bob, one of the worst times was when Jesse Miller died. And he said, oh, well you didn't have anything to do with that, he says, I talked him out of going on that trip. And he, and he cried, I mean he got carried, I, I honestly think he's alcoholic, and I, he cried over that, and I said, Bob, I said, all these years I thought it was me that had done this, and he said, no, no, he said, I've always felt that I killed Jesse and, you know, and I think he mentioned things about him trying to get hold of the family and stuff like that because he just felt, he felt so terrible about it. That, I think that's what happened to a lot of people, those kinds of like crazy weird experiences, you know, where you ended up feeling guilty for the death of somebody else. It was not a good, it was not a good experience. But they had things that happened, if I can go on a little bit because some things are coming to mind. One was friendly fire, I mean I'd never heard of that until Desert Storm but it, we killed more of our own people at the beginning than anybody else did. I remember one night being, I must have been in the aid station, they had sent, one of our fellows as a medic was up with a line company in the perimeter and they were getting hit with mortars and they were getting hit with their own mortars, because they'd shoot them up and then they'd come right back down. And that was very traumatic. This, evidently the young guy, the medic who was out there, went through some sort of like really a crisis and just froze and, and ended up like very, very devastated from that whole experience, you know, afterwards. I don't think he ever got over it, I think it was one of those, must have really just destroyed his ego, and that kind of thing. So that was very, very bad. I remember that we were there for Christmas and Bob Hope came and we were the perimeter, and I didn't get to see him, I did see some of the stuff, I mean which was, you know, it was kind of nice in the sense that we, we, Bob Hope came and then a town in California adopted us, so

everybody got like twenty five or thirty presents from this town. It was unbelievable, yeah. But they were doing patrols and this one company went out and they did the same loop three or four days, and they blew the hell out of them. And that's, that was one of my worst experiences because I had to drive out and pick up this guy that I'd gotten drafted with and bring him back, hold his hand all the way back, take him to the hospital, and then he died. I remember, oh, that, oh, I shook after that, I really, really went through a very, very kind of traumatic time. Because I had been, you know, so resistant and so, I wasn't going to do anything anybody told me, I was so angry, and then that happened. And then I just, I remember I sobbed and I said, I remember going to the platoon sergeant who I'd been so miserable to and just saying, you know, I'm really sorry, I said, I, and he said something to me, he says, do you want to be a part of this platoon, and I said yes I do. See they were all jealous about me going over to the PX [unintelligible phrase], I said, yeah I really do want it, yeah, I said, I really do. I went through this intense kind of commitment to that, to that group which, which lasted I think about six hours and then I was right back to, but it was really, it was really hard. I mean this is like, oh, this an awful, awful kind of experience that I went through, and I never forgot. And here it is in the midst of Christmas and you go through the whole thing. It was just bizarre, I think war is bizarre, full of bizarre images, you know.

SR:What was your contact with like the people back home?

BB:A lot of letters, I did get a dear John letter from a girl I'd been, well, I didn't get it from her, I got it from her brother-in-law, which was kind of, that was right after I got into country, that was sort of devastating. My mom wrote regularly, I mean she was wonderful. I always got a letter from my mom, she sent me Downeast magazines, and in fact wrote, I wrote a little note to Downeast saying that, you know, it got printed, that I was sitting in Vietnam reading a Downeast magazine. My mom used to send me canned lobster, I was, I was like the, I was everybody's favorite guy because my mom was

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wonderful, I mean she sent cookies. See, she'd done this with my brother so she did a lot of the same things, you know, she knew how to pack stuff and we'd get these cookies and bars, she made date bars. And the funny story about date bars is that my mom would always baked them for me when I'd go home on the weekend, and if I'd come back to Fort Devons, I'd bring back a box of date bars. Well, we had a Mexican guy with us who really was having trouble fitting in, and I went and I left these date bars, and my mom would put the date bars in a box of dog biscuits because she had a big dog, well this guy thought I had, somebody had given him dog biscuits. Then he traced it down to me and I remember my platoon sergeant calling me in, who happened to be Puerto Rican, you know, I thought jeez, you know, he's really going to kill me. But I, you know, I went and I got the things and I said, look, I said my mom baked goodies, date bars and I gave them to whatever his name was, I can't remember what his name was now, and that was just one of those things. Actually he and I then became very close because, you know, we were able to talk and I said I don't have these feelings for you, you know. This poor guy would go down to the, what's that zone in Boston, wherever it was, in Boston, the, where they had, the combat zone, he'd go down to the combat zone on a Saturday night and get beat up, because he'd go, I'm Mexican, you know, fuck you, I'm Mexican, you know, then people would beat him up. And then, and he had this horrible self image and here he gets this can of dog food, but it was like the date bars were something my mom would send and everybody, you know, we'd get around and we'd share them and, it was really nice. And I got that. My, the other bad experience was the Presbyterian church, I had, I was in what they call in care with the Presbyterian church, I was going to go to seminary, and I swear to this day this is the truth, I got this letter from them, a form letter, please update us on your activities. There's a goddam war, you know, that's what I sent back, you know, something like that. It was so totally, it was so totally, I, and I don't know to this day whether I just was so ticked about being drafted and everything else, and so angry about the whole experience that I'd take it out on the

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Presbyterians. But for, but even after that, because I'd do training with ministers and things like this in my work. If it had anything to do with the Presbyterian church I was always like really nasty about it, and I don't think I ever forgave them for that, can you imagine getting a form letter? I think I wrote back, I'm in a foxhole, that's what I'm doing, and you want to know what my religious life and experience is right now, I'm not going to seminary, I'm here. So that was, that was kind of one of the bad things that happened. People from our church back in Philadelphia, the Presbyterian church, they were wonderful, they wrote. All my friends wrote. But I did kind of get out of touch with a lot of people from the outside that, but I got letters really regularly and that was always a help, you know, I don't remember having too much trouble really with that.

SR: Did you yourself ever feel guilty for being this PX supplier running down, while other people were out in the field?

BB: Yeah, yeah, it was really, I mean but it was one of those things where, yeah I felt guilty but the hell with it, I mean I had so much fun and I just, and it was a great break. And if you think of it, once a month I was gone for at least a week, a week and a half I'm living the high life, I mean I had money. Because, because of the way it all worked out I always had money because I was selling stuff right and left and, and I could buy some stuff a little bit more or less, and, you know, and I had a first sergeant who was always kind of conning things around with me, and we'd buy, we used to buy pizza stuff and he made pizzas and sold them. And he'd always make sure I was taken care of, because I took care of him he took care of me, you know. And so I always was really in good shape with that, and I think that's where the thing with Jesse Miller got kind of twisted because, yeah, on the one hand he died, poor guy, Jesse who's, who'd probably always struggled all his life, nice guy, and here I am out having a ball, making money, sleeping in hotels and cruising Saigon and then all the rest of it, and just having a good time. And that, that was a little bit hairy. And

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that, where it came to a head was, was somehow one of the platoon sergeants had confronted me with that, you know, are you a part of this outfit or not. And then that, that time that we had that terrible experience around Christmas, that really all sort of brought it to a head. But it didn't last, I, it really didn't last. I, I did, I did several things.

I did a lot of drinking which was really unusual for me, but I mean I remember drinking just to try to cope with the whole experience. Well,

[unintelligible phrase] funny story, I was, I had bought liquor for an officers club. Ha, the hell with the officers. I think it was right after Christmas when everything was so bad, I just went into the trailer and hauled out the officers club and we were all in a tent and I just said, let's celebrate, and so we drank up the officers club.

I've never been so sick in my life, but we finished the officers club right there in one night, you know, but it was, it was sort of like getting even, you know, it was kind of like, oh, you guys can go to hell, getting me into this mess and, you know. So

some guilt, yeah. And, which followed me, where I got well was I went to work at Boston City Hospital one summer in a chaplain's program, this was like '67

I think, and it was an interpersonal group therapy almost kind of experience. It was very, very intense. And the guy that I worked with was

wonderful and, my supervisor, and I had one of these like breakthrough experiences in a group experience

that, I really had a breakthrough where I just got into that whole Jesse Miller experience and, and

something that happened in the training group I was in and I experienced the same thing all over again.

This guy was a great group therapist, and I just, I unloaded a bunch of that, and I went back, the next year I went back and I really had a chance that whole summer both in therapy and in group stuff to deal with my guilt, and my, and my kind of struggling theologically with the whole thing and what it meant.

That was a wonderful I worked with, and that's how I got through it, you know. And I can, I look back on that, I do work with Vietnam vets here and especially with their families and things like that off and on, and that's really been helpful to me because I can kind of identify and, not with some of the worst of

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the stories but there's a lot of the stories I can really identify with, and they can identify with me because I can talk about, you know, I've been there, so.

SR: While you were in Vietnam, were you stationed in the same place the whole time?

BB: Pretty much. I remember we went from Saigon to Phuoc Vinh, to Da Lat, back to Phuoc Vinh, and then, and then got out in, yeah, pretty, yeah we were there the whole time.

SR: And you always had the same duties? Or did you ever actually go into the field?

BB: I don't, no, just, just really off and on. I don't, I don't really remember, I honestly don't remember. I remember the PX stuff probably more than anything else, because I remember, that really became my responsibility which I took very seriously, that's what I really remember doing more than anything. It's really funny when you mention that because that's what I remember more than anything, were those experiences, because they were all so wild and wonderful. And it was crazy, you know? We, one night Bob Bronto and I, this is really interesting, we decided, tells you how crazy we were, with absolutely no fear or feelings we decided that we'd have a lot of fun by doing two things. One is we'd pretend we were really black marketeers and we'd go into bars and we'd, and we'd, and we would, you know the girls would be so impressed and that was one way we met a lot the girls was, you know, we'd be sitting down writing like, you know, we'll get this and we'll get this and this is how much money we made, you know. They'd all come over and, what do you guys do, I said, well, I'm in the black market and stuff like that, is there anything you need. We used to go buy them things and, hair spray was a big number, hairspray would get you anything, you know, and so we'd get hairspray and, you know, all that stuff. And we did that. And the second thing was, I don't remember why we did it, but he decided one night that we ought to be the CIA and we would go searching out dens of inequity all over Saigon, and we did. I mean

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we went into all kinds of these crappy little places and we'd be checking the people, we'd show them our GI IDs and then we'd say CIA, you know, and we'd be checking things out. And they'd go, oh God, what are you looking for, oh we're looking for somebody very suspicious and something that's going on, oh, nothing going on here. And he did that and then the culmination of the evening, after we'd gone, I don't know how many hours we were out there, and finally went back to the hotel and I was exhausted and lay down, and he was still, he didn't come back until early in the morning. And I said where were you? He says, you won't believe this, he says, I've been directing traffic. In the middle of Saigon with his GI card. And you know, he'd taken over and he was doing this and he was doing, he was just a rake, he was just the most wonderful guy, you know, just a neat guy. So we did those kinds of things. How do I tell my kids this? What did you do during the war, dad? Well, I did some really weird things, you know.

SR:What did you do when you did leave Vietnam, where did you go?

BB:Did really fun things. I came back, the big thing was my family, my family in Washington, D.C., and they met me, I don't know if they met us in Rockland or what the story, I don't remember how it all worked out, we traveled, but I went to Williamsburg and spent, gee we must have spent a week at Williamsburg. Just kind of laid around and my cousin, Janet, really treated us royally and took my mom and I down and we, we stayed in Williamsburg and toured Williamsburg and then she took us to Washington, D.C. and we spent some time with them, they live in Arlington, *[unintelligible phrase]*. Then I came back, I went to work for a guy in Rockland, George Sleeper, selling used cars, Sleepers Car Sales, Catch 'em and Skin 'em Car Sales, on Park Street in Rockland. Had a great time, he was a wonderful old guy, he ran an inn down in Owl's Head and he just let me come and work, he gave me twenty five dollars a week and I could just sit. And I was going to go to seminary, I was going to go to Bangor seminary so I had about, I had about a year of just working with

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him, and it was just wonderful, I mean it's just what I needed. It was kind of decompression and, oh, I met characters, you wouldn't believe it, well you might believe it. Maine characters, you know, from up in the hills there around Rockland, oh, it was just unbelievable. You know, traded cars for sheep and shot guns, it was just fun, I mean I really had a good time. And, you know, I met people, I made friends in Rockland, I just, I just had a ball. And that was kind of like decompression for me, and then I went to seminary, in '67 I think I started seminary in Bangor and I stayed there for four or five years, I can't remember exactly. I mean, I had to make up some of that college stuff, I hadn't quite finished college so I stayed and finished that off. And then, let's see, what happened next, and I did the things during the summer that were so helpful. I did that for about three or four summers. Then I decided I really liked being a chaplain. You know, I loved the ambulance driver thing and I really did get into that and enjoyed that, and then I decided that I wanted to be a hospital chaplain, so I went to Boston City Hospital again, I went to Grafton State Hospital for a training program, and then I got married and we decided, I decided, we didn't decide but I decided that I ought to do a residency someplace, so I went to the University of Virginia Hospital and did a residency in chaplaincy, stayed down there for three years, went to Connecticut for two years, and then came back here and I've been here for twenty two years. Chaplain, and then about five or six years ago I wanted to get my doctorate so I went down to Andover-Newton and I got it in family counseling, or family therapy and stuff like that, so I've been doing that here, plus chaplaincy for about five years now. It's been fun, I've really enjoyed what I've done, I liked it. I think the war thing, it was, it was important for me, you know, I really grew up in the Army. I'd never been away from home, I changed, you know, I was kind of a geeky guy, I used to wear Argyle socks and they'd all make fun of me. I got in with a bunch of Black guys, this was really fun for me, I have no prejudice whatsoever, I just, you know, always never saw color, and I fell in with this bunch of crazy Black guys from down south, they were all part of the same group. And they would, they would

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just sort of like, I think they just felt so sorry for me because I looked so sorry, you know, they, oh, come on, you know, they'd take me some place and buy me clothes and try to make me look, because they'd want to go some place with the whole bunch of us and I'd be such an embarrassment that they'd, you know, they'd want to buy me decent clothes so I wouldn't look like such a fool. But they were wonderful, I just had a wonderful time with them. I lost touch with them, I don't know whatever happened to those guys, but they were great.

SR: If you could how would you, well, if you could sum up your experience in Vietnam as best as you can, as short as possible, how many words and what would it be?

BB: The first word was awful, it was physically awful. It was exciting, I mean it was probably the most exciting thing I'll ever do. I mean when else are you going to get shot at or, you know, well, actually it has happened around here but, you know, working with these kids, you know, here, but it was exciting, I mean it was really a growing up time. I mean it was, it was like everything opened up. My, my spirituality, my personality, I had to f-, I had, I think I had always held myself back from people, and I knew that my life depended on these people, and that, I remember, I remember distinctly deciding that even if I didn't believe the same things they did, we were going to be a unit that worked together, because my back was going to be watched by these guys and I was going to watch theirs. I really remember that, I remember deciding that on the ship that, you know, all this other stuff that had divided us and everything from the past, no way, I was going to, I was going to s-, I remember deciding I was going to survive, that was real important to me. Isn't that amazing? I don't know where that, but isn't that, that's what happened, I decided I was going to survive, whatever it took, I would survive. And not all of that was good because I did some stupid things, you know, I really took some risks, you know, and, but I grew up.

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SR:I know you're pressed for time, so. Let's go to the release form real quick.

BB:I honestly think that kind of covers it too, I really think....

SR:Really?

BB:Yeah, I was trying to think as we were talking, and other stories would sort of pop into mind but I think that kind of covers it. I don't know what else I'd really tell you. This has been great, I really, and I appreciate it too, by the way, this is, this is actually very moving to be able to tell the stories and look at all the sides of this.

SR:I've heard that from most [*unintelligible word*] veterans that they're, they really appreciate this, it's....

BB:I don't think there was any....

SR:I should explain this real quick. Basically these paragraphs here talk about the release form itself, where it'll be housed, what it'll be used for, and if you have no problems with this being available for research etcetera, just write no restrictions, or none, and this talks about, then it becomes [*unintelligible phrase*] recording, and basically down here it just says that, you know, this does not prevent you from saying the story again ever, and you can even write your own book if you ever want to, it's just, it's exact copy on that tape.

BB:Oh good, okay, sounds good. Sign it right here?

SR:And then date it there.

BB:Yeah, great. No, it's seven, seven six.

SR:And, if you do think of anything, I'll, thank you,...

End of Interview