**Ernie King Brock**
**Narrator**

**Michael Russert**
**Wayne Clarke**
**Interviewers**
**New York State Military Museum and Veterans Research Center**

**August 24, 2012**
**Cambridge, New York**

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| Ernie Brock | **EB** |
| Michael Russert | **MR** |
| Wayne Clarke | **WC** |
| Unidentified speaker | **US** |

**MR:** We are in Cambridge, New York. It is the 24th of August, 2012. The interviewee is Ernie King Brock. Could you tell me where and when you were born?

**EB:** I was born May 1, 1945, in Chipley, Florida.

**MR:** What was your educational background prior to going into the service?

**EB:** I had a Bachelor of Arts from Florida State University.

**MR:** Did you work before going into service?

**EB:** Yes. I was employed as a high school English teacher, in the small town of Greenville, Florida, halfway between Monticello and Madison.

**MR:** Were you drafted or did you enlist?

**EB:** I enlisted, actually, in order to avoid the draft. I was already a bit older from teaching, and found out that I was about to be drafted because I had decided to change the location of my teaching job. I was interviewing for a job in Sparta, New Jersey. I was from a small county, and when they found out that I was no longer teaching in Greenville, the draft board lady told my mother in church that I was about to be drafted, so I ended up joining at that time.

**MR:** What branch of the service?

**EB:** Army.

**MR:** Why did you select the Army?

**EB:** Because I knew about the language school opportunity. And I don't know, I just had an affinity for the Army. But I joined mainly to try and get into the language school, the Defense Language Institute.

**MR:** What years were you in the service?

**EB:** I was in the service from the fall of 1969 until spring of 1972.

**MR:** Did you end up in the Language School?

**EB:** Yes I did.

**MR:** Could you tell us about your time there? How long you were there and what language?

**EB:** Well, I went to Jacksonville after I went to see the recruiter, and took the language aptitude test, that's how I did it. So I ended up going to the Language School unassigned.

**WC:** Did you go through basic first?

**EB:** Went through basic training first at Fort Benning. And then went straight to Monterey to the Defense Language Institute, where I studied Russian for a year. It was a really interesting group of teachers who were still the old guard. People who had been in the White Army. All kinds of backgrounds, but all native Russian speakers.

**MR:** When you left there, did you feel you were proficient in Russian?

**EB:** I was quite good. I graduated at the top of that class. Later, when I got out of the Army, I took the Graduate Record Exam in Russian and made a perfect score.

**MR:** So you had to read and write?

**EB:** (Nods) Read and write in Russian, and I was much, much better at it than I am now. (Laughs)

**WC:** How many people were in your class?

**EB:** I'm trying to remember. It was probably, my guess would be something like maybe 50 people in my group. They put us in various smaller groups; in the actual classroom situation that I was in, there were about ten of us.

**MR:** So it was very intensive?

**EB:** It was very intensive. Lots of work, all day long, and then copious amounts of homework at night. I mean, it was just an all day thing for a year.

**MR:** Where were you assigned after graduation?

**EB:** After graduation I ended up being sent to Fort Richardson, Alaska in Anchorage. It wasn't what I wanted. I wanted to have a

plainclothes job in Munich, and I thought my class standing would guarantee that, but I was married at the time and that meant two security clearances. The guy that was next to me was single, and he also had the advantage of being fluent in German. So I ended up in a military intelligence unit in Anchorage.

**MR:** What were some of your duties there?

**EB:** Almost nothing. I sat in a cellar a lot of the time and played Russian Scrabble. (Laughs) And occasionally our group would be sent out on Coast Guard cutters. That was the main thing we did. So, in turns, we would do that kind of thing. Occasionally go out on a field problem, and such. I failed to mention that after I went to the Language School, I was sent to Killeen, Texas, to learn how to be an interrogator. Most of us had been through interrogation training.

**MR:** Was this with the CIA or through the Army?

**EB:** Through the Army. It was just the military intelligence unit. Almost every one of that unit had been through interrogator training.

**WC:** Was there waterboarding that was taught?

**EB:** No. In those days, there was no mention of any kind of thing like that. It was exactly the opposite approach, it was all, mostly psychological approaches that we were taught.

**MR:** Could you tell us about some of your experiences while you were in Alaska? Were you assigned to the Coast Guard?

**EB:** Well, this is just one incident, and that's probably the reason for this interview. Because as you know, we've spoken about this before.

**MR:** Well, there were two incidents. Is this the one about the Russian sailor?

**EB:** Yes, but this was all on one trip.

**MR:** Oh, yes, right.

**EB:** When it came my turn to go out on a Coast Guard cutter, this was in the winter of 1972, and I wish my memory were better. I can't remember whether it was January or February, but it was early in the year in 1972. And I was supposed to go aboard the Coast Guard cutter Storis, just on patrol. That's what the Storis was doing at that time. It was actually the first commissioned Coast Guard cutter, the Storis was, and I think it was commissioned in 1942. But by this time, it was being employed just for going in the Bering Sea and checking on fishing treaties and boarding Japanese and Russian vessels. Since our group was all Russian linguists, they would send us out on Coast Guard cutters.

**WC:** What rank were you?

**EB:** At the time I was an E5. When I went on board the Storis, I wore no uniform. I was supposed to pretend that I had no military connection. I went on board with a fisheries agent from Anchorage, whose first name was Wayne; I can't remember his last name. And my cover was that I was a university student who was a cousin of Wayne's. You know, an obvious lie, but that was it and I stuck to it. So when we went on board, we had no idea about anything that was about to happen.

**MR:** Do you know how large the crew was?

**EB:** I really don't. There were quite a few guys. I'm trying to think about the mess gallery and the number of people that would be the capacity of that. Maybe 30, 35 individuals would have been aboard, maybe?

**MR:** Was the ship armed at all?

**EB:** Yes, I never saw it because I never went on deck because the conditions were severe enough that a lot of the crew were out a lot of

the time chipping ice off of the deck. I never went on top at that time to examine what kinds of armament there was. But I know that it was armed.

**MR:** Could you tell us about some of the events that happened on this cruise?

**EB:** Ok, I'll just go ahead and tell my story. I flew to Kodiak where I boarded the Storis, and we took off and went into the Bering Sea. First we went to Adak, and then we proceeded on northward. The seas were just incredible. I had to tie myself into my berth. The first day I could not move. I never lost it, but I was so seasick because I'd never been in swells of this size, it was like 50 foot swells. It was really, really rough, it was just tossing and tossing. By the evening, I had finally gotten over that and, I guess, got my sea legs. And we went on into the Bering Sea.

I can't remember how many days, and I didn't have a whole lot to do, so I would spend my time up in the pilot house—the bridge, we called it -- just kind of turning knobs on the radio to see if I could get any kind of interception or anything. One day I was doing that and I heard a voice, faintly, going "Galp, galp," and it was a Russian trying to say "Help." A lot of times our sound of "huh" gets sounded by Russians as "guh". Even the name Henry is Genry. So it was a "Galp, galp." I managed to make contact with him, and found out from the skipper of this Russian vessel that he had a crewman on board that, unfortunately, had his legs severed at the hip by a cable that was being taken up. The guy was in shock, and was really badly off. I told the skipper of the Coast Guard cutter Storis, whose name was Capt. Allen, about this incident, and about the guy in shock, and the Russian skipper had given me their coordinates and I gave them to Capt. Allen, and we proceeded to go there. It took well over a 24-hour period to get to this ship.

When we got on board, I was taken to this fellow and he was in shock and he was badly off, but he hadn't died, he was still alive. We managed to get him airlifted to Anchorage, where I later found out

he made a pretty good recovery, and even had received a prosthesis while he was there. So, at the time, once the helicopter came and took him away, I was feeling really good because just by fiddling with dials on the radio I managed to save a guy's life, and that made me feel good.

From there we went patrolling in the Bering Sea through the heavy swells, and had just started to get into hummocky ice, which was kind of a little light slush. We were close to an island called St. Matthews Island, which was our westernmost holding. It was really hardly deserving of the name island, it's sort of just a rock sticking out of the Bering Sea, it's not much. But we got close to St. Matthews Island where we observed two Soviet vessels. One was a small fishing boat called the Kolyban and then a larger ship that was—I guess the function of this one was to kind of collect the catch and transfer it to the mother ship, which was a factory ship. This ship was named the Lamut. And what was going on is that the little catcher boat, the fishing boat, was transferring herring to this larger collection vessel, and that is considered a fisheries activity. Our contiguous fishery zone, at the time and I assume this is still true, was 12 miles, and this activity was taking place 11.9 miles off the coast of St. Matthews Island, inside our contiguous fishery zone.

My personal feeling was that it was just a matter of inattention on the part of the Russian vessels. They were close enough to 12 miles off the coast of St. Matthews to indicate that they knew they should be outside the zone, and I think they had just drifted and were not thinking that much about it. Of course, the activity drew quick attention from Capt. Allen and the first officer, whose name I cannot remember. There was a ship's photographer, I remember, who was trying to take pictures of the transfer, but the first officer pushed him aside just before he clicked the snapshot and said "Wait, let me have a look at that," and put his binoculars up and watched it. But the photographic record of the incident really wasn't made. But they determined that this activity was happening inside our fishery zone, and decided that we should board the Russian vessels. When that decision was made, I offered my opinion about the way we should

behave. I warned Capt. Allen and the first officer that if we went on board these vessels, the first thing they were going to do was offer us all kinds of hospitality. It's a Russian custom called [unclear word in Russian], "salt bread." It's common in a lot of cultures [another unclear word], which is, roughly, "hospitality."
And I said, "You know, they're going to offer you cold cuts, they're going to offer you vodka. It'll be a big layout. If we're going on board to arrest these people, don't accept the hospitality."

So we went on board the Russian vessels, and out came the cold cuts and out came the vodka, and I was the only person who didn't take it. The captain and the first officer were both Latter Day Saints from Salt Lake City, and they nevertheless drank the vodka, and Wayne, the fisheries agent did too.

**MR:** Why did you think they didn't listen to you?

**EB:** I just think, you know, the moment was… I just think, in the heat of the moment they just lost judgment, that's all I can say.

**WC:** Did they arrest them?

**EB:** Well, what happened, and the way this happened was incredibly awkward, because the Russians were, you know, trying to explain themselves. There was all this going back and forth. I couldn't really understand why we were taking so long. Wayne the fisheries agent was explaining to them about the fisheries zone and they were replying. He would not allow me to translate simultaneously; he said it distracted him. He said "No, just wait, let me talk, and then you tell them what I've said. Well, that's an abuse, and I explained that to him. It makes it hard, it makes it sound like I'm more of a key person than I am; I'm just a translator. It also made it harder to remember—because I mean, he's talking paragraphs before he lets me translate, and that was a strain. And this went on for at least an hour of me translating Wayne's paragraphs. And the first officer left momentarily and then came back in and looked at me and said, "I have been talking to headquarters in Juneau, and they said to arrest

them." So, they're Russians, and I told them [uses Russian phrase], "You're under arrest." And they went wild. They were trying to put their cigarettes out on our arms. It was a frantic situation, I think made more so by the fact that the hospitality had been accepted, and then it was tremendously bitter. They were making their attempt to impress the Coast Guard officers and I think they thought they were doing pretty well, and then to have that cold announcement that they're under arrest.

Well, that's how the whole thing started. As it proceeded, I was told to explain to the Soviets that they were to follow us to Adak, and both the little catcher boat and the collecting boat were to follow the Storis back to the island of Adak.

**MR:** So they were seizing both the vessels?

**EB:** Both vessels were being seized. And the captains on both vessels were taken into custody and put on the Coast Guard cutter. I can remember the captain of the larger of the two vessels, the one that did the collection, his first name was Igor, his last name was [unclear last name], and that was his first command. This was the first time he had been out, so it was really a problem for him. The other guy on the catcher boat, I think that his last name was Archoma [?]. I have articles at home in Florida I could send to you that do have their names so that could be established. But he was the older of the two.

**WC:** Were they younger guys?

**EB:** Well, Igor [last name], I would have said was probably, he looked to be 25. He wasn't much older than I was. I immediately felt sorry for him because I thought, first command and this happens. Later on I found out he was indeed very worried about it because there were going to be a lot of consequences for him. But they were taken on board the Storis, and finally we were underway to Adak. Several crewmen were put on board the small vessel, the Kolyban, and I and the first officer and about three enlisted fellows were put on board the Lamut, the larger of the Russian vessels, and we started

off toward Adak. I don't have a real good memory of the fellow who was on the bridge at the time, the Soviet, but I gave him the coordinates and he knew what to do, and we all took off. After just a very brief time, this fellow—and I remember this because I thought it was so ironic—told me "We have extra bunks unoccupied if your men would like to get to bed for the night, we can accommodate them." I translated this for the first officer. I told him, "Now I am not suggesting that anybody goes to bed, but this is what this fellow has told me, they have extra bunks and these guys could go to sleep if you want them to." I was surprised when he told them about it and they all trundled off and went to bed, leaving just me and the first officer on the bridge of this Soviet vessel. The first officer had a walkie-talkie, and we were relying on the radio on board the Russian vessel for our communication with the Storis. And at first that was fine; we were able to use their radio and we were able to be in contact with Capt. Allen on the Storis. But shortly into this trip, the watch changed. There was a log, and a very, very strack Soviet fellow came in and took over the wheel and logged in. He was just a very different kind of person from the original fellow.

**MR:** In what way was he different?

**EB:** He was much better dressed, much…. he was strack, the other guy wasn't. This guy was very official, and well groomed, and didn't particularly seem to me like he was a sailor. He just looked too strack. And hair neatly combed and oily. Once he had logged in, he turned to me and he said, in Russian, "This is a Soviet vessel, we must obey the orders of our mother ship. I am changing our coordinates to this, this, this and this, and we are going to the mother vessel." And immediately we turned and changed direction. As you can imagine, we could hear Commander Allen on the radio yelling about this, and the first officer was trying to communicate with him. Well, the Russian electronics were sophisticated enough that all that communication was jammed. There was no way we could be heard on the Stories, obviously, but we could hear Capt. Allen, that was it, so it was a one-way deal by then. And so the Lamut and—I never really knew what happened to the Kolyban, the smaller vessel. I

suppose it was somewhere there, too. But it was the Lamut that I was on, and we were going to this mother vessel in a completely different direction from Adak. The Coast Guard cutter started doing narrow circles around, really cutting close. This was turning into a sea chase, with Capt. Allen repeatedly commanding the Lamut to halt, to stop, and of course we just kept going. And this went on for hours, actually, it was a harrowing thing. The Lamut was moving at full speed, and the Coast Guard cutter was going around and around. Later I learned that somehow the news media had been alerted to this at the time, and so in all the newspapers in Anchorage and all around the country… My friend Janet that I'm visiting right now, and Karen, said that she read it in the New York Times, and most of the mention was that we were being kidnapped. So the media reports were coming out before the full story was known. So somehow the Coast Guard cutter had given this information, had radioed this in to Juno, and it got into the media.

But, after some hours of this chase went on, Capt. Allen radioed and said "Stop or we will open fire." And indeed they did, there was a warning shot over the bow of the Lamut. And at that point, the Lamut's engines were closed down and we stopped. We were in the middle…. and then the enlisted guys from the Coast Guard came storming aboard the Lamut carrying their M16s, and they were terrified because they had been going through this very dangerous operation, and they had been told, I learned later, that they might have to make a boarding in progress, which would have been the most dangerous thing in the world. It could have been certain death if anyone had fallen into the Bering Sea in the darkness, in a sea chase like this. So you could see the whites of their eyes; they were really in a panic situation.

So then, the arrest was absolutely final, the incident was becoming a lot more, just a whole lot more like a conflagration than it had initially been. The fellow that was so strack I had assumed by that time was a political commander, a Russian term at the time would have been "politcom." I think they had such a person, probably, on board every one of their vessels, and he was the person who was the

real power. As it turned out, by the time we stopped we were almost next to the mother ship, so they had achieved their goal, they had gotten where they intended to go.

**MR:** But this was still in international waters?

**EB:** This was all in international waters. And so a strange thing of negotiations started taking place at the time between Capt. Allen and this fellow, arguing about where we would have a kind of conference to determine the outcome of this situation, whether it would be on board this large factory ship that we were close to, or whether it would be on board the Coast Guard cutter Storis. There were officials on this factory ship, so it became one of those things like, "Where will we do it? Where will we do it?" I was very tired; I had already been up for a number of hours, but Capt. Allen, all of a sudden, said to me "Well, we're boarding this Russian factory ship," we all went there… and Capt. Allen said, "Will you stay on board? We're going back to the cutter, and you stay on board here and try and convince them to have the meeting on the Storis." And I told the Captain, "Look, I'm just a translator, an interpreter, I'm not… that's way, way outside my position. It makes me look like I have more authority than I do." And he said, "Well, just try." And they indeed left me on board this large factory ship, and I stayed there for, like, a day. It was very interesting. It was like a city on the water, they had everything. It had stores, a barber shop, a huge dining hall. It was amazing. And the fish that were transferred onto this factory ship… I got taken on a tour, I got to see the whole operation of this ship as far as the production. They would take the herring and the salmon and whatever other fish they had, and by the time they were done with it, the fish was all in cans and all ready for shelves back—

**MR:** So it was a processing ship?

**EB:** It was a processing ship, and just vast. I thought it was just a huge ship.

**WC:** Did anyone else speak English on board?

**EB:** No. Or if they did, I don't know. I was using Russian the whole time. I had a guide, this woman latched on to me. A tall woman with red hair, and a considerable number of warts, I can't remember her name. And she smoked the [foreign word], those hand-rolled, thick, very aromatic--I guess that's a euphemism--but those kinds of cigarettes one after another. And she was sort of like the medic on board the ship, probably the closest thing to what we might describe her as would be like a nurse practitioner. The system in the Soviet Union at that time, the first care kind of doctor would be called a {Russian word], and the best way of describing that would be like a nurse practitioner. She acquainted me with the ship and they were very, very nice to me. I played the piano and we sang Russian songs. It was kind of a lark of a day. They served me special foods in their dining room. There is a special little dumpling, much prized in Siberia, called pelmeni, and it's like a little stuffed dumpling. And people would put it in caches in the snow, close sometimes to little huts for people who happen to be stranded, and there are a lot of Siberian stories about being stranded and finding a cache of pelmeni and that saved their life—so it's that kind of national food that they treasure. So I had those. It was an interesting day. I had no effect, really that much, on where this conference would take place, but it did eventually happen on board the Storis.

The determination was that the two captains and the two boats would be arrested. They would be taken back, ultimately, to Anchorage, where they would undergo trial, and the boats would be confiscated. On the Soviet side, they just kind of bargained to have their crew offloaded so that they would just have skeleton crews, and that made sense. And then what they did was say, well, we don't want to leave them here on this factory ship because it's already at capacity, but we do have another vessel further north that has room for our crew, and we'd like to offload them there.

Well, as it turned out, the vessel that was further north was icebound up in the icecap, and they knew that we were a cutter, so it was agreed that we would take their excess crew there to this other ship.

And we went on up to the ice cap and actually cut ice all the way up. I had been awake at that point, almost three 24-hour periods. I was exhausted. Captain Allen informed me that we were going to go up. By then he realized that what we were going to be doing was cutting this vessel out of the ice and freeing it. He explained to me that I would be having to coordinate that, which terrified me, because I realized that I would have to be dealing in a language I didn't know in English, much less Russian. I had a nautical terminology dictionary, and I spent the entire time on the way up to this icebound vessel studying these terms, thinking about what I would have to say to get them to get their propellers going, and trying to get better at giving quick coordinate directions because it would have to be happening quickly.

So we got there and started the process. I did not cause any collisions. I managed to get everything translated, but it was a tremendous pressure. I remember feeling like I was sweating bullets because it made me so nervous with this close movement of the cutter and this ship, and the Russian vessel would have to do certain operations and turn on their propellers all of a sudden…. It was a complex operation and I was sweating it. But we succeeded, we freed them, offloaded the crew. And then I went back on board the Storis and stayed with the two Russian skippers as we made our way back first to Kodiak and then to Anchorage. Most of the time on the way back we watched movies. I did the best I could translating American movies for these two guys.

When we got back to Anchorage we were way out of port, and Capt. Allen asked me to go on board with the two Soviets so that they could get some air. We were so far out that I would never have thought of anybody being able to, with long-range cameras, capture our pictures, and they were published in the Anchorage paper. I had been going under this cover, and I hadn't even been using my name with these guys, and some reporter from Anchorage caught up with some of the enlisted men as they disembarked and showed them my picture and asked who I was, and they told them. Then they went to the personnel office at Fort Richardson and found out all about me

and published my name and who I was and everything else, so any cover that I might have had was blown. And then there was a trial, and I was there for the first day of it. And then I was told to stay at home and not to come out for a couple of weeks. I just had to kind of disappear.

Meanwhile the Russian captains were arrested, the boats were confiscated, and they became the toast of Anchorage. They had a translator there who had a Russian background, and they were released to him, which I thought somewhat strange. People wined and dined them all over Anchorage. The public sentiment was definitely on their side, I felt. I thought that the whole incident was somewhat ill-advised. I thought that being 11.9 miles off that rock didn't mean a lot. I felt a little bit guilty about the whole thing, though I was not the one who was making any decisions. My conscience was salved a little bit when Igor [Russian name] told me that if the tables had been turned and the Soviets had arrested us instead, that the treatment would gave been much more severe. I thought that was interesting. The Coast Guard cutter went in with all glory with two brooms on front (gestures crossed arms) signifying clean sweep; that was their tradition. And that was the 1960s and the people in Anchorage were not impressed with this arrest. I think in a way they immediately vilified the Coast Guard and had great sympathy for these Russians. But at the same time, I was mystified by the fact that they were there going around town having dinners, being interviewed by the media. I thought that very strange. I certainly didn't see it as being very helpful to our image or to anything we were doing at the time. But I stayed in hiding for my two weeks and that was the end of that incident. I had to go report to the base commander when I got back, and I told him basically what I've told you today.

**MR:** How much longer were you in the service?

**EB:** After that incident, I was still at Fort Richardson all the way to spring, but the war in Vietnam ended and my four-year commitment got reduced. I got an early out because of that. The rest of the time I

was in Anchorage I spent doing ordinary things. I had one situation where I went on a war game north of Galena in Alaska. That was an interesting time.

**MR:** What made it so interesting?

**EB:** I've not told you this story before. I was sent to a war game with –the person I answered to was a warrant officer whose name was Herman "Wise-ell" (Wiesel) he called himself. His name would be pronounced "Veesel"; he was a cousin of Elie Wiesel, in fact. Herman had been a young boy when he was captured by the Nazis. He was born in Belgium and ended up, I guess, as a virtual slave with Rommel's army in Africa. And just as a kid. He was rescued by the American Army, and his blood was red, white and blue. He was the most patriotic person that I've ever known. He credited the American Army with saving his life. He was a warrant officer and a Russian linguist, along with me. This problem, our war game, was being orchestrated by the Air Force more than anyone else. We flew out and ended up in Galena where there was just this one hangar that said "The End of the World." That's all I remember about that. And then we were just out in the snow fields by the Yukon River. And Herman and I had no rank on. We had uniforms on but no rank, and we were supposed to be there to interrogate (gestures "in quotes") prisoners.

I took with me in my duffel bag, a huge magnum of whiskey and a whole bunch of whiskey sour mix, and I figured I wouldn't need ice. I had every intention of turning the tent into the USO and having plenty of whiskey sours to give everyone. Which turned out to be true: it was a really good interrogation tool, and it worked. We were there for altogether about 10 days. Before we went to Galena, though, we were at the Air Force base, and there was an Air Force captain—he was just a captain, I don't remember his name—but Herman Wiesel knew him and there was bad blood between them. I mean it was just so obvious from the very get-go that these guys were enemies. And this captain was the person who had essentially designed this war game. I didn't think that much about it, and

Herman didn't give me any explanation of what this enmity was about. I really suspected that Herman thought that this guy was really anti-Semitic and there was something about that involved in the whole thing. But we went through the war game. It was interesting enough. It was amazingly cold, it was right at about 50 below wind chill. The littlest bit of sunshine on the horizon by this time in the winter—this wasn't too long after the Kolyban and Lamut incident, it was still the dead of winter.

Once this field problem was winding down and people were starting to pack up and go home, a lieutenant came to our tent and told Herman "You have orders to go and interview prisoners out in the field, and you're to report to this helicopter at such-and-such an hour." And I looked at Herman and I said, "Herman, this is weird, because this war game is over. Everybody's leaving. This doesn't make any sense." But Herman said "We have to follow orders." So we went to this helicopter. We had fairly decent clothing but we didn't have snowshoes, we didn't have anything, and this helicopter took us way, way out into the snow fields. There was nothing, just snow fields and a bit of forest over there, but mainly just snow. And he hovered and he told Herman, "This is where you get out." And Herman jumped out of the helicopter and went up to his armpits in snow. And I looked at this pilot and I said, "This is wrong," and he patted his side like he had a sidearm there and he said, "You better get out too." And so I jumped into the snow and I was up to my armpits in the snow. My first thought was, this is a very cruel joke. I really had not even begun to think that it would be possible that someone would drop us with no provisions and no snowshoes in the middle of this—I had no idea where we were, it was remote.

And time passed enough that Herman was beginning to get frostbite; you could see his nose starting to turn. So I was taking off a glove and holding his nose from time to time, then putting it back on. We tried to pull ourselves across the snow and that wasn't very successful. I began to realize that the situation was dire and I thought, this is probably going to be it. They will never find us, and we'll be here until snow melt and then animals will get us. I realized

that somehow I was with the wrong person at the wrong time. Just in this moment of desperation, and realizing that, I saw these tiny, tiny dots just in the murk because there was barely any sun on the horizon, and I saw these dots moving along very smoothly in the distance. I realized from their motion that it was somebody on skis, like cross-country skiers. As cold as it was, I took my jacket off and started flinging it up into the air. I really didn't have much of a hope because they were so small, I really didn't think they would see us. But they did, and it turned out to be Canadian special forces in their white suits, and they actually skied to us and found us. They had no idea we were there. This was just pure good fortune. And so they had a tracked vehicle that was coming to collect them, and they said, "We'll get you in there." When the vehicle came, we squeezed in, there was barely room for us, and they took us to their encampment, where they had a tent and a Yukon stove, and they all crowded in real fast. There was not room for me and Herman, and he was still having trouble with frostbite; he was a bit older and not in real good shape. There was an eggbeater helicopter there that was about to leave. I had no idea where it was going. I said, "Herman, we're going to get on board that helicopter." He said, "But we don't know where it's going. We don't have orders." I said, "Herman we're going to get on board that helicopter because it's life and death. We have to get somewhere that's warm." I pulled him on board the helicopter, and it flew not too far from where our—maybe a couple miles—and landed—closer to the American encampment.

We started than to walk down what was serving as a road, which was just a snow-packed road that was iced over. We started walking, trying to get back to our tent. Herman was really flagging. He was saying things from the movies, like "You go on, I can't make it." And I'm saying "No, Herman, I'm not leaving you." And a jeep came down this ice-packed road, and I tried to hail it but it went right past. I said, "Herman the next time a jeep comes by it's either going to stop for us, or it's going to kill me." So when I heard another one coming I got in the middle of the road and held my arms out, and it stopped and took us back to the tent. At which time, Herman became very effective at getting us onto an airplane and back to Anchorage. I

reported all this to the company commander, too, and nothing came of it that I know of, except that Herman got riffed. He was devastated because he was counting on his retirement. Being riffed was the worst thing that could have happened to him. He was married to a very sweet Japanese lady, and he moved out to Japan. I wrote him once, and he never answered.

**WC:** It sounded like they were trying to kill you guys.

**EB:** They were trying to kill Herman, and I was just there. That's what I decided. My late wife was always furious when she heard this story.

**MR:** Were you discharged shortly after that?

**EB:** I was honorably discharged shortly after that, and out. I'd been through enough things. My Russian language was good, and they tried to get me to go to OCS and I thought in times after that that I could have gone back for even more advanced Russian training, and probably would have had a very interesting life doing that, but the situations I had been through made me so cynical that I didn't want to stay in. And so I decided against re-upping and going to OCS.

**MR:** How do think these things had an effect on your life?

**EB:** It was an interruption in my life. I had always thought I would be a college professor of humanities. This changed everything. Of course it gave me the Russian language direction. I ended up going to Indiana University and working on a masters' degree in Slavic languages. But I was older than everybody else and I was cynical, and a lot of that stuff suddenly seemed pointless. It took me a while after that to find my true self again.

**MR:** Thank you very much for your interview.

**EB:** Well, it's a pleasure to tell the story.

Tape is turned off, and turned on again while conversation is already in progress.

**US:** Explain what the term "riff" means.

**EB:** That was kind of a slang military term at the time that meant that you were forced to end your career before you really intended to. Which meant that you were not going to get your full retirement pay, either.

**WC:** And that was largely due to the downsizing of the military, not necessarily that you did anything wrong, in most cases.

**EB:** Right, just cut from active service.

**US:** And when you talked about that political officer you said he was "strack." What does that mean?

**EB:** That was another military slang term at the time for somebody that is… it implies all kinds of things, from having spit-polished shoes, a uniform in top shape, all the bases covered as far as being totally military and….

**MR:** Just as you assumed that he was the political officer, they must have assumed because you were not in uniform that you were CIA—

**EB:** Absolutely. My cover really didn't mean a whole lot. A lot of it made them think that I was a lot more than I was. I was just an E5 Russian linguist.

**MR:** The captain set you up that way.

**EB:** Yeah. It was a little bit that way. And I don't think he thought about it. None of that was intentional; it was sort of like an operetta.

**US:** My other question, I'm just curious. I know you studied Russian at the Language Institute, but how did you know so much about Russian customs? Like, you knew enough to tell them--

**EB:** Oh, that was part of it. We had a lot of in-culture Russian, and all of these old Russian teachers that we had would talk about all the customs a lot, and so you were aware of all of that, just from those kinds of teachers and the kinds of reading we did.

**US:** And, I noticed… I've always said SIE-beria (long I sound), but you said SI-beria (short I sound). Is that more the Russian pronunciation?

**EB:** (Nods head, pronounces Siberia in the Russian way)

**US:** Ok.

**MR:** That's it? Ok, well, thank you again.