

Robert Earl Bliss
Narrator

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Interviewers
NYS Military Museum & Veterans Research Center
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Robert Bliss **RB**
Wayne Clark **WC**
Mike Russert **MR**

MR: This is an interview at the Super 8 Motel, Kingston, New York, July 14, 2004, at approximately 3:30 p.m. The interviewers are Wayne Clark and Mike Russert. Could you give me your full name, date of birth and place of birth, please?

RB: My name is Robert Earl Bliss. I was born in Los Angeles, California, May 8th, 1947.

MR: What was your educational background prior to entering service?

RB: I finished high school, I graduated from high school, and I went into the service right out of high school. In fact, I actually signed up for the Marines before I graduated.

MR: So you enlisted?

RB: Yes.

MR: Why did you select the Marine Corps?

RB: I don't know... I guess that when I was in high school, I played a lot of sports. I was a gymnast and I played football for four years. When I went into the service, the Marines seemed like the logical thing to do. I figured if I could get through the Marine Corps, I'd proven something to myself and maybe my family and friends. That's why I did it.

MR: Where did you go for your basic training?

RB: I went to Parris Island.

MR: Could you tell us about your training, and tell us about your time in the Marines.

RB: I went to Parris Island. I got down there in July. After high school I went out and visited my mother for a while. I came back and went down to Fort Hamilton; we were sworn in there, and they took us to Parris Island. What was kind of stupid, I think, is that I had volunteered to go in in the summer, not knowing how hot it would be in Parris Island, and it was brutal. Nonetheless, the training was only 8 weeks. I think that's probably because the Vietnam War was going on, and I think they needed personnel overseas, because today I think it's about 13 or 14 weeks. So I guess it was kind of a crash course, but still it didn't make it any easier, that's for sure.

It was pretty tough. I found it... for myself, I was very physical and the physical training, although very, very hard, was not the thing that bothered me. It was more the psychological aspect of it, where they tear you down and build you back up. In those days, they didn't mind pushing you around. Today they don't do that, as I understand, not that you don't get as good as if not better training

than we did. I see these guys who are overseas now, they seem to be very well trained. So it was 8 weeks. After I'd gotten used to the initial shock, which was very hard--these guys throwing garbage cans down the squad bay early in the morning and things -- I seemed to excel at the physical aspect of it. I managed to come out of Parris Island... I made PFC, graduated Private First Class, which was 10 percent of a platoon of about over 200 guys in the platoon, so that was quite an honor. One of the guys gets the dress blues; that wasn't me, but that's ok.

From there on, the night of our graduation they had us all line up and they gave us our orders. We knew, as they had told us earlier, that probably a lot of us would be going to West Pac, and West Pac was directly to Vietnam. I didn't have those orders for some strange reason. They sent me out to California to join the 27th Marines out there at Camp Pendleton.

So I was there for a while, and I managed to get into my captain's -- let's see I forget what company I was in, I think it was India Company--but they were looking for a company clerk. And I happened to raise my hand and I got in there. I was doing the daily activities of whatever Captain Conger wanted. I was like his personal secretary. Well, I did that for a few months and I got really pretty board with it. I knew the action was over in Vietnam. So one day we were out on the company street having our early morning muster, and the Top Sergeant said "We need ten bodies to go to Vietnam. Raise your hands." I found myself raising my hand. It was funny, because later in the company office, the first sergeant said, "Bliss, if you get killed over there, do not come back and haunt me." I'll never forget those words.

So at any rate, we went through about 4 to 6 weeks of training, including some jungle training, and we took the airplane out of El Toro. They flew us out to, let's see, it was the Hawk to Hawaii and through the Philippines, Okinawa, and then to Vietnam.

MR: Whereabouts did you land in Vietnam?

RB: We landed right in Da Nang. We got off that plane, and the first thing you realize is that blast furnace that hits you. My God, I've never since realized anything as hot as that. The humidity and the heat. They put us in these cattle cars, they called them. The whole thing was pretty demoralizing. Right away I said to myself, "What have I done here; I'm sorry that I volunteered to go." I remember looking down at my Timex watch, and as I got off the plane my watch stopped, and I had had this watch all through high school, so that was a little disconcerting. But nonetheless, they took us off and had us digging sandbags most of the night. Finally we just looked at each other and said what the hell are we doing this for? And nobody was around, so we went and got some sleep.

We went through some battalion training, which was really an orientation, I suppose: how to treat the people, what to do, what not to do, etc., etc. And then we got our orders... Well, the battalion training was actually after I'd gotten to the battalion area, and then from the battalion area then sent me out to Hill 55, Dai Loc, the "Arizona" territory. They used to call it Indian territory. It was an area that was full of VC in 1967. It was little villages with their own little huts – we called them hooches – and there were a lot of rice paddies out there. We ran patrols all the time and night ambushes. Most of those people who were wounded or killed over there were due to VC mines and snipers, and that's what we experienced at that point.

Then in the spring, we were ordered to move up to southwest of Phu Bai and set up a battalion firebase, which became Camp Evans. As we were up there, a sniper killed a young Marine and they named the base after him, Camp Evans. We set this base up, and we ran patrols and battalion size operations out of there for several months. Some of those operations were up in the triple canopy. When you go west of Camp Evans, you run into these hills and then up into the jungle area up there, and those jungles there – you couldn't see the sky, most of them were triple canopy.

The North Vietnamese were running their supplies down through those jungles, and supplying the VC and what have you. A couple times we found a couple of bunker complexes, and there were some firefights, and these NVA didn't stand, they left. I remember one time I went into a bunker and there were some plates and chopsticks and things like that, and I found a can that said "A gift from the United States." It was cooking oil, with the shaking hands – red chicken hands on the blue background – so you knew that the black market was doing very well in Saigon and other parts of Vietnam to get these American products to our enemy. It was pretty strange to me as a nineteen-year-old, I remember, seeing that.

So that went on for quite some time, and we took casualties. Again mostly it was through snipers and sometimes there was some fierce combat with either VC or VC and NVA, and as fast as it began, it would stop. We never found the enemy to stand and hold his ground and fight until we got up to the DMZ. Then you were facing North Vietnamese regulars and it was a whole different ballgame.

We were up on a mountain in late August, my company, Golf Company. There was a radio relay station. In those days, no one was supposed to know, including us I suppose, we had people in Laos and Cambodia (this was 1967 in August), and of course we did. They had a big radio complex up there, Air Force and Army personnel, and they had us around the perimeter protecting those people. It was Hill 681, I think. It was so high up there you could see Laos, you could see Cambodia, you could see the South China Sea. And it was extremely beautiful; if it hadn't been a war, you would have loved to have been there as a tourist. Someday I'd still like to go back. But that was not the case. So we manned these positions, and it was in such a position that we were never bothered by any of the enemy soldiers. In fact, we had spotters up there and we would have aircraft come in and drop ordnance on the enemy who were down in these jungle valleys.

All of a sudden we were ordered out of there in the first week of September, and it was... They brought up the big Chinook

helicopters with the double props and loaded us all up. In fact, while we were up there, everything was brought up to us, water, food, anything we needed because it was just too difficult any other way. We were ordered back to Camp Evans and when we got there we had a huge briefing by platoons and by companies, and they said we're going to pack our gear. We'd been ordered up to Con Thien, and this is the fall of 1967. What was going on at the time was the NVA had more or less had that whole area up there, especially Con Thien, under siege. They were throwing in just an amazing amount of rockets and artillery and mortars in on these people. I had heard there were days when they took 1200-1400 rounds a day. Pretty incredible. So these Marines were up there looking like rats in these bunkers. And so we were supposed to go up there, and we were a roving battalion. What we did is we relieved elements of the 26th Regiment, who had been mortared in place in at least two different areas the week before we got up there, and they had really taken a lot of casualties. As it was, anybody that went up there at that time took casualties. The Ninth Marines, Bravo Company and Alpha Company, were almost overrun in the summer, in July. There's a book about that called *Operation Buffalo*, where the NVA actually were able to overrun elements of the 9th Marines. So we went up and –

MR: Can I stop you a second? As a roving battalion then, you moved into areas that were threatened?

RB: Yeah. They wanted us to look for, to pin and engage any NVA units we could find outside of Con Thien, because they were afraid that Con Thien was going to be attacked en masse – as indeed they were at one time, but they were repulsed prior to our coming up there. So we would move every day, and as every day we moved, every morning we were shelled. They had their forward observers watching us and as we filled in our holes in the morning, they'd shell us. And in the evening they'd shell us. Sometimes it was mortars, sometimes it was rockets, sometimes it was artillery, but it was every day we were shelled. It was miserable enough, also, because there

was a lot of rain, a lot of monsoon was hitting us there at that time, it was just miserable.

By the time we'd been up there, I guess a week or two, I think most of us were, they were picking us off with these artillery rounds and all this, and a lot of us – I know for myself, I thought well hell, I'm not coming home from this. We became quite fatalistic about it. I'm sure other servicemen in other wars have done the same thing. Especially those guys down there in World War II in the islands.... Whatever.

Nevertheless, the 21st of September we were out on a search and destroy operation again. We were southeast of Con Thien, about a thousand meters out, and we were told to – my company (I was a radio operator, by the way), it came over that we were to turn to the right, fix bayonets and move in on line. So you take the whole company in one line, just left to right, and move in. We had heard some firing going on up in front of us, and what happened was that Echo Company, which was the lead element, had walked right up onto a bunker complex, and the NVA came out and started killing all these guys, then it just broke out. So Echo was trying to disengage and pull back to try to set up a line of fire, and Foxtrot was ordered up to cover them while they disengaged. And then it just broke out and we realized--well, I didn't realize because we couldn't tell because there were hedgerows all around us, and these hedgerows were 8 or 10 feet high.

After this, we were ordered to move in, Golf Company, up on line. I found out later that we were a flanking element, and we were trying to catch the NVA on their backsides to give relief to Echo and Foxtrot up on our left and in front. As it turned out later on, we had run into the 90th NVA regiment – I know because I'm doing this research for a book for an author, and of course the research I've done in the past – and they were situated in bunker complexes that were very well fortified and they knew what they were doing. They had all areas pinned with their mortars, and they pretty much worked us over. Every time I saw a fire team run up into the hedgerows, an explosion went off and they were blown back. The Marines up there, all of us,

were so excited, the adrenaline was rushing, the bullets were snapping over our heads like this (snaps fingers over his head), and we wanted to get at these NVA because we had taken enough. We had been shelled every day we were up there and we were pissed off. I can't put it any other way. We were really, really mad. But we couldn't really get to them because of these hedgerows in the way.

It got into a grenade duel, grenades were going back and forth. There was so much going on, it was very hard to tell except for the fact that people were getting wounded and people were getting killed, and they were lying around out there in front of me. I remember an NVA kept sticking his head up over in the corner – he must have had a ladder back there – and he was pinpointing mortar positions for his mortar crews. And every time he'd put his head up, we'd shoot at this guy, but we didn't hit him. So he kept passing these orders, I guess, and at some point something landed right next to me here (gestures to his left); I'm not sure if it was a grenade or a 60mm mortar to this day, but it blew me up in the air, blew my sergeant that way (points behind him), Sergeant Roberts, and I remember coming down with a bang. It knocked the wind out of me. Everything was sort of yellow, and I could smell the cordite and I had this very strange taste in my mouth, I don't know what that was – maybe it was the cordite. I tried to get up, and as I got up, I remember looking down and seeing my left foot which was turned this way (gestures) in a position it shouldn't have been, and my femur was poking up into my left leg, and I realized I was in bad shape. And I fell back down like this (leans back). And Sergeant Roberts there said, on my left, said "Bliss, call them up and tell them we need help, we've been hit." So I tried to get the radio but I couldn't (it was on my back); I was in a bad way, so he crawled over and pulled the radio off, and they got people out there to pull us out.

They pulled us back into a dry riverbed, I guess, and they were putting the wounded in there, and there were a lot of guys in really bad shape. The corpsmen were all there trying to treat them, and what have you. This went on for quite some time, and I remember at one point one jet came through and dropped some ordnance on, shot

some rockets down, actually, on these bunkers, and that was the only one that came in that day. Anyway, they kept the medevacs going, because just a month or so ago, I got an email from the helicopter pilot that got me out, and he told me that he and his wingman were running medevacs for eleven hours that day, so obviously we were there for some time. Time in combat is irrelevant, you can't focus on time. It seemed very fast to me.

WC: Was that a Marine helicopter?

RB: Yeah, these were Marine helicopter pilots. They would take the wounded and dead down to Da Nang, they'd fill up with water and ammunition and come back, and they did this for eleven hours. Some of these helicopters were shot down, he told me later. I was one of the last to get out, if not the last, and the helicopter – they finally got me on. I told this corpsman, "Look if I don't get out of here pretty soon, I'm not going to make it." I knew it. I stayed conscious the whole time. I suppose I was in shock, but I don't remember. I guess I didn't lose that much blood, although I guess I must have lost enough. Maybe the shell had cauterized the artery, the major vessels, I'm not sure, but I managed to live through it. The helicopter got down, rather they got me on this helicopter with a couple of other guys and it took off and they were headed towards Dong Ha. They had a military base back there, which I think was about twenty kilometers south of Con Thien, but they were radioed as we got near it, and they said "Don't come in; their artillery is hitting the base hospital." And he looked out, he told me, and said they were impacting around the hospital, so he took off towards the USS Sanctuary, which was on call and on station out on the South China Sea because of this huge battle we were in, and they were taking wounded out there.

I had been there, let's see five months ago [before then] when I had malaria; I was there once before for thirty days. But nonetheless, he told me that they limped out on fumes, and barely landed that helicopter. They had to leave the helicopter there because they couldn't take off again on that ship. The last thing I remember was a

minister with a purple cloth leaning down giving me last rites on the deck, and I told him in no uncertain terms to get the hell away from me – well, I used other words – I said I wasn't going anywhere. The next thing I woke up minus my foot, and this corpsman tried to come over and tell me very kindly, very nicely, as gently as he could, that I'd lost my foot. I said, "Yeah, I know, I lost my foot," but I was amazed that I was alive. That didn't seem to bother me. Eventually gangrene set in and it worked its way up and there were subsequent operations and amputations till it got all the way up to my hip. The doctor came in and said, "Well Bliss, we're going to make one more operation, but that's all we can do. You're going to have to fight and live through it." "Well, I'm sure I will." Well I'm here today, so I guess I did. And that was the story of my trip to Vietnam.

MR: What kind of weapons did you carry?

RB: That's something I wanted to mention, because that firefight – well it was more than a firefight – that battle we were in up there on the DMZ that day, we had the M16 primarily. I went through 3 rifles that day, it just kept jamming and jamming and jamming. Actually, they pulled it out later on sometime back there, just prior to 1968, before Hue. I think it probably was still in the fall of 1967. They pulled the weapon because the ejector was not working right, and it was a real pain in the ass that... I remember stories of Marines dying up there with their cleaning rods out in front of them. And it's a horrendous situation to be sent into that war and not have the proper tools to use. There were also guys that had their M79 grenade launchers, which were very effective, and we had the M60 machine guns and we had our mortar crews, and those types of things. But the problem was, of course, we were up on the DMZ: we were under strength and we were under supplied, and our weapons were not working right, and the NVA up in front of us, they were much more well supplied than we were, so it was quite a bad situation all in all.

This is what happens when you let politicians in Washington run a war that is 13,000 miles away, instead of letting the men in the field take care of it. But that's another story, maybe for another time.

WC: When were you discharged from the Marines?

RB: Well, I was on that hospital ship for a month, and then I spent a year at the Oakland Naval hospital recuperating there and being fitted for an artificial leg. I was officially discharged... I had wanted to stay in the Marines, but they medically discharged me, medically retired me, so I was discharged in June of 1968. I was already back in New York when I got the separation papers.

MR: Do you feel, in retrospect, that the training you received at Parris Island was adequate?

RB: Oh sure, even the eight weeks. And we'd had subsequent training after that, as I mentioned, before going overseas. And a lot of it was on-the-job training once we got there, but we had really great NCOs in Vietnam and they worked us into the unit in a proper manner that gave us the... Well you know the first day I was there in Da Nang, that next morning they brought in an ambushed group, and one of the men had got shot in the head and been killed. It's quite a rude awakening to combat, and it was very frightening. But I found, like everyone else, that once you've been in a situation it's amazing how the human being can adapt to any type of situation. And you do. Yeah, I thought we had the proper amount training. I think the kids down there today are getting better training.

MR: Have you been in contact with your fellow Marines that were over there with you?

RB: Well, you know for all those years before I guess most of us wanted to forget about the experience. We weren't welcomed home or anything. I personally spent fifteen years drinking in bars, that's how I felt about it. I just wanted to crawl into a hole and drink myself to death, I guess. That's what happened to me for a while. So I wasn't really in contact with anybody. But I met a nice woman in 1980 and we got married and things changed, and I had a son and things got better, and they got better. And then we all got into the

computer age, and I started to locate some friends through these online websites. Today, of course, there's a whole bunch of us in contact. In fact, I'm the membership chairman of the 2nd Battalion 4th Marines Association at this time. And so, I'm in contact with a lot of people. As I mentioned, I just got a letter from Colonel Hammond, who was my battalion commanding officer in the field there in Vietnam, a really good guy. He was wounded and received three Purple Hearts while he was there, a very hands-on battalion commander.

MR: How did you feel about the leadership at that level?

RB: We had good leaders in Vietnam. I'm speaking for my battalion, but from other people I've spoken to, they say the same things. Some of our officers had been in World War II, some of them had been in Korea. They were field officers and they knew what they were doing. They were aggressive, but yet at the same time they tried to get a lot of us home. And Colonel Hammond was one of those, and I mentioned that to him. He's a good man. He was an officer that came out of the Naval Academy, and he's a very good man.

MR: Were you aware of the anti-war movement while you were there?

RB: We had heard stories about it from guys who were coming in, and some of the newspapers that we might have had access to--not too many, we were pretty much in the field all the time. But Occasionally if we got into a big area like Phu Bai, for example, the *Stars and Stripes* would be around with these articles. And you know, we just thought that they were misinformed. This was 1967, and we were still fighting the Communists then, it wasn't anything to do with... Well, as everybody knows, after Hue things went downhill for the Americans. Should we have been in Vietnam? No, obviously. Of course, hindsight is cheap. Yes, looking back historically, no, we should have never been there. Eisenhower had told Kennedy "Don't make the mistake of going into Indochina." Well, look what happened to the French. And then we went in after them and we

should have never been there, no. But the fact that we were, a friend of mine told me years afterwards, he said "Bob, you know nobody may thank us for our service, but we did what we were trained to do, and we have nothing to be ashamed of." And that made me think, and that's right. We were serving our country like our fathers before us. My family's been in this country since 1638, we fought in every war since the French and Indian War. We were doing what our fathers did before us, and that's the way it's always been. We've always been patriots, and supported the country. And I'm sure they learned some big lessons about Vietnam, and it showed later on and it shows today, in fact my unit is over in Iraq at the moment losing some of our American boys, and I think the country has changed the aspect of those days. You can see that there's more support for the American forces that are overseas. What's the bumper sticker you see now, "Save our troops, Get Bush out"? Well, I don't know. Again, politics and the military have always rubbed against each other in one way and another, usually for the worst, I feel.

But yes, to answer your question, I am in touch with a lot of these guys and we have our reunions every summer and these guys have all, for the most part, gotten back to good lives, they're married, have good jobs, pay their taxes like everybody else. That's all we really wanted to do, so I think history will look at us differently than they did back in the 1960s and 1970s. At least I think they will.

MR: Did you join any veterans' organizations when you came back?

RB: Not right away, but eventually I joined the Disabled American Veterans, and I'm a member of the Vietnam Veterans of America and my Battalion Association.

MR: You did talk about being in contact. You sent us some photographs. (Hands him photos) If you could hold them up under your chin, Wayne can focus on them and you can tell us where and when about each one of them.

RB: Ok. (Holds up photo) This is one of the pictures they take at Parris Island for your book, which I lost somewhere. They put you in dress blues, even though it's a hundred degrees down there in Buford, South Carolina, and everybody gets one of those.

This is a picture of us in Vietnam. This is Camp Evans, and we were back off some operation. But the looks of the wet clothes, it looks like we had just gotten back off an operation.

MR: Whereabouts are you in that picture?

RB: I'm standing right (points) here, with a cigarette in my mouth. I was usually the tallest one there. I was 6'2", 6'3". This gentleman here, Gary Shaver, was killed the day I was wounded. He was a grenadier. This gentleman died mysteriously when he came back from Vietnam; I heard later it was probably from heroin. This is my friend Mike Lovelace who lives in California today, my best friend. He stepped on a bouncing betty mine, it jumped up in his face and it didn't go off. Ever after that, he was known as Betty. This is my friend Oriano – I forget his first name now. He survived, and I saw him in the Naval Hospital when I came in in the middle of the night. He heard me talking and he said, "Bliss, is that you?" The lights were out in the squad bay in Oakland. In the Naval Hospital we got back together, and I don't know what ever happened to him; I haven't heard from him since. This is Sammy Summers, he lives in Detroit. He still has alcohol problems but he appears to be getting better, so says a friend of mine who is not in this picture.

MR: Were there any drugs being used that you know of at the time you were there?

RB: In 1967 there was a little bit of marijuana that sometimes you could get in the villages. Most of the Marines didn't do that. I remember smoking a little marijuana when I was over there once or twice and it was extremely strong. But apparently the Communists were trying to get us to do those sort of things, and when we found out about that we realized, Hey, we're really being stupid, and we

shied off that. That was in 1967. Of course, I understand that later on that it really became more prevalent, and the heroin too, and it was pretty disastrous.

MR: What year was that [photo]?

RB: That was 1967 at Camp Evans. (Holds up another photo) This is a picture of that mountain I mentioned, 681, overlooking Camp Evans and the South China Sea. The radio relay station. This was my little bunker, basically a rat's nest. I'm holding my M16 rifle here, and somebody was taking a picture, I think it was Smitty. This is a Marine named Delgado. He did survive Vietnam. I should have said quickly that we had, subsequently after the battle that I was in, the Second Battalion 4th Marines was in the field for about 7 weeks. There were other battles. There was a bridge that had to be defended between Cam Lo and Con Thien; [they were] told [it had] to be held at all costs. Well, the NVA came through my company, Golf Company, one night and overran the CP and killed a whole bunch of officers--the battalion surgeon and a number of other people--before they were repulsed in the morning. There were other firefights out there with the NVA. A helicopter was shot down. They liked to fight at night and they would come right at you. So this went on for about 7 weeks before 24 was pulled off the line and sent to Dong Ha to refit. We went in there with 960-something men, and when they were pulled off the line there were 324 men. We really... we really.... we served our country, let's put it that way.

MR: What hill did you say that was [in the picture]?

RB: That was hill 681. (Holds up another picture). I don't know if you can see this. This was an operation that was up in the mountains, I don't remember exactly when, probably summer of 1967. I know a couple of these people. One of them was a sergeant, a drill instructor in Parris Island, this guy in the middle. As you can see, the area looks like a moonscape; that's because it was bombed prior to our going in there. On the outsides of this [area] is triple canopy jungle, and I don't recall what we found there, if we found

anything. Sometimes you'd go on these operations and you wouldn't find anything and they'd send you right back again. Sometimes you'd find bunker complexes and what have you.

(Another picture) This is a picture of me on 681; as you can see this mountain was heavily bombed, and then they put a radio... What they'd do is bomb these areas and make them look like that so that, of course, you'd have fields of fire and you'd be able to see what was going on and the enemy couldn't sneak up on you. So we were situated around the top of this mountain while the radio groups were up on the top there. This is part of the logo of the 2nd Battalion, 4th Marines. On the bottom it says "Second to None," and "The Magnificent Bastards." Somebody gave us that handle, I'm not sure who it was. It might have been a general, maybe in World War II, it might have been at Corregidor. There's a whole history of that. Our battalion goes back to the Boxer Rebellion. They were known as the China Marines. There's a whole history about every Marine regiment. Anybody who was in it, if you're worth your salt, you know the history.

(Another photo) This was up on the same mountain. I thought it would be kind of cute to have some of my friends pose on this tree branch here that was sticking out of the ground, and we'd send it home to our loved ones and they could see how happy we were in Vietnam. We're all smiling, and we were happy up on the hill because it was almost like in-country R&R. Nobody bothered us, we didn't bother anybody. It was very nice. You can actually see rain coming twenty minutes before it got to us. It was always twenty minutes for some reason, I don't know why.

(Another picture) Now this is Camp Evans, and this is [our sign] that says "The harder we work, the luckier we get." Well, that wasn't often the case, however. This is the Battalion CP area. You can see a huge whip antenna off in the background; it looks like it's coming out of Gene Smith's head. He was a very good friend of mine. I did see him in California and then lost contact. He lived in Whittier. I don't know what ever happened to him. I've always wanted to get in touch

with him again. This (points) is my good friend Mike Lovelace. Believe it or not, he had malaria. I saw he had malaria and I got a corpsman up there to the DMZ to get him out. When he got back to Dong Ha, everyone was gone, and he said to Sergeant Nelson, who somehow survived and won two Silver Stars up there without getting a scratch, a big guy – he was over 6’5” too, a big black guy who became a postman. Nobody could find him after that, down there in the Carolinas somewhere; we never did find him. Nonetheless, Lovelace said to him “Where is everybody?” and he said “They’re all gone.” And he said “Well, what about Bliss?” “I don’t know, I think he was killed.” Well, we did get in touch years later, and lo and behold I wasn’t killed. Anyway, he had malaria and he was very lucky to get out of there. The story I wanted to say quickly about him, when he got back to the United States, he got tapped for duty as the President’s... what do they call it? Let’s put it this way, when the President gets off his airplane, Air Force 1, or off his helicopter, there’s a Marine always standing out there right by the door. Well, Mike Lovelace had gotten that duty--

MR and WC: Honor Guard duty.

RB: Is that what it’s called? Well he was very happy to have that, although there was a lot of spit and polish, of course. That’s why a lot of guys volunteered to go overseas, because they didn’t have to do spit and polish: “junk on the bunk and things on the springs.” We all remember that, right?

(Another picture) Anyway, this is me in Quang Tri. This is Mike Lovelace over here, and this other man is Chandler; I never found out what happened to him. He was with Force Recon at one point. But this is Quang Tri City. The ARVNs up here had gotten attacked by an NVA outfit and we went up to relieve them. When we got up there, the NVA disappeared again. We didn’t think too much of the ARVN over there, by the way, although I heard that the First ARVN Division was probably pretty good.

(Another photo) This I got from Lovelace, he sent me this, one of his photographs. This is up at Quang Tri at the same time. We were wearing our little boonie hats, standing there. This is me (pointing); this is a man named Hamilton – he was killed on the Bridge with a machine gun, defending the perimeter, and he was killed; and there's Mike Lovelace.

(Another photo) This last picture is pretty amazing. When I was on the hospital ship that month, I wasn't supposed to live anyway. My parents kept getting telegrams from the Naval Department saying "Condition critical, prognosis guarded," so they didn't think I was going to live. Anyway, maybe that had to do with the fact that they didn't give me a Purple Heart. When Headquarters, Marine Corps Hawaii heard about this, where General (his name skips me), the general in Hawaii was head of all Marine forces West Pac. This general decided that he was going to come out there, personally, and award me my Purple Heart. Behind me, you can see those litters – we'd just come in from the Philippines. This corporal came in and said "Do you think you could stand up, Lance Corporal Bliss? General So-and-So personally wants to award you... this is a very big honor." I said "Well I haven't stood up yet, but for the General I'll make an effort." And I did. Well, I was about 135 pounds here; when I was in Vietnam I was about 180. I lost a lot of weight, as you can tell, with the amputations. But he came up and he pinned it on me. He was a very nice man, and he was like a little grandfather, I'll never forget that. Much shorter than me, and very nice. And I had another picture of him pinning the award on me, and I've lost it; I don't know what happened to it, but at least this survives. I can't remember his name – what was it now? Oh well.

And I guess there's a few [photos] I have, here and there, but that's basically it.

I think if I had to do it again, I might do it in the Coast Guard. That's what I told my son: "Jeffrey, if you're going to go in the military, go into the Coast Guard." Although if he'd gone into the Marines, I would have been very proud of him, too. In fact, I have a nephew in

San Diego right now who's in the Marines, and he hurt his foot, and his unit had already left for Iraq. He was very, very upset that he didn't leave with them. But that's just the way the Marines are, and I suppose other branches of the service are the same. You want to stay with your buddies and I think probably that's what it's all about. You know, you asked before if the protestors bothered us. We were pretty much, I remember, my squad and my platoon, we were all for each other, and we didn't care what else was going on anywhere else. We were there, and that's all that mattered. We were in Vietnam and we were going to be there for a year. We relied on each other, and we fought together, we died together, and as we all know, some of the strongest relationships you'll ever have are with the guys you fought with in combat, and I'm proud to have served with some of these fine young guys over there in Vietnam, and we will remain friends for as long as we live, the ones that we contact.

MR: Thank you very much.

RB: Thank you. It was a pleasure.