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2	ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW OF DAVID BENA	
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4	April 7, 2005	
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22	Associated Reporters Int'l, Inc.	(200) 522 7007
23	e-mail Courtsteno@aol.com	(800) 523-7887
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800.523.7887 04/07/2005, Interview of David Bena, Associated Reporters Int'l., Inc. Page 2 1 David Bena - 4-7-2005 2 (The interview commenced at 10:00 3 a.m.) MR. CLARK: This is an interview 4 5 at the New York State Military Museum, Saratoga Springs, New York, the 7th of March 2005 -- 7th of 6 7 April 2005. It's approximately ten a.m. 8 Interviewers are Wayne Clark and Mike Russert 9 (phonetic spellings). 10 BY MR. CLARK: 11 Ο. Could you give me your full name, 12 date of birth and place of birth, please? 13 Yeah. David John Bena, born in Α. 14Saratoga Springs on December 10th, 1943. 15 Ο. What was your educational 16 background prior to entering the service? 17 I went to college at Stetson Α. 18 University in Deland, Florida and graduated in 19 1965. 20 Q. All right. Did you enlist or 21 were you drafted? 22 I enlisted. I would have been A. 23 drafted, but I had been involved in the Army 24R.O.T.C. and did not complete that. I had hoped to Associated Reporters Int'l., Inc. 800.523.7887

1	David Bena - 4-7-2005
2	be a helicopter pilot and when my eyes went below
3	twenty-twenty I realized I would not get in the
4	helicopter program. So, I did not continue in the
5	R.O.T.C. So, when I graduated from college I was
6	prime lead for the draft and so in a strange kind
7	of a way I beat the draft by joining the Marine
8	Corps.
9	Q. Why did you select the Marine
10	Corps?
11	A. Well, I liked their uniforms.
12	They were known as pretty tough and I thought of
13	myself as pretty tough.
14	Q. Okay. Where did you enlist and
15	where did you go for your basic?
16	A. I enlisted in my senior year at
17	college down in Florida and then when I finished
18	when I graduated from college I went to the Officer
19	Candidate Course in Quantico, Virginia. That would
20	have been autumn of '65.
21	Q. Okay. Could you describe your
22	the course you took in?
23	A. The Officer Candidate Course at
24	that time was approximately twelve weeks long. It
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2	was geared toward preparing one to be an officer of
3	marines. It was, in my opinion, a rather grueling
4	course. It involved lots of physical training,
5	extreme emotional pressure and academic academic
6	training as well.
7	Q. Okay. Where did you go after you
8	left basic?
9	A. On receiving my commission as a
10	second lieutenant I was assigned to what's called
11	the basic school which is also at Quantico which is
12	a six- month long course which prepares officers to
13	become infantry officers and also to explore the
14	other areas of marine officer life. And in the
15	while I was there in the in the basic school I
16	found out that I could get into aviation without
17	having perfect vision which surprised me and
18	encouraged me. And I found out there was a program
19	called the Naval Flight Officer Program where
20	someone with eyesight no worse than twenty-forty
21	could become either a radar intercept officer in
22	in F-4 Fanthoms or a bombardier navigator in the
23	new aircraft called the A-6 Intruder or possibly a
24	E.C.M. officer in one of the old what was called
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2	then the F-10 Sky-Nights which was running, jamming
3	and intercept information regarding surface-to-air
4	missiles.
5	And so I took the flight aptitude
6	test exam and passed that and went to flight
7	school down in Pensacola, Florida. And in the
8	process of flight school fell in love with the A-6
9	Intruder and applied to become a valid bombardier
10	navigator which is what I did. And the flight
11	school was about maybe a year and a half in
12	duration or so. Following getting my wings I went
13	to Naval Air Marine Corps Air Station, Cherry
14	Point, North Carolina and started training in the
15	A-6 Intruder. The training was about I don't
16	know, maybe about eight or nine months before I was
17	qualified as a bombardier navigator and immediately
18	went to Vietnam.
19	Q. So, you're saying you fell in
20	love with the Intruder. Why? What what did you
21	like about it?
22	A. I liked the fact that the the
23	naval flight officer had a lot more to do in that
24	aircraft than the as a sub officer in the back
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2	seat of an F-4 or as they call in an in an F-10
3	Sky-Night. And he just had more to do, more
4	challenging mission. It was at that time in
5	Vietnam the A-6 Intruder was the real work force of
6	the war. And it was delivering more more bombs
7	than any other any other aircraft in the naval
8	inventory.
9	MR. RUSSERT: As a navigator did
10	you have to rely on using a plotter or was most of
11	it done electronically for you?
12	A. The the the beautiful thing
13	about the A-6 Intruder was that it was way ahead of
14	its time with navigation equipment. It had a
15	an it had an inersial (phonetic spelling)
16	Navigation System, I.N.S
17	Q. Uh-huh.
18	A which would by putting in the
19	coordinates, the latitude and longitude, it would
20	tell the airplane where it was. And then it had a
21	gyro which tuned that aircraft in to true north.
22	Once the aircraft knew where it was and where true
23	north was, you could simply put in coordinates and
24	that aircraft would give direction to the location

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2	you wanted to go. It it got affected by winds,
3	however, and the winds could throw you off. There
4	was another system that was put in the aircraft, a
5	Doppler system, which sampled winds and gave wind
6	information. But in the whole time I was in the
7	Marine Corps most of the Doppler systems did not
8	work well.
9	Q. Uh-huh.
10	A. And so we had to do a good bit of
11	radar work in addition to the Inertial Navigation
12	System. The radar screen could put you out about a
13	hundred fifty miles forward and and it was the
14	primary instrument for bombing. So, in the
15	navigation we would use latitude, longitude in the
16	Inertial Navigation System to go from point to
17	point. Suppose you're going for a target and we
18	had to evade enemy radar, anti-aircraft, so by
19	selecting latitude and longitude coordinates we
20	could go point by point to where the target was,
21	come in at the best angle. And then the radar work
22	took over and then was identifying on radar the
23	particular target. It may be a bridge, it may be a
24	rail yard.

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2	And then on the pilot side, on
3	the left side of the the cockpit the pilot had a
4	T.V. screen which looked like a highway and the
5	highway could tell him to go left or go right. And
6	if the pilot kept the highway centered he would be
7	on course, in tune with the the navigator's
8	directions. So, there was very little verbiage
9	needed.
10	Q. Uh-huh.
11	A. Also, the pilot that was to drop
12	bombs it was a two-man operation. One, the
13	the bombardier, the navigator bombardier, ceased
14	becoming a navigator and become a bombardier when
15	you're on target. The bombardier by putting the
16	cross hairs on the target, then hit a button called
17	attack, and that told the computer to start
18	calculating the data needed to drop the bombs at
19	the precise moment. And a little light came on the
20	pilot's screen that said attack and then the pilot,
21	of course being the commander of the aircraft,
22	looked over everything and if it looked good, then
23	he would push a button on his stick called commit.
24	And when he hit that button commit, the computer
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2	took over the operation and would drop the bombs
3	itself.
4	And then after we dropped the
5	bombs we might might drop six or eight bombs
6	at a time, sometimes the whole load of twenty-two
7	bombs or twenty-eight bombs, then we would roll
8	left and roll right and look at get an estimate
9	of the bomb damage called bomb damage assessment,
10	and by looking, actually eye-balling how those
11	bombs were dropping.
12	Q. Uh-huh.
13	A. Our typical missions in Vietnam
14	were for the first six or eight months were bomb
15	were missions into North Vietnam. At that time the
16	Marine Airway, first Marine Airway, was fragged to
17	the Air Force for missions in in Vietnam. And
18	the A-6 had a adaptation which allowed it to view
19	only moving targets if you turned the the
20	switches in a correct way. So, it was excellent
21	and we adapted toward bombing truck convoys
22	bringing supplies south from Hanoi Haiphong.
23	Q. Uh-huh.
24	A. And so our primary mission during
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2	those months was to do what we called road wreckies
3	where we would go fly up and down the roads of
4	North Vietnam and and then eventually Laos
5	Laos and look look for truck convoys.
6	Q. What was your typical flight
7	attitude or altitude?
8	A. We we tried to stay at at
9	about five hundred feet above the terrain.
10	Q. So, you were pretty low?
11	A. It was low level.
12	Q. Uh-huh. Why?
13	A. There was an advantage to that.
14	It was pretty much below the triple aid that the
15	surface-to-air missile radar worked. So, that was
15 16	
	surface-to-air missile radar worked. So, that was
16	surface-to-air missile radar worked. So, that was an advantage to us. Sometimes the sometimes the
16 17	surface-to-air missile radar worked. So, that was an advantage to us. Sometimes the sometimes the surface-to-air missile people were able to pick us
16 17 18	surface-to-air missile radar worked. So, that was an advantage to us. Sometimes the sometimes the surface-to-air missile people were able to pick us up that low, but mostly they couldn't. Of course
16 17 18 19	surface-to-air missile radar worked. So, that was an advantage to us. Sometimes the sometimes the surface-to-air missile people were able to pick us up that low, but mostly they couldn't. Of course the disadvantage was we were we were fresh meat
16 17 18 19 20	surface-to-air missile radar worked. So, that was an advantage to us. Sometimes the sometimes the surface-to-air missile people were able to pick us up that low, but mostly they couldn't. Of course the disadvantage was we were we were fresh meat for the anti-aircraft guns. So so, a typical
16 17 18 19 20 21	surface-to-air missile radar worked. So, that was an advantage to us. Sometimes the sometimes the surface-to-air missile people were able to pick us up that low, but mostly they couldn't. Of course the disadvantage was we were we were fresh meat for the anti-aircraft guns. So so, a typical mission would be to take off say out of Cho Liu

1	David Bena - 4-7-2005
2	demilitarized zone. And we would take off and go
3	out over the South China Sea, climb to somewhere
4	between twenty and thirty thousand feet, fly
5	paralleling the coast into North Vietnam and then
6	when cleared him into to the target area, we
7	would descend down to about five hundred feet above
8	the terrain, flying in a prescribed route. There
9	were several missions going on and a lot of times
10	in the road wrecking business so we had to we'd
11	have to cover maybe a hundred mile stretch of road.
12	And we would travel up and down the road. We had a
13	target time of thirty minutes on target.
14	Q. Uh-huh.
15	A. And and if it if it was a
16	hot night, lots of traffic, we might hit four or
17	five targets with five bombs each. If it was a
18	slow night we would always have a secondary target
19	which could be a a ferry crossing or an ammo
20	storage place once in a while a bivouac area. And
21	if we had bombs left over as we posed in our
22	thirty-minute time slot we would then drop on the
23	secondary target. Then we'd come back out over the
24	water, climb back up to an altitude and come home.

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2	Usually the mission was between one and a half to
3	two hours.
4	Q. Did your aircraft ever receive
5	any battle damage?
6	A. Well, I came back with battle
7	damage twice. And it's it's incredible that
8	those airplanes did not get hit as often. Flying
9	in flying in Vietnam in North Vietnam at that
10	time was considered rather dangerous business.
11	There were there were lots of anti-aircraft guns
12	and they were mostly on trucks and so they moved
13	them around a lot.
14	Q. Uh-huh.
15	A. And there were then of course
16	we'd try to guard the roads because they wanted the
17	truck truck convoys to get through. And then
18	the ferry complexes and the ammo storage areas were
19	reigned with anti-aircraft guns. So, it you
20	would fly through it. It was like it would be
21	like flying through a fireworks display. There
22	would be different colored tracers all over and
23	you'd fly right through them. And it's amazing
24	there wouldn't be more more damage or even hits.
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2	And after a while we got kind of complacent, we
3	figured we'd never be hit. So, every so often
4	somebody got hit and that helped move away from the
5	complacence.
6	Q. Uh-huh.
7	A. One one hit was under the
8	wing. The the the A-6 Intruder was a very
9	powerful aircraft. It had two two powerful jet
10	engines. And so it was able to carry a lot of
11	armor plating. So, armor plating was what we had
12	under the aircraft, under the fuselage and under
13	the wings to a certain extent. So, I think it was
14	a thirty-seven millimeter, a pretty powerful gun,
15	hit under the wing one time and it made a hole the
16	airplane, but we were still able to continue home.
17	Q. Uh-huh.
18	A. And then one time we got hit
19	under the fuselage and all that did was ding off.
20	So, those were the only two times we got hit.
21	Q. Did your unit lose any aircraft?
22	A. We lost I don't know how many.
23	We lost a number of aircraft, yes, and crew
24	members. And and if you got hit in North
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1	David Bena - 4-7-2005
2	Vietnam and you could not get out over the water,
3	it was tough to get out out of there. You were
4	going to be a P.O.W
5	Q. Uh-huh.
6	A or dead, one or the other.
7	And several of my friends were in P.O.W. camps,
8	some died, maybe being shot by people or we don't
9	know if it's actually what happened to some of
10	these folks.
11	Q. Were you ever fired at by a SAM?
12	A. Yes. Certainly. Probably two or
13	three times. Not often because we were so low.
14	Q. Uh-huh.
15	A. The the little prevent
16	actually the E.C.M. birds were not helpful because
17	they would catch the launch after the launch and
18	usually they would tell us there was a missile
19	being fired after we had evaded it. So, we had
20	we had little instruments in our aircraft to
21	alarm show alarm when when a missile when
22	we were locked on and then it would show a
23	different alarm when the missile was actually
24	launched. And eventually after I'd been there some
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2	months we had this little instrument that gave the
3	direction by a needle as to where that missile was
4	coming from. And so what we had to do was to
5	find find that missile heading course and then
6	the pilot did his pilot stuff and that was to evade
7	that that SAM and to fly at it and then to fly
8	away from it, climb, descend. And the bombardier
9	navigator was the prayer, did a lot of praying and
10	kept reading off altitude and attitude while this
11	whole extravaganza was going on. So, that's the
12	way it worked.
13	Q. Now, you flew over two hundred
14	fifty-two missions in thirteen months?
15	A. Yes.
16	Q. How often did you fly?
17	A. We mostly every day. We we
18	were a night mostly a night squadron. And we'd
19	like fly seven or eight days in a row and then get
20	a day off. We also were able to get out of country
21	every so often. Because we had an airplane we
22	could fly over to the Philippines for a little
23	break or fly into Thailand. So, you might get
24	you might fly fairly steady for three weeks and
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2	then you might get away for a day or two, maybe a
3	week. There would be things we we could do. In
4	the Philippines one of the fun things was going
5	through their survival jungle survival training,
6	which we enjoyed a lot. There also they had what
7	they called mini R and R's where if you got
8	selected you could get on a contract aircraft to
9	the flight places like Hong Kong or Chloe. Some
10	people even got to go to Australia and some got to
11	go to Taiwan. So, you can go for three or four,
12	five days depending on how long that the R and R
13	was. So, that was the the the pattern was
14	for us to mostly mostly flew at night was that
15	we would get up and do a mission because we had
16	flown the night before. And then we'd go into
17	the the office so to speak, it was a couple of
18	shacks, and do our ground job. Each in the
19	Marine Corps every flyer had a collateral duty.
20	And for instance I was the flight safety officer
21	for the squadron.
22	So, we'd go in for several hours
23	and do our our ground job and about four o'clock
24	in the afternoon we had the briefing for the night

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1	David Bena - 4-7-2005
2	missions. So, everybody was that was flying
3	would come to a a kind of a hut and there we
4	would each be given our targets for that night.
5	And the the crews would be together. We we
6	were crewed up and for most of my time I had one
7	pilot. So, we would we would get together for
8	the crew briefings. They'd give us the targets for
9	the night. Then after the meeting broke up we
10	would look over the targets, figure out how we
11	wanted to approach it.
12	And and then depending the
13	flying operations for the night started at pretty
14	much dusk and they would go until dawn. And so
15	depending on when we were flying, if we weren't
16	flying until early early in the morning we'd go
17	watch the the movie of the night, get a little
18	rest, then get up and fly. Or we'd fly right away
19	and then after we finished flying, come back and
20	and party a little bit and then hit the rack. And
21	that was pretty much the way it went seven days a
22	week.
23	Q. Did you have any kind of
24	debriefing when you returned?

1	David Bena - 4-7-2005
2	A. We always had a debriefing.
3	Thank you. When we pulled the
4	aircraft into the revetments the first thing we did
5	was of course debrief the aircraft system, how was
6	it working, what broke, what didn't work well.
7	Then we would have what was called the intelligence
8	debriefing and there we would have to give specific
9	information about what targets we hit, what we
10	considered the damage to be. If there are other
11	aircraft in the area at times they would give us
12	verbal damage estimates. We would also have to
13	give information on any aircraft fires, SAM's
14	threats, et cetera. So, then when that debriefing
15	was over, then we were we were cleared to to
16	go back into
17	Q. How long did those briefings and
18	debriefings usually last?
19	A. The the intel debriefing you
20	always had to count about an hour. And there would
21	be an intelligence officer there. Always always
22	had intelligence officer debriefing.
23	Q. Uh-huh. What were your living
24	conditions like, what kind of buildings did you
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1	David Bena - 4-7-2005
2	live in, et cetera?
3	A. We lived in quonset huts.
4	Because we were night flyers we had air
5	conditioning because we slept mostly in the day and
6	was most of the year in Vietnam it was quite hot
7	and humid. So, take a take a quonset hut and
8	divide it by four, which gives you four rooms, two
9	crewmen in each room. That's how that's how we
10	lived. That was in Cho Liu. When I got up to Da
11	Nang I was in Liu for ten months and then the
12	last three months, when I toured, I was in De Nang.
13	In Da Nang it was more crowded and so there might
14	be three crewmen to a room up there. And then you
15	go outside, walk down the way a little bit and
16	there would be a bathroom.
17	When I first got to Cho Liu there
18	was no running water and so we had outhouses to use
19	and we'd get water where we could to clean up.
20	After I'd been there maybe two months we got water,
21	we got flushed toilets. Wow, what a miracle. And
22	we got showers. Of course we didn't think about
23	hot showers and that came down I don't know if
24	we ever got hot showers.

1	David Bena - 4-7-2005
2	We ate in a community mess hall
3	which was it doubled as the officer's club. It
4	was a thatched roof, big shack. And there we would
5	take our meals, watch a movie, socialize, U.S.O.
6	shows. That shack would take care of four
7	squadrons of aircraft. They were Three Eight-Four
8	Skyhawk squadrons and then our A-6 squadron. In a
9	typical A-6 squadron there would be somewhere
10	around thirty-five officers or or flying
11	personnel. In an A-4 squadron there would be more
12	like twenty or maybe twenty or twenty-five. So,
13	we're talking about a hundred airmen hanging around
14	the the officer's club for meals.
15	Our meals were prepared, hot
16	meals. We we had being in the flying
17	business we had better accommodations than did the
18	ground hounders. So, we had prepared meals for us.
19	We we didn't have many eggs, so we did powdered
20	eggs a lot. But for dinner once a week we had
21	steaks, barbecued outside on the grill, which was
22	the highlight of the week for us.
23	Q. Now, did your aircraft require a
24	lot of maintenance or minimal or?

1	David Bena - 4-7-2005
2	A. The A-6 was had the worst
3	maintenance record of any aircraft in the naval
4	inventory. Because it was so sophisticated at that
5	time and so new it wasn't it was an airplane of
6	black boxes.
7	Q. Uh-huh.
8	A. And a lot of those black boxes
9	were went down or stopped working. So, there was a
10	lot of maintenance per hour, per flying hour. At
11	one point it was fifty hours of maintenance per one
12	flying hour for our aircraft. A lot of avionics in
13	those things.
14	Q. Uh-huh.
15	A. And so we sometimes, I
16	wouldn't say often, sometimes we would fly with a
17	degraded airplane. Maybe the computer wasn't
18	working and so we would go up with radar only. The
19	Doppler hardly ever worked, so we never had
20	accurate wind data only what we could sort of work
21	into the work into it ourselves.
22	Q. Uh-huh.
23	A. Radar screen, of course if you
24	don't have a radar screen you're not not going
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1	David Bena - 4-7-2005
2	to do the mission. Now, we didn't only do North
3	Vietnam missions, we did also night guided bombing
4	missiles in missions in South Vietnam where we
5	were controlled by a marine on the ground in a tent
6	who has us in radar contact. Those were called
7	T.P.Q. missions and I have lost my memory as to
8	what those mean.
9	Q. Uh-huh.
10	A. But it was the target was
11	acquired by personnel on the ground. This would be
12	a little bit like the the B-52 arc-like missions
13	where you would just do a carpet of bombs across an
14	area. An A-6 could carry twenty-eight
15	five-hundred-pound bombs. So, you got four of
16	those airplanes flying in formation, you had over a
17	hundred bombs. So, it it could be that on a
18	given night we may go up in a four four-aircraft
19	flight a section and and flying to about twenty
20	thousand feet and be directed from the ground, a
21	ground control bomb dropping where we would carpet
22	the jungle.
23	Q. Now you did this from high
24	altitudes?

1 David Bena - 4-7-2005 2 Twenty thousand feet. Twenty to Α. 3 twenty-five thousand feet. 4 Was -- was your physical target 0. 5 like the Ho Chi Minh Trail or -- or you --? 6 Yeah. Actually the bombing Α. 7 missions were interdiction truck convoys. Those 8 were various aspects of the Ho Chi Minh Trail 9 because the Ho Chi Minh Trail went from the -- the 10 coast of North Vietnam right to Laos. 11 Right. 0. 12 So, it wasn't just one trail, we Α. 13 did a lot of that. Now, with the carpet bombings, those were all in South Vietnam and they would 14 15 be -- they would be areas where the enemy was 16 supposed to be concentrated. 17 Ο. Uh-huh. 18 And what I was getting to was, we Α. 19 used the degraded aircraft where we could on those 20 T.P.Q. missions because all we needed to drop bombs 21 in a T.P.Q. mission was an -- screen with the drop 2.2 on the stick. And so the -- the -- the bombardier 23 navigator could fall asleep on those missions 24 because all you did was go up to altitude, get Associated Reporters Int'l., Inc. 800.523.7887

1	David Bena - 4-7-2005
2	lined up, follow the instructions of the ground
3	controller and when he said hack, hack, the pilot
4	dropped the bombs and we'd go home. You didn't
5	need a lot of radar for that, didn't need a
6	computer.
7	Q. Uh-huh.
8	A. So, those so the aircraft that
9	were deeply degraded were not used for the North
10	Vietnam missions.
11	Q. Was this an all weather aircraft?
12	A. Yes. It was called an all all
13	weather radar bomber which is why we used it at
13 14	weather radar bomber which is why we used it at night.
14	night.
14 15	night. Q. Uh-huh.
14 15 16	night. Q. Uh-huh. A. We didn't really ever have to see
14 15 16 17	<pre>night. Q. Uh-huh. A. We didn't really ever have to see the ground.</pre>
14 15 16 17 18	<pre>night. Q. Uh-huh. A. We didn't really ever have to see the ground. Q. How do you think your training</pre>
14 15 16 17 18 19	<pre>night. Q. Uh-huh. A. We didn't really ever have to see the ground. Q. How do you think your training was it adequate enough for combat the combat</pre>
14 15 16 17 18 19 20	<pre>night.     Q. Uh-huh.     A. We didn't really ever have to see the ground.     Q. How do you think your training was it adequate enough for combat the combat situations you were in?</pre>
14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21	night. Q. Uh-huh. A. We didn't really ever have to see the ground. Q. How do you think your training was it adequate enough for combat the combat situations you were in? A. No. I could have used a lot more

1	David Bena - 4-7-2005
2	A. So, I I spent several months
3	practicing bombing in the mountains of North
4	Carolina, of course not dropping those bombs.
5	Q. Uh-huh.
6	A. And then we had several
7	deployments to Yuma, Arizona which was which had
8	a a live drop area that we would actually drop
9	live ordinance. But I I learned a lot by
10	actually dropping bombs in North Vietnam. I
11	learned a lot about radar imagery, I learned a lot
12	about how to get around degrees to still to
13	still do the do the bombing. It took a couple
14	of months actually in country to where I really
15	knew that system well.
16	Q. Did you ever have much contact
17	with the Vietnamese people?
18	A. Very little. On our base at Cho
19	Liu we had some Vietnamese who worked on the base,
20	barbers, waiters, waitresses, laundry people. We
21	also had something called I think it was called
22	Civil Action where we would be involved in trying
23	to do something nice for the people of Vietnam.
24	And that would be doing work on a school, providing
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1	David Bena - 4-7-2005
2	food to a village, and so we would go out to these
3	villages in in trucks, large trucks. We'd sit
4	in the back of the trucks. And and go out and
5	try to mix with the people. Of course they didn't
6	understand English and we didn't understand
7	Vietnamese, so it was mostly standing around
8	smiling at them and having pictures taken. That's
9	about it as far as getting to know the the
10	Vietnamese people. I know the ground pounders got
11	a lot of of action talking to the Vietnamese,
12	but we just didn't.
13	Q. Did you all ever name your plane
14	or anything at all or?
15	A. No. In fact we didn't
16	although we had our name on an airplane
17	Q. Uh-huh.
18	A the pilot and I had our name
19	on an airplane, we didn't fly that airplane except
20	when it was assigned to us. Airplanes were
21	assigned based on whether they were in fully
22	working working order and they got to go to
23	North Vietnam and as and as they became more and
24	more degraded the mission changed. And so whatever
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1	David Bena - 4-7-2005
2	you were up for that night that yours you flew the
3	airplane that, isn't assigned to you.
4	Q. So, you you jumped from plane
5	to plane, you weren't always on the same plane?
6	A. No. We had fifteen airplanes and
7	probably probably flew on all fifteen of them.
8	BY MR. CLARK:
9	Q. Uh-huh. How did you feel
10	about were you affected by and how did you feel
11	about the rules of engagement?
12	A. At that time I was too stupid to
13	question. I think we probably dropped a lot of
14	bombs on trees. We wasted a lot of money. It got
15	to be where every time our secondary target was set
16	to be a bivouac area we figured that meant that
17	they had run out of secondary targets and so they
18	were assigning us a part of the jungle to destroy.
19	The primary mission, truck convoys, was very clear
20	and very understandable. No one would be on those
21	roads unless they were carrying supplies either
22	down to South Vietnam or carrying trucks and troops
23	back to North Vietnam. That was clear. That was a
24	definable mission that worked. The secondary
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1	David Bena - 4-7-2005
2	target missions were questionable as to whether we
3	ever did anything with those. And the T.P.Q.
4	missions I have no earthly idea what we were
5	dropping bombs on.
6	Now, there's one part of what we
7	did that I haven't mentioned and that was called
8	close air support. And close air support was a way
9	of was flying a mission in direct support of
10	friendly troops, friendly marines. And that was
11	basically dive-bombing. The bombardier navigator
12	on a dive-bombing mission, his job was to count
13	backwards starting at eighty thousand feet, seven,
14	six, five, standby, standby, hack, and the pilot
15	dropped the bomb. So, that was basically a a
16	pilot's dream because pilots love dive-bombing.
17	Q. Uh-huh.
18	A. We didn't get to do it very much
19	in the A-6 Intruder. The A-6 was not particularly
20	a great close air support aircraft. It you
21	couldn't do napalm, for instance. And so most of
22	the A-6 dive-bombing missions were you'd drop the
23	bombs at a about three thousand feet, you pull out
24	about a thousand feet, and you go back and do it
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1	David Bena - 4-7-2005
2	again. Now, the full air controllers on the ground
3	are called FAC's which were marine aviators
4	themselves or naval flight officers, would call in
5	the air the air strike request and then they
6	would be they were on an F.M. radio, we were on
7	V.H.F. So, we couldn't communicate directly, so
8	there was the middle man.
9	The middle man was an airborne
10	FAC who had both radios in his airplane. And that
11	way he might be flying what was called a an
12	an OB-10, it was called a Broncho (phonetic
13	spelling) or possibly, you know, two little
14	little airplanes little airplanes who would fly
15	over the target area and suppose a battalion was in
16	combat against the enemy and the enemy was
17	particularly rough and they they felt the
18	Americans felt they couldn't take this North
19	Vietnamese unit unless they had air power. And so
20	they would they would call in air strikes from
21	American aircraft. And suppose our Americans were
22	on one hill and the enemy was on the next hill, we
23	would try to pulverize the hill.
24	Q. Uh-huh.

1	David Bena - 4-7-2005
2	A. We never saw you know, we saw
3	where the bombs hit, but we didn't see anybody
4	any anybody get killed because we we didn't
5	get that close. But the airborne FAC would report
6	the damage to us as to how we were doing and so a
7	typical mission might be two or three or four A-6
8	Intruders pulverizing a hill. And we would just
9	take turns dropping. We'd drop a couple of bombs
10	at a time, three or four bombs at a time and so you
11	might make five or six runs in a mission and
12	then and then go home. We we did a lot a
13	lot of that. Those were daytime missions with some
14	night night close air support missions. And
15	those you did under flares. Another aircraft would
16	fly around dropping flares
17	Q. Uh-huh.
18	A and we would we would drop
19	bombs looking at that. Eventually when I'd been
20	there about six months a new concept came in
21	actually that I'd help develop back in in the
22	states which was called a Beacon Close Air Support
23	Mission. That was geared for Intruders because it
24	was meant to to do in bad weather. And how that

1	David Bena - 4-7-2005
2	worked was the the FAC on the ground, full air
3	controller, had a beacon, oh, just a little a
4	little metal gadget which sent out a signal. And
5	so he would turn that beacon on and if I was the
6	bombardier navigator that that beacon would show
7	up that signal will show up on my radar screen.
8	And then he would give me information from where he
9	was to where the target was. Since I knew where he
10	was he would say the target bears zero two zero
11	from my position, which would be northeast
12	Q. Uh-huh.
13	A at five hundred meters which
14	we did feet in an aircraft, so I'd combined that
15	convert that, okay, to fifteen thousand feet. And
16	the my I'm at altitude twenty feet and the
17	enemy is altitude sixty feet. And I would put that
18	into the computer and then the then the radar
19	would show me a target. It was called offset
20	bombing by by lining up on the FAC's beacon and
21	in a sense keeping our clusters on the beacon the
22	aircraft would actually fly to the target and drop
23	the bombs. Just needed to make sure you put in the
24	offset or you would bomb the the the enemy

1	David Bena - 4-7-2005
2	the friendly rather than the enemy. And that
3	allowed for all weather close air support, which
4	was really a revolutionary thing. So, when the
5	A-4s and the F-4s couldn't get off the ground to
6	help with close air support we just went up and we
7	did it day or night.
8	Q. Uh-huh.
9	A. So, my last six months we stood
10	down from bombing North Vietnam and we we did
11	mostly beacon runs, truck convoys in Southern Laos
12	and some close air support.
13	Q. What were I know being an
14	officer what were relationships like in your unit?
15	A. Among the officers it was like a
16	fraternity. The flying squadron I I don't know
17	about how the Army
18	Q. Uh-huh.
19	A or the Air Force I must say on
20	them. Most of the officers were in their early to
21	mid twenties and there would be a couple a
22	couple of old guys who were maybe in their mid
23	thirties. They were the the Commander and the
24	Ops Officer and the Deputy Commander. So, it was
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1	David Bena - 4-7-2005
2	mostly a bunch of guys mostly just out of college
3	and about the size of a fraternity, you know,
4	thirty to forty of us.
5	Q. Uh-huh.
6	A. We we got along I think most
7	of the time quite well. All types of conditions of
8	the people, all religious backgrounds, we just put
9	it together and did did the mission. As far as
10	the enlisted guys, we have about maybe two hundred
11	fifty in the squadron. They did everything from
12	aircraft maintenance, to security, to clerk. All
13	of us had enlisted people that worked for us to do
14	our part of the mission and that was I don't
15	I don't remember any difficulties. We pretty much
16	worked together strong as esprit de corps, got
17	along quite well.
18	Q. Were you aware of the anti-war
19	movement?
20	A. Not really. I mean I know it was
21	going on, I was there in 1968 and 1969. We didn't
22	pay much attention to it. In fact I remember in
23	1968 we had a movie come through called Barberella
24	with Jane Fonda.

1	David Bena - 4-7-2005
2	Q. Yeah.
3	A. And we did have a discussion as
4	to whether we were actually going to watch the
5	movie or not. We decided it wasn't worth the
6	protest and so we enjoyed the movie.
7	Q. Speaking of that, now that she's
8	somewhat apologized, what how do you feel
9	about about that and and her? She raised at
10	least she was
11	A. Yes.
12	Q. I don't know if
13	A. I do. I know that she apologized
14	for sitting on the aircraft
15	Q. Yeah, pro bonos.
16	A anti-aircraft. You know, we
17	all have to walk our own turf. She's made peace
18	with it, so have I.
19	Q. Okay. I was just curious. And
20	you left Vietnam or you left the Marine Corps
21	regular Marine Corps in '70?
22	A. Yeah. I came back from Vietnam
23	in May of 1969.
24	Q. Uh-huh.

1	David Bena - 4-7-2005
2	A. While I had been in Vietnam I had
3	come to a close relationship with God and in the
4	process sensed that God was calling me to ordained
5	ministry and so when I got back from Vietnam I
6	started flying for seminary through my church. And
7	so I served another year and two months on active
8	duty in the Marine Corps.
9	Q. What did you do during that time?
10	A. I flew.
11	Q. Uh-huh.
12	A. I was an instructor, bombardier
13	navigator. Also, an admin administrative
14	officer for the squadron. And I I actually
15	resigned from active duty in August of 1970 so I
16	could enter seminary in September of '70. But I
17	remained in the Marine Corps Reserve for the time I
18	was in seminary.
19	Q. So, why did you go to the Air
20	Force and the Air Force Reserve?
21	A. A long story. My my sense of
22	call was to finish seminary and go back to the
23	Marine Corps as a chaplain. I found out while I
24	was in seminary that actually those chaplains who
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1	David Bena - 4-7-2005
2	walked around us were not marines, they were navy
3	personnel because marines don't have chaplains.
4	They don't have lawyers. Well, they do have
5	lawyers, but they don't have doctors. They
6	they since they're part of the sea service they
7	use naval personnel for those functions. And so
8	when I talked to the navy I was told that yes, I
9	probably could get into the navy chaplaincy, but as
10	far as serving with marines, that would be once in
11	a while kind of a deal. Mostly I would be sailing,
12	sailing over the ocean blue. I never liked ships
13	much myself.
14	And so while I was interested in
15	the navy chaplaincy when an Air Force position came
16	available I I accepted it. That was not run by
17	me anyway, that was run by my church. Our church
18	decided who went into what service and so since I
19	had been in the air wing anyway in the Marine Corps
20	when I was offered the position in the Air Force I
21	took it.
22	When I think back on it this was
23	now during the Vietnam draw-down and so people were
24	getting out of the service. I'm not sure I would
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1	David Bena - 4-7-2005		
2	have either been able to get into the navy		
3	chaplaincy because the navy chaplaincy was chocked		
4	full of chaplains who were not eager to leave the		
5	service. Whereas the Air Force for some reason was		
6	beginning to develop opening and I got one of them.		
7	Q. And you ended up going out of the		
8	Air Force Reserve into the Air Force itself.		
9	What what what did you do there?		
10	A. Well, my intention was active		
11	duty all along.		
12	Q. Okay. All right.		
13	A. Yeah. Yes. So, when I		
13 14	A. Yeah. Yes. So, when I finished when I finished seven or eight I		
14	finished when I finished seven or eight I		
14 15	finished when I finished seven or eight I actually remained a Marine Corps Reserve officer		
14 15 16	finished when I finished seven or eight I actually remained a Marine Corps Reserve officer for two years into my priesthood. And then I was		
14 15 16 17	finished when I finished seven or eight I actually remained a Marine Corps Reserve officer for two years into my priesthood. And then I was able to I was given the opportunity for the Air		
14 15 16 17 18	finished when I finished seven or eight I actually remained a Marine Corps Reserve officer for two years into my priesthood. And then I was able to I was given the opportunity for the Air Force and and that started with a reserve		
14 15 16 17 18 19	finished when I finished seven or eight I actually remained a Marine Corps Reserve officer for two years into my priesthood. And then I was able to I was given the opportunity for the Air Force and and that started with a reserve assignment. So, I was a reservist for a couple of		
14 15 16 17 18 19 20	finished when I finished seven or eight I actually remained a Marine Corps Reserve officer for two years into my priesthood. And then I was able to I was given the opportunity for the Air Force and and that started with a reserve assignment. So, I was a reservist for a couple of years before the active duty assignment came on.		
14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21	finished when I finished seven or eight I actually remained a Marine Corps Reserve officer for two years into my priesthood. And then I was able to I was given the opportunity for the Air Force and and that started with a reserve assignment. So, I was a reservist for a couple of years before the active duty assignment came on. So, then I was recalled to active duty oh boy,		
14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22	finished when I finished seven or eight I actually remained a Marine Corps Reserve officer for two years into my priesthood. And then I was able to I was given the opportunity for the Air Force and and that started with a reserve assignment. So, I was a reservist for a couple of years before the active duty assignment came on. So, then I was recalled to active duty oh boy, probably the end of 1977.		

1	David Bena - 4-7-2005
2	A. I stayed on active duty until I
3	retired in December of 1992. Once again, I was
4	called out of active duty by our church so that I
5	would go go on and assist our mission for the
6	armed forces as a civilian to take care of
7	chaplains around the world of all three services.
8	Q. How do you think well, did you
9	stay in contact with anyone that was in service
10	with you?
11	A. My pilot. We're still very close
12	friends. He lives down in Florida. We get
13	together at least once a year. We've been through
14	a lot together and not only in the war, but after
15	the war. We helped each other a lot in the
16	difficult situations. He's now seventy and he's
17	had some health problems, so I've I've
18	maintained contact with him. Also, a fellow
19	bombardier navigator who lives down in Albany, we
20	get together for lunch. We had a we had an A-6
21	reunion when the A-6's went out of business, but I
22	was not able to attend because I was on a
23	conference in Europe. So, I have limited contact
24	with them. We're going to have a reunion of

1	David Bena - 4-7-2005		
2	marines in July out in San Diego and I'm I'll		
3	see some of the some of the guys then.		
4	Q. Did you join any veterans		
5	organizations at all?		
6	A. I really haven't. Not that I'm		
7	not interested, but I'm I'm moving pretty		
8	quickly here in this job and I just I haven't		
9	been in a situation where I could attend meetings		
10	or anything like that. I was approached about		
11	joining the V.F.W. and I I didn't, but I did		
12	I did join reserve no, Retired Officers		
13	Association while away and I was involved with that		
14	work for a couple of years. But once again a lot		
15	of that was Sunday afternoons and I'm kind of busy		
16	on weekends. So, that's where it is for me.		
17	Q. Did you make use of the G.I. bill		
18	at all?		
19	A. I went through seminaries on the		
20	G.I. bill.		
21	Q. Okay. How do you think your time		
22	in the service changed or had an affect on your		
23	life?		
24	A. It had a major affect. When I		
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1	David Bena - 4-7-2005
2	went into the Marine Corps at age twenty-one I was
3	still an immature college kid. I believe I not
4	only got my life straight with God, but I learned a
5	lot about myself and how far I can go and what the
6	envelope is for my own life, what I can handle,
7	what I can't. I learned how to get my emotions in
8	control, I learned how to deal with alcohol. And
9	that that five years of active duty in the
10	Marine Corps really set me straight on what life is
11	really all about and I really appreciate that.
12	Q. Can I ask you a question going
13	back to to that. Lots of times when we've
14	when we've talked to pilots and air crews from
15	World War II they said when they were off duty they
16	drank a lot. And did you find that problem?
17	A. Oh yeah. That's basically our
18	our recreation in combat was basically alcohol. I
19	mean we did have the movie of the night. Sometimes
20	a a U.S.O. show would come through, but
21	basically it was then you were out drinking beer.
22	We didn't have a lot of hard booze. There was
23	some, but mostly we just drank huge quantities of
24	beer.

04/07/2005. Interview of David Bena, Associated Reporters Int'l., Inc. 800 523 7887 Page 41 1 David Bena - 4-7-2005 2 BY MR. RUSSERT: 3 There wasn't anything else to do; Ο. right? 4 5 Well, then after I -- after I Α. 6 really started walking closer with God my -- my 7 alcohol intake went down. 8 Ο. Uh-huh. 9 And my Bible reading intake went Α. 10 But I tried to do that in a graceful way so up. that I didn't look like some kind of a holier than 11 12 thou person on -- on a crusade. 13 Uh-huh. Ο. 14 Α. In the squadron they would be 15 thirty some officers, a -- a small percentage did 16 not drink, but -- but we all partied. And I didn't 17 see -- you know, I may have been naive, but I 18 didn't see anybody crashing because of use of 19 alcohol. And we -- we maintained a rule about how 20 much time elapsed between drinking alcohol and 21 flying. That was -- that was a rule. I -- I can't 22 remember now, I think it was eight or ten hours and 23 so nobody flew drunk. We did maintain very careful 24rules about how we -- how we -- how we drank

1 David Bena - 4-7-2005 2 alcohol. 3 Uh-huh. Ο. I -- I didn't know of any 4 Α. 5 marijuana use while I was there. I did address one 6 marine for marijuana use on a tip when I was duty officer, but there was not that -- as far as I 7 8 know, very -- there was very little marijuana use. 9 BY MR. CLARK: 10 Okay. I have some photographs. Ο. If you could hold them like this where you can 11 12 focus and just tell me where, when, what date. 13 Okay. Great. Okay. This is a Α. 14 photo taken in 1968. This -- this was not my 15 pilot. My pilot was on R&R and so I flew with one 16 of the greatest guys in the squadron. We called 17 him Cosy Cohen (phonetic spelling). And so I was 18 thrilled to be able to fly with Cosy on a daytime 19 close air support mission. And he was exemplary in 20 his piloting skills. And that's us standing in 21 front of the aircraft before taking off. 22 Ο. Okav. 23 Okay. This is in 1969 after I Α. 24 had moved to Da Nang. Once in a while we would Associated Reporters Int'l., Inc. 800.523.7887

1	David Bena - 4-7-2005
2	have a daytime attack, a mortar or a rocket attack,
3	on our base and this particular attack one of the
4	rockets or mortars hit the bomb dump and what you
5	see in the background is our bomb dump going up.
6	Q. Okay.
7	A. And it did a job on our Quonset
8	Huts and that's me standing there in my flight
9	jacket and gas mask watching the bombs actually
10	I was feeling the bombs because as they went off we
11	actually were catapulted into the air.
12	This is a a picture of me as a
13	duty officer as we have two kinds of duty
14	officer activity. One of was squadron duty
15	officer, S.D.O., and that person was in charge of
16	the aircraft for a twelve-hour period, assigning
17	crews to aircraft, making sure our aircraft got off
18	on time, if there were maintenance difficulties,
19	getting maintenance out to to fix those
20	aircraft. And so this is this is me one night
21	as the squadron duty officer in our what we called
22	a ready room in Cho Liu Vietnam in 1968. I'm a
23	young captain there in my utility uniform. When
24	you were the squadron duty officer you you wore
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1	David Bena - 4-7-2005
2	your utility uniform rather than your flight suit.
3	The other kind of duty you had
4	was the officer duty of the day, O.D.O. And that
5	was an outside duty where you did security of the
6	squadron area and when you did that work you wore a
7	flack jacket and a helmet and your weapon and you
8	had a troop of marines around you. And what you
9	did was basically cover the parallel of the of
10	the base area.
11	Q. Did you ever carry a side arm
12	when you were up there flying?
13	A. Always. Always had it with me.
14	Q. What did you carry?
15	A. The standard issue was a
16	thirty-eight stub nose pistol.
17	And this is a photo of me as an
18	Air Force chaplain in my last couple of years in
19	the Air Force. And everyone had to have what they
20	called a promotion-jacket-photo. There it is, my
21	promotion-jacket-photo.
22	Q. Okay. And how about this?
23	A. Okay. This is a book I wrote
24	called Mounting Up with Wings as Eagles, a Vietnam
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1	David Bena - 4-7-2005			
2	story. It's a historical novel. I actually wrote			
3	it in the mid '80s, not thinking about trying to			
4	sell it, but I was trying to get something that was			
5	allowed about what people did for the war, get			
6	something written down that my son could read some			
7	day. And he read it. It seemed interesting to him			
8	and that was the end of it until about 1993, '94			
9	when McNamara (phonetic spelling) made his speech			
10	about his idea that the war had always been futile			
11	and that he had known it was futile, but still			
12	prosecuted the war. I I got so angry that I got			
13	the manuscript out and actually wrote it as a book			
14	to show what life was really like with a			
15	typical			
16	Q. How much of this is based on			
17	reality?			
18	A. Almost all of it's based on			
19	reality.			
20	Q. Did you change names or?			
21	A. Yes, I changed the names. Yes.			
22	Q. Okay.			
23	A. In this war I did not come back			
24	from Vietnam, in this in this book.			

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1 David Bena - 4-7-2005 2 I notice you have a flight log. Ο. 3 I just saw this here. 4 Α. Yeah. It -- that's another thing. We -- we had to keep a close record --5 6 Ο. Uh-huh. 7 -- of -- of what -- what we did. Ά. 8 And actually what's today, the 7th? 9 The 7th. Yes. Ο. 10 Yeah, on the 7th of April -- let Α. 11 me see now, it's 1970. On the 7th of April, 1969 12 in Vietnam I flew a beacon mission with Lieutenant 13 Colonel Costello (phonetic spelling) who was not my 14 pilot because my pilot had rotated back to the 15 states. And the mission was one point five hours 16 and half of that was instrument time. Half of it 17 was visual flight -- flight rules. It tells me the 18 aircraft I flew in, which was one five five six two 19 three. And so that's -- every person who's ever 20 flown and you have a flight log, has a flight log 21 and it -- it shows the flying I did from the time I 22 jumped in an aircraft for the first time until my 23 last flight with the marines. 24

Q. Maybe if you could hold that up Associated Reporters Int'l., Inc. 800.523.7887

David Bena - 4-7-2005 1 2 also and just --. 3 Okay. Here's what's called Α. 4 aviator flight log book. There have been many 5 variations of this over the years of naval 6 aviation. And then inside you can just see a bunch 7 of columns with dates, aircraft type, mission, if 8 it was night or instrument, who the pilot was and 9 just various information that you need. 10 Ο. Okav. 11 It also would record training Α. 12 that I took, ejection seat training, oxygen, 13 whatever. 14 MR. RUSSERT: Okay. Well, thank 15 you very much for the interview. 16 MR. BENA: Thanks. Nice to --17 nice -- I'm glad you're doing this kind of a thing. 18 (The interview concluded.) 19 pwss 20 21 22 23 24

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25:19 27:24 31:2 33:13		
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