

So, I went back to my office and the general I was working for, [Brigadier] General DePuy, William DePuy. His executive officer was a guy named [Lt. Col.] Y.Y. Phillips. So, I told Y.Y. that "I had to get out of this place." He said nobody had ever escaped J-3 before, the whole time. And I said, "Well, man, I've got to get out of here." So we had a talk, and it turned out that Y.Y. was trying to get out too. So he said he wanted to prepare the way for himself. There was one other major, a guy named [Capt. Robert] Bob Stevenson who wanted to get out. So

on top of a 118th helicopter and blew it up and turned another one over. The ARVN guys jumped out, and they were all cut down within 5 or 10 minutes.

It was a very well laid ambush, set up on that airstrip, positioned in all the right places. They were very disciplined because nobody saw anybody. So they were very disciplined. They planned the ambush the night before and had been in position there for several hours before daylight anyway. In my book, I've got a time on these things. I think it was about 10:30am. The battalion commander was Bob Cunningham and when it became obvious that they [Viet Cong] had ambushed the strip, he called off the assault and all the helicopters turned around and went back to Phuoc Vinh. Everybody who landed, including the advisor, Capt. Bruce Johnson, was killed there.

So I went back to Phuoc Vinh. When Dave and I went up and made the first recon and tried to pick up Lt. Krukowski, we took some hits in our tail boom, and our maintenance officer looked at it when we landed and said "Okay, you guys are grounded because you hit some spars in the tail boom and we can't let you fly because it might break off." I told Dave "Okay, you find us another ship. We are not going to get left out." So, he did. The next operation, [rescue of men still at the Dong Xoai airstrip] I was not part of, because I was still trying to find a helicopter.

About 1 o'clock P.M, [Major Harvey] Stewart was monitoring the radio for the Special Forces Team in Dong Xoai. The call sign there was "5 5 body jab." A very brave guy, [Harold Crowe—SF 'A' Team from inside the DIDG/ District Headquarters at Dong Xoai] stayed on the radio and in communication all day. They were monitoring him, and he said they were under serious assault and down to the last few rounds of ammunition—everyone was saving one for their self. So they had to pull out of this building. 50had I1E0102016C000

We went on down, and our group landed in the soccer field and we were probably on the ground three seconds, because the 52nd Rangers started jumping out before they touched down. As the 'slick' flight Dave and I were escorting slowed for touchdown in the soccer field, we went past them on the right side between 15-25 feet altitude firing into the jungle edge to our front and right front and north. As we turned to break out to the north after we shot, we called [U.S] advisor for the 52nd Ranger Battalion (he was a Black Panther Five), and told him we had some ammunition we would shoot for him, and he said, "Stand by. We are in hand-to-hand combat." We said "Oh. Okay." Some things are funny now, but it wasn't funny then. So, we flew up to the north four or five miles to kind of get out of the way and stay so that we didn't have mid-air collisions, and after 15 minutes or so he [52nd Ranger Battalion advisor] came back and said "Okay, I've got a target you can shoot now, so he marked it and blew a smoke grenade and we shot at it.

Because we had the additional helicopters, we had enough to lift the entire Ranger Battalion in one lift, so we put them on the ground and the whole battalion on the ground in about 10 minutes. They had enough strength to assault the compound and the fort and take it back. It was a very tough fight, and by the way, there was a quote from the "after action report" by two pilots from the second company in [the flight] line (118th led and the A-501st came second) that said when they [A-501st

Hand were awarded the Distinguished Service Cross. There were five distinguished Service Crosses. There were a number of Silver Stars and Distinguished Flying Crosses awarded. I call that "The Day of Heroes," because, let me tell you, that was a nut-cutting fight. That was my first day in combat. You wanted to know what my first contact with the enemy was—that was it.

Robards: From your experience, how would you evaluate the enemy's fighting ability?

Booth: Very good. On this day they were exceptional. They were disciplined, and they had positioned their weapons in the proper places. They were in a very dedicated assault and we were killing a bunch of them with helicopter gunships and Tac air fire support, but they never backed off until that night.

Robards: Do you remember seeing any action that stood out as being particularly brave?

Booth: Bill Fraker's act on that day. There were lots of brave actions that day. Everybody was doing brave actions. A rational person would say, "I'm not going to do that, because I'm going to get killed." But nobody, not one single person ever declined to do his duty or responsibility.

Robards: What do you remember most about combat?

Booth: The courage of the American soldiers. That runs through two tours. I've observed a lot of American soldiers in combat and different ways, so the one thing that stands out most in my mind is how brave these guys were.

Robards: Describe your living conditions, housing, and food in Vietnam.

Booth: In our case we were not infantrymen, so the first tour, we had a villa; the officers did, right outside of the gate of Tan Son Nhut, a very nice place. We had our officer's mess in there and a bar. We had tables with white Formica on them and there were grease pencils there on top of the bar, and it was common practice at the end of the day to critique the battle and use the grease pencils to draw it out. Everybody could comment on the battle. So they could say, "When you decided to do this, that was wrong, you should have done something else." Then the leader needed to justify what he did in a reasonable way. We didn't have any shouting matches; everybody was critiquing to learn how to do the job better. Our food and our billets [living accommodations] and that kind of thing were great.

The second tour, our troops were spread out. One troop was at Phuoc Vinh—1st Cavalry Headquarters was at Phuoc Vinh. It was build up hugely to accommodate the 1st Cav. Our billets were adequate. We occupied an old French fort, so we fixed those up. For example, we had a 55 gallon drum filled with water sitting on top and the sun heated it during the day. When you got back at night, you could pull a lever and take a shower. The weather kept it very comfortable for us.

Robards: What was your daily routine while in Vietnam?

Booth: On days we were having a battalion assault, we got up about 3am or 3:30am in the morning, because usually the assault was somewhere that was 45 minutes or an hour away. So, if we got up and had breakfast, we could get to the airfield by 4:30 or something like that, and had a chance to preflight the helicopter and get a briefing and all. Then we took off at let's say, 6 o'clock. We would fly to the

location of what we called the stage field and get our last minute briefing and top off the fuel tanks. At first light we would have the assault. The assault would go in and the gunships stayed all day long supporting the ground force. They would finish at say 7:30 or 8:00pm then fly back to Tan Son Nhut where our base was. After they got back, they would go in and fill out an operational report where they'd describe the battle, and what they did. We kept those and drew lessons learned from those. The crew chiefs inspected the helicopters for combat damage and did the post-flight, and reloaded with ammunition. If it had combat damage, they arranged to get it repaired so that it would be ready to go the next morning. So, crew chiefs would get to the mess hall around 9pm or 9:30pm. The mess sergeants usually saved steak sandwiches or something like that for them. At least after I got there they did. The first time they served baloney, I went ballistic and said "you guys want to stay a cook or be an infantryman? If you want to stay a cook, get something fit for these guys to eat." Then we got in a great mess sergeant. Depending on how the schedule was done the next day, the crew chiefs would go through the same thing, and the pilots. We had a system called 1st up, 2nd up, and 3rd up. With 1st up, one platoon filled all the missions; 2nd up probably overflowed into the second platoon, and the other people were what we called 5-minute stand-by. So they would be in operations to the air field and when they got called, they went. Third platoon, we tried to give them a day of rest. Sometimes we were successful and sometimes we were not, depending on how intense the fight was.

Robards: What did you do to relax?

Booth: The first tour, I was just outside of Saigon, so about every two or three weeks I would go downtown, and would be out of communication with my unit. I'd tell them I was going. We didn't have cell phones in those days, you know. So, I'd go down to a bar and have a couple of drinks, beers and just relax. I'd talk to people in the bar. For a while, the French had a social club out on the Saigon River they called the Club Nautique. They did some water skiing out there. You could go out and pay a very reasonable price to rent water skis for an hour or two and go water skiing. That was very popular until some sniper started shooting at them. He was shooting at me one time, so I motioned to the guy that was driving the boat to get behind a large barge on the river. So we pulled in behind him and blocked the sniper. Nobody was ever hit out there that I know of, but it made it a little less fun. There was also a club downtown called the Cercle Sportif. We were permitted to join and you could play tennis out there and they had a swimming pool and a bunch of stuff. People could get in touch with you out there, so sometimes at night I'd go out and play some tennis since the courts were lighted at night. That was about it. It was nice and relaxing, but it [going to a club] was not a daily routine.

Robards: Please tell us about any community involvement you participated in such as irrigation or construction projects,

Booth: In the outskirts of Saigon there was an orphanage, Catholic orphanage. A very wonderful person, a lady, called Madame Ngai ran that orphanage. The kids were 2, 3 or 4 years old, and their families had been killed or who knows what happened to them. So in the down town one, they had about 25 or 30 kids, and they had a farm outside of Saigon about 25 or 30 miles where they raised produce and stuff to feed the kids in the orphanage. They had orphans there too. I don't know exactly how many, but more than down town. Our people adopted that orphanage. We supported it with

Robards: Do you believe that Vietnam veterans encountered discrimination when they returned home from the war?

Booth: Yes

Robards: Have your views about the war changed at all over the years?

Booth: No, I still have great admiration for the American soldier; I'm suspicious of the U.S. Congress and government. They will leave you in a heartbeat if it is politically expedient for them; that's what happened in Vietnam. And that's likely to happen in Afghanistan; we don't know yet, but yes, I do not trust the Politicians.

suspicious and went over and opened the bushes and looked down at the LRRPs and they shot him. It was later determined that he was an innocent civilian. At the time he opened the bushes and looked in there, they didn't know that.

Anyway, none of those were atrocities, and I deplore and despise those guys who did do atrocities. But I will tell you that the commander has to set the policy and the atmosphere and the understanding in all his soldiers that that is not permitted {acts of atrocities}, because if you leave it alone and nobody says anything to the soldiers, and you've got replacements c

turn up anyone, but we do know that they were VC, because there were trenches all the way around the village. That wasn't part of the rice farming, you know.

Robards: Col. Booth, we thank you for your service and dedication to our country and also for participating in this oral history project.

Booth: You are quite welcome.