

C. Paul Barker

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Part 1

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McDevitt: Today is May 16th, 2017 and I am joined here with Paul Barker. He was with the 1st Marine Division in Vietnam. He served from 1969 to 1972. And a pretty fascinating guy. He did jungle [warfare training] in Okinawa, he did a little bit of [i.e., six weeks of Vietnamese] of language training in Quantico and was a [junior infantry] officer in Vietnam. Welcome. Thank you very much for sharing your time with us today. It's a pleasure to have you here, Paul. And if you would, can you give me a kind of a background? Where are you from?

Barker: Originally from New Orleans, raised Catholic, lot of military in the family, and in college became a hippie and decided it was cool to be anti-war, but it was mainly because the hippies had the best-looking girls. And when I was about to graduate I got my draft notice. This is before the lottery was established. Drafting was done by General Hershey, this decrepit old guy from the Spanish American War, I think, who kept saying, "Well I went into a war, and I didn't get killed. I don't know what their objection is," so. He... I actually met him at a State Department dinner when my dad came up to Quantico for something. And next to him was Curtis Tarr, a very tall thin young man who was going to run the lottery. I was right in the middle of the sandwich between these two guys, and General Hershey turned out to be the crabby old guy that everybody portrayed him as in political cartoons. So from there I went to... Let's see, what was the question again?

McDevitt: I was just kind of asking for your background. So, you are from New Orleans. You were born in 1947. What was it like growing up as a kid? Like, what do you remember about the late '50s, early '60s? There was a lot of things going on in the country at that time.

Barker: Race was a huge issue in New Orleans, and the general camps were, it's wrong to be racist and black people deserve justice versus we've got our heritage; if everybody stays in their place what's the problem? You know, we've got it good. If they don't have it good, that's their problem. That hasn't changed today as near as I can see. I have changed quite a bit. I can remember when there was a time when I was afraid to be around black people 'cause they didn't understand them, and I expected violence from them. And if someone has been violent to another party for a couple of three centuries, they are bound to expect violence in return. I am now working on equity issues with my wife. She's retired, and so I support her and getting on school boards and electing the

right officials to city council and in pulling our hair out at the national political scene, getting very frustrated with the pervasiveness of racism. The [United States] Marine Corps did a lot to un-racialize me.

McDevitt: Yeah, there's--we're all treated the same no matter what, you know.

Barker: Yeah.

McDevitt: So, what were you into in high school? Were you into sports? Were you into-- what kind of extracurriculars did you do?

Barker: I was into history and into art, gymnastics. Never particularly athletic, but at gymnastics I excelled because I had a nice tree in my yard with a tree house and a bunch of rope swings. My ideal was to grow up and be Tarzan. So, I couldn't do the yell. I sounded a little falsetto when I think about it now, but I did used to rig up a bunch of rope swings where I could transfer in the air like Tarzan does, and that was fun. I finally got to fly on a real trapeze at a Club Med somewhere in my forties. And I never did make it back to the platform. Every time, I went into the net, but I did get some fancy tricks. The catcher would get me and as soon as he let me go to return [sound of falling into net].

McDevitt: You also said that your--you had a lot of military history in the family can you kind of go in that? Was your father in the military?

Barker: My dad was on the Enterprise, the carrier Enterprise, and he had Marine friends. He was a naval officer, and his job was aligning the machine guns on the fighter planes to hit a buoy that they would park out in the ocean. They would stop the aircraft carrier and set the buoy out and then put the planes all along the side of the deck and--

McDevitt: Zero out the--

Barker: Yeah, zero in the two guns, so the streams would collide at the right distance. And a bunch of his friends were Marine pilots, and one of them was kind enough to give him, my dad, all his jewelry from his uniform for me so that I could save money when I had to get my uniforms outfitted because officers have to pay for all their own stuff. And so this is a vintage World War II eagle, globe, and anchor. And it is different from the modern cause they use wire twisted for the rope on it are and are made in America. Clearly, these are stamped out in Hong Kong somewhere I think. But he was very impressed by Marines and very afraid when I decided to join the Marine Corps, but after I had gotten my draft notice I went shopping and found that the time commitment was the shortest of the four services. I didn't check into the Coast Guard. The Marine Corps had the shortest time commitment--three years--and a year of that was spent in school, so I thought well then I'll only have to survive two years and the Marines of course had the appeal of panache. And at that point I was immortal. I got cured of that later. But I

wasn't really worried--I was worried about getting crippled, not about getting killed. The biggest thing I worried about was moral dilemmas because My Lai had happened. I read everything I could on My Lai, and eventually I met people who had met Lieutenant Calley and talked with them. Went to the My Lai massacre site in '92, talked to some survivors, but they were too young to actually remember anything and now they were like college age. But I thought, "That can't happen in the Marine Corps," you know. [us] Army, yeah, they're all screwed up, they got no discipline, but the Marine Corps is small and tight and disciplined.

McDevitt: Yeah, so what was that like? You said you were kind of anti-war in college, so how did that transition--how was that transition for you? Going from a college campus, probably pretty liberal, you know, I think Kent State had happened by that time, right?

Barker: Yes.

McDevitt: And there was a lot going on, so how was it to go from one side all the way to the other and being in the Marine Corps?

Barker: It was quite an internal tear. I mean it was really difficult for me to explain. I was embarrassed to tell my hippie friends, anti-war friends, who were genuinely anti-war that I had made this decision. And at the same time I had this deep anxiety to try to, I think, initiate myself into manhood because in our culture we don't have a ceremony quite like that. The closest thing I think is a bar mitzvah in Jewish tradition. But if we were tribesman, if we were Native Americans, we would have a ceremony where we let a male know you are no longer a boy, you are now a man and you're--all these responsibilities come with it, and you're part of the tribe. We don't really have that in our culture, and I was looking for ways to initiate myself, and apparently that is a big factor in people deciding to join gangs. And the military seemed like a good way to do that, to be...to have your manhood credentials stamped, it seemed to me you could do it through sports, you could do it through sex as a ladies' man and raconteur, you could do it as a successful businessman and power house and alpha male, or you could do it in the military. So I knew I was heading into art as a profession, and that's what I do now, but to explain--my dad thought that artists were people who did pastel portraits of tourists in the French Quarter and never made a good living and were not really--it was not a man's job. It was for weenies. [Chuckles]. So, I had to be able to prove I wasn't a weeny so I could go be an artist. So, the dilemma was to alienate some of my friends who were generally peaceful people, whereas I had been in a lot of fights as a kid because there was always justice issues, there were always bullies, there were always... And I had a couple of concussions as a result from hitting the side of a bank at one point when I got knocked silly or... And that may be one of the causes for the Parkinson's, but the greater likelihood is Agent Orange. But once I got past that moral dilemma and got it under my belt, I could go back to being a hippie, which really upset my dad. I told him,

“Dad, if you get high and tight haircuts for three years straight as soon as you stop, it goes foomph like this.” I told that to one of the generals and he laughed, but then a retired colonel who we were working with came back after being a civilian for three and four months, and his hair was all grown out. I thought it was kind of funny.

McDevitt: Was there a part of you as an artist that was like, I want to experience war to impact my art? Was there--because you see a lot of different things in combat.

Barker: Ah, good question, good question. Yes, I have done some personal art after doing the murals for the National Museum of the Marine Corps. I had to do so much research for some of these murals that I had this plethora of information with no place to express it, and the exhibits in the museum were very limited in that they could afford six or seven cast figures in a space that should have been filled with—you know, you should have 150 figures for this particular event. They just couldn't afford that. And the information they put out was the kind of thing that you walk through, absorb as much as you can, and move to the next one, while I had reams of data on the defense of Toktong Pass in Korea, on the siege of Hill 881 South near Khé Sanh, of the Invasion of Peleliu. And I wanted to communicate this in some way, so I wound up doing my own personal art, and I've got some pictures I can show the curator. And what I got out of the war that surprised me--I was expecting to see some pretty ugly stuff. That wasn't the preponderance of the experience. The beauty of Vietnam is rarely spoken about, but it is a gorgeous country. It's like Hawaii before the missionaries came in. The people are happy; they're simple. They were desperately poor in '92 when I went back. And the way it affected my art was to find beauty in some of these ugly things. Sunsets, the view of rice paddies from high altitude just like a quilt, carpet, something laid over rumply mountains. There is just, there is just a lot of great aesthetic appeal.

McDevitt: So, when you--you start shopping around, you said. Were there different pitches from the recruiters for the different branches? Do you remember meeting your recruiters?

Barker: Yes. One of the things I loved about my Marine recruiter was, the [US] Navy was trying to sell me on how you could parlay this into a civilian career, you could get into technology, you could do language, you could do--you could even do finance. You could be a reporter, and you wouldn't have to go get your ass blown away in Vietnam. (Laughs) The Marine recruiter says, “I guarantee you Vietnam, and when you come back you'll be a man.” So, he knows the soft spots. So that was the reason I did it. And then to my horror, after our plane left Fairbanks [Alaska] they announce over the PA system, “We've been rerouted. You're going to be on Okinawa for your tour.” There was this roar. You know, half of my classmates were on that plane and we were indignant. So we immediately started filling out requests, and we all said, “Yeah, the Marine Corps is going to consider what we want, right.” [Laughter] And then they put my battalion--I was in 2nd Marine--no wait, 3rd Marine Division at that point. 2nd is on the East Coast.

And they took my battalion and put us on what they called a battalion landing team or a float. Five ships doing landings all throughout the Philippines against indigenous people who were trying to sell us lobsters and beads and trinkets and stuff, and we're trying to tell them, "This is a combat zone, get out of here." And prostitutes. It is amazing that there are prostitutes everywhere the Marines and the Navy show up. But halfway through this float, I got a message while I was being officer of the day in a smelly Quonset hut in Subic Bay, they said, "Pack your bags, you're going to Vietnam in fifteen minutes." And I said, "You mean it came through?" And they said, "Yes, your request came through." And five of us out of this half-a-plane load of officers got orders into Vietnam, and I think part of it was I had had experience commanding a platoon through all these landings, so when I got there I was the only one with that kind of hands-on experience of the five of us. Everybody else got a desk job, and I was the one that got a platoon. So, I felt extremely lucky, and I thought, "Thank you God. Does this mean you have evil plans for me?"

McDevitt: Yes.

Barker: Am I gonna get killed?

McDevitt: Be careful what you wish for, kind of thing.

Barker: Exactly. It might come true.

McDevitt: You did boot camp in Pendleton, is that correct?

Barker: No, I did OCS [Officer Candidate School], which is the officer boot camp in Quantico. And I just went to visit an OCS a couple of months ago when I was at the museum doing some pricing. It's a rather tawdry little place and very small. It makes you realize how small the Marine Corps really is compared to the Army or Navy. But then I had to go through a staging battalion where they give you a lot of shots and last-minute instructions before you went into Vietnam. Once I got to Okinawa and got the orders, I had to fly from the Philippines back to Okinawa, go through a similar kind of thing, and that's where we got our sacred tree suits which is the camouflage--green camo that even the Army Green Berets did not have. They had a tiger striped camo, but once we put on our tree suits we had arrived. Nobody else has this really cool jungle camo. And we got on a plane and flew to Đà Nẵng. It was like a four-hour trip. It was nothing. One of the most fearful times I had was getting off the plane just walking up to the door and looking both ways expecting tracer rounds to be crossing the airport. And, boy, my classmates were so ticked they got these office jobs. One of them came out to the field when my platoon was out in, theoretically, a combat zone in his jeep with his driver saying, "Paul, you don't understand, I can have a choice of steak and lobster every night, I sleep in air conditioning. I command one troop, corporal so-and-so here, and I get a jeep, and I got loads of money. I'm trying to buy guns off the locals, you know, and no

questions asked, you give me an AK [Attack Kalashnikov] and I give you so many dong." And I said, "That sounds horrible, Bob."

McDevitt: Was there ever a time where you were like, well I would much rather be in Bob's shoes than mine?

Barker: Oh God yes, there were several times when I thought, "What I have done?" You know, the times I thought I was dead were the times when I started to think I've got nobody to blame but myself for this stupid idea, but I had one experience that I had--it took me years to explain it to myself that took a lot of fear out of combat. Going up a river with a counterintelligence team who was just out looking for trouble. They were a bunch of very unlikable guys.

McDevitt: Was it search and destroy?

Barker: Yeah, and it was a bunch of Navy guys, and they had all this slick equipment. They had carbine M-16s. They had smoke grenades that looked like a canister of film, and they put out just about as much smoke as the big ones. They had seismic intrusion devices. They had starlight scopes.

McDevitt: Were they SEALs?

Barker: They were Navy--Navy Counter-Intelligence

McDevitt: Okay.

Barker: It was a team of two Vietnamese guys, two Navy guys, and a Navy warrant officer. And they were all gungy-ed up. They had their K-Bars taped upside down on their shoulder straps. They knew how to strike poses. You took a camera out, and the peacock in 'em immediately appeared. And so we were going up a river, and we were in tall grass, and I had alpha squad upfront, and then I was in the middle of the column. And my platoon sergeant was right at the back end of the alpha squad, and we were having to go single file through this deep grass, and shooting started up front. I called to find what was going on, and the platoon sergeant was trying to get back to me, and there was a lot of radio traffic as usually happens when the shooting starts. And the tips of the grass were disappearing from the rounds flying by. And I had the handset like this with the curly cord connecting me to the radio on the back of the radioman, and I'm yelling, "What the heck is going on up there?" And all of sudden a Vietnamese voice comes on the line and says, "Lieutenant Barker," and I thought, who is this? I knew I didn't--I thought maybe it's one of the Navy guys, but I had had Vietnamization language training, and the accent was too strong. And he said, "We're going to kill you. We're going to kill you tonight. You'll be dead tomorrow." And it kept repeating that. It was...If he pressed his key fast enough he cut out everybody else, so everybody in the platoon is listening to this. Back

at the combat operations center, they're listening to this. And this guy is threatening me personally, and when he used my name something happened, and I snapped, and I thought I'm dead. This is way too personal. I mean, my first reaction to a firefight was to jump up and say, "Stop this. I'm just a college art student, you know. I got this outfit on, but I'm not really, and I don't want to kill you, you know. And why would you want to kill me? I'm a nice guy. We might like each other." I overcame that urge pretty readily, but when this happened, I... It's hard to explain, I lifted out of my body and was up in the air.

McDevitt: Were you looking down on yourself--

Barker: Yeah.

McDevitt: --from above? Yeah.

Barker: On the top of my helmet and the reason I knew, it was my body down there was that I had a quote I picked out from the big box where all the helmets were laying in, somebody had written, "The boys who throw stones at the frogs in the pond do so in jest. The frogs however do not die in jest but in earnest." Aristophanes, which I can't pronounce. [The quote is actually from another Greek philosopher, Bion of Borysthenes.] But, I saw that quote, and I saw the radioman being pulled off his feet by the curly cord and I saw this desperate guy who was trying to get it together and first figure out what was going on, and eventually I decided to swing a squad out for an envelopment. I remember thinking how peaceful it feels up here, and it was only fifteen, twenty feet up in the air. And I've heard people report silver chords snaking around in between them and the body. I didn't see any of that, and it's hard-- the experience was kind of timeless. It seemed like I was up there for a while, but it could have been as short as a few seconds in regular time. And I remember thinking, "Okay, he's dead meat. I'm sure glad I'm up here. This is not going to hurt, and I'll be glad to move on," but I sort of felt sorry to have to leave him down there in that dilemma. And then the memory ceases at that point, and the next time it occurs to me is the next morning when I'm waking up. I'm thinking, "Whoa, what the hell was that?" I had never read anything about an out of body experience. And I've talked to psychologists about it and they say, yeah, that's common. It's the sensation of watching from a distance. I had that experience as a thirteen-year-old in a confrontation with my dad where I felt like I was watching the whole thing and not really in control of what I was saying. I was furious; he was furious. I also had it again when--with my first wife when she was pregnant when we spun out on an icy road. We had a long conversation in what had to take less than a second, and both of us can remember either parts of it. So, I had some sense of this part of ourselves, our personality, our memories, which is not permanently connected to the body and the two could separate, and maybe this is a soul. Maybe this is a...I didn't have a name for it, and I had stopped being a practicing Catholic.

McDevitt: Did that ever happen again in combat when you were in country? That was it?

Barker: No.

McDevitt: What happened at that firefight, like what was the result of the firefight?

Barker: The guys in alpha squad went online automatically, and they shot it out for a while, and at least in Vietnam it is very rare to see the enemy. You see the rifle flashes, but there's enough vegetation that often you're just shooting wild. You're just making noise to reassure yourself. They backed off. We closed in and found a harbor site and dug up some pennants and some bags of rice, some bags of AK ammunition wrapped in plastic and, we thought, a grave and the head of the counter-intelligence team who was Mister Gungy walked up there and said, "Get your hands in there. Dig around there until you find that body." And he pushed his guys aside because they were kind of reticent to do it, stuck his fingers down in the loose dirt and dug around like that, and then pulled his hands up and went [sniffing sounds] "It's a latrine." [Laughter] A cheer went up from the Marines, you know. But years later I watched Norman Schwarzkopf being toured around with Dan Rather in Vietnam. They were walking across a field, and he said, "This was all a minefield." As a battalion commander I was in a loach, little-- the army has another name for them: little birds, tiny two-man helicopter. And he said, "I saw one of my lieutenants go down when he stepped on a mine, and I realized I had to get him out of there, and everybody was trapped behind the rice patty berms. So, I had him set the helicopter down. I ran." He said, "The whole time I ran, I was telling myself you're dead. If a bullet doesn't get you a mine is going to get you." But, he got to the lieutenant, threw him over his shoulder in a fireman's carry, and brought him back to the helicopter. And he said, "I watched the whole thing from up in the air." He said, "It was the weirdest experience." When I talked to the psychologists they described that sensation. I know what they are talking about because I had it with my dad, but that was like being emotionally disconnected and sort of watching a movie. It did not involve being up in the air, it did not involve being able to recall real-time what was going on, it didn't involve a new point of view to where I was seeing the tops of helmets. It was a point of view from somewhere up in the air, and it was very different than those other kinds of dissociative experiences, I think....

McDevitt: It's almost like a lucid dream, that that's like--

Barker: Yeah, that's a good way to put it.

McDevitt: --because you can see the entirety of the battlefield. Could you see where you thought the enemy was? You could see where all your guys were. You could see them in motion. So it was like a real...Yeah, that's--

Barker: Nah, I saw a couple of flashes, but it was mainly dust, which was kind of odd. Maybe there was smoke, but AKs have smokeless powder, so I don't know.

McDevitt: So Paul, walk me through, when you're getting ready to go out on... Do you remember your first combat patrol?

Barker: Yeah.

McDevitt: Yeah? How do you go about getting ready for that? Because now as an officer you are going out there, and you are charged with leading Marines to go into battle. You don't know what's going to confront you. What kind of stuff are you bringing with you when you go, like when you're gearing up to go out your first patrol?

Barker: That's a very astute question. Like all the Confederate soldiers who brought bowie knives to the war and quickly after the first twenty-mile march got rid of them and got a pocketknife, I brought so much stuff that it was hilarious in retrospect. And at the time the policy was to have a new lieutenant overlap for one week with the previous lieutenant, which worked out great. I didn't have any particular duties. I was just there to observe. And I got to know my platoon sergeant really well, and I had sense enough having commanded a platoon on Okinawa and on that float to say, "Okay, Sergeant Mack, I know the score. You're in charge of the platoon. I get the grief when something goes wrong or I get the glory when something goes right, but you run the platoon. Just tell me what's right."

McDevitt: Real quick, tell me about Sergeant Mack, real quick. What kind of man was he?

Barker: Incredible guy, he was the old man of the platoon at twenty-five. I was twenty-three. Everybody else was around nineteen or twenty. And he unfortunately had the 1,000-yard stare. It was his second tour, and he was very pragmatic, but every once in a while he'd surprise the hell out of me. We climbed a ridge and then the first patrol was to go up to Hải Vân Pass, which is a couple of a thousand feet about Đà Nẵng. I've got a three-dimensional map to show the curator. And then we had to climb for eight hours to get to the top of a ridge where the NVA [North Vietnamese Army] were sending rockets down and closing the pass by blowing holes in the road or whatever truck they could get lucky with. We get to the top, and it's been defoliated. That's where I'm pretty sure the Parkinson's comes from. Dead trees, big boulders, but not moss, not lichen, not grass, nothing. Just everything defoliated. And it's creepy, and the clouds would come from the north and sweep up over the ridge, and within a few seconds you couldn't see your hand in front of your face. It was just a white, intense white mist. And we're looking over all these dead trees that are like skeleton hands sticking out from between these gigantic boulders. A really weird landscape, and Sergeant Mack says, "This looks like a scene out of Macbeth," "Sergeant Mack, what do you know about Macbeth?" And he said, "Well if you wanted to commit a murder wouldn't you pick a place like this?" And I

said, "Yeah, it looks like Birnam Wood marching on Dunsinane Castle." And he went "Right on, Lieutenant." And I thought, what, who is this guy? [Laughs] He was a surprise in a lot of ways.

McDevitt: So, now going back, what kind of, you said you were bringing way too much stuff for the first patrol. What's your mindset? What are you bringing with you when you go out?

Barker: The mindset was, I kept--having been on enough humps through the boonies. I knew that I should keep the weight down as much as I could, but I also knew from a lot of operations in the Philippines that the more water I could carry that would be the most valuable thing, so I had--my friend Bob had gone through the black market and bought me an Army "Alice" frame pack, so I rigged four canteens on that, and it had a quick release shoulder strap, so I could pop one shoulder, swing it off the other shoulder and get rid of the pack pronto 'cause it had--since it had all the water it had all the weight. Then I had my pistol belt with a couple extra clips. I brought a knife that was too big, I brought the K-Bar, and eventually I went to a survival knife I stole off a helicopter, and that was ideal. It had a saw blade. It was a very cool little knife. And brought too much food. And it's surprising, but I remember reading about Carlos Hathcock, the...

McDevitt: The sniper.

Barker: The sniper, and he would take a thin tin of peanut butter out for the day, and that is all he would eat during the day and of course he lost a lot of weight, but I found that I was not hungry, and I didn't want to carry all that weight, so I was giving away food to the locals.

McDevitt: Yeah.

Barker: I think I carried too much stuff, but I had a whole week to winnow it down before I took over and the previous guy left, and he left me the map with all the grease pencil markings where he pre-plotted fire, that sort of thing.

McDevitt: Yeah, that's nice. A lot of the guys that I've spoken with, it seems like there was no turnover with the people that they were replacing. They would go in, they would fall in on a company or whatever it may be, and the person they were there to replace would just be gone. There was kind of no continuity. And that's one thing that just blows my mind. We do--nowadays, you go over to Afghanistan We have an advance party that will go out there and they'll spend a couple weeks with people, and then everybody falls in, and you usually get a good two weeks with the people that your falling in on before they rotate out, so you can exchange all the information, and you can learn from them.

Barker: Wow.

McDevitt: So, when I think about the way you guys did it, it really kind of blows my mind.

Barker: Exactly, and that's one of the reasons I haven't been able to find a single guy from my experience in the war. Actually, one of them found me at some kind of reunion, but he couldn't remember anything about the time when I was his platoon commander. But I haven't been able to track down Sergeant Mack or even Bob, my officer friend, and I've got their service numbers, their date of birth. Someday, I will hire a private detective.

McDevitt: Maybe we can help you with that here. You know, we have a reference department here that... I'll put you in touch with somebody after this, and we'll see if maybe we can track them down, help you track them down.

Barker: Fantastic, fantastic. One of the things that I had to develop was an office, a traveling office. There is so much paperwork involved, and there are so many things to remember. They give you all these plasticized little cards to remember for call for fire, when to use the pre-plotted fire, when to call... I was theoretically supposed to be able to call artillery myself, and I did that on one occasion. Blew away my own hill, and in the morning the troops said, "Lieutenant, why do we need the Viet Kong if we got you? You know, you could get them to pay us to blow ourselves away." Like shades of the *Catch 22* novel. So, I eventually came up with an office which I will demonstrate to somebody later for those who are interested, but it amounted to a notebook with some extra Vietnamese money in it, the names of each of the troopers on a page, all the plasticized cards, a couple of invitations to the NVA to surrender, and managed to keep everything miniature, and it worked great as an office. I wasn't expecting how technical a lieutenant's job is. And I was waiting for my chance to jump up with my Mameluke sword, you know, waving it the air yelling, "Follow me, men." Thank God that never happened, you know. But that night on the defoliated ridge--it was actually two nights--was another of one of the scariest times I've been in because we were in absolute blindness and really cold because the wind came with the damp clouds moving through. We didn't have jackets, so we put our arms inside the flak jackets and pulled the helmet down to try and keep some heat in your head and sat on a freezing cold rock between two other freezing cold rocks and just shook for--until the dawn came up. And there were a couple of RPGs during the night. One of them hit the rock I was leaning against and must have missed the tip. Didn't explode, I heard it go, ba-dink (sound of metal bouncing off something), you know, metallic thing, and then went down into the valley, and it seemed like it took forever and then we heard this boom way down there, couldn't see it.

McDevitt: Touch on your language training for me a little bit here. You went to--was it at Quantico you did your language training?

Barker: Yes.

McDevitt: It was a month long, is that correct?

Barker: Yes.

McDevitt: Was it strictly like orders, like “get on the ground now”? Or was it kind of more practical? Walk me through a little bit of that training.

Barker: It was conversational, so that you could theoretically get along on the street, and then it had a separate little handbook of military terms that you were expected to memorize. Interlocking fields of grazing fire, and when you try that in Vietnamese it takes fifteen minutes to get the word out.

McDevitt: And how likely are the South Vietnamese... Did you work with the South Vietnamese quite a bit?

Barker: A little bit. A little bit.

McDevitt: What were your impressions?

Barker: They were a pathetic bunch, and I remember hearing about how bad they were. Referred to as the surrender monkeys by my troops. And they did--when we were trying to sneak up that particular ridge, they were in a parallel column, and they “accidentally” fired off their guns every once in a while. It “accidentally” happened four or five times coming up the hill. A way of saying look out, here we come, so the NVA could back off and nobody would get surprised. And I had great respect for the NVA. They were a well-disciplined army, and all they had was tennis shoes and cork pith helmets. They didn't even have--no flak jackets, they didn't even have a steel helmet. What looked like a helmet weighed nothing. It wouldn't stop a twig, you know. South Vietnamese were clearly in it for the money because they knew their South Vietnamese government was a puppet government. It was not popularly elected. It was all a case of the State Department screwing around with Vietnamese politics and trying to create an army. And you may have some experience with faux armies like that yourself, in that if the people are not personally driven to be soldiers, it is very difficult to get them to stick it out when the going gets hairy, you know. And my language skills helped me quite a bit in 1992, what was that, twenty years later when I went back. I could get along on the street, but at the time I was hoping... I kept asking for a Kit Carson scout. That was a program whereby North Vietnamese could surrender, and they would pick up one of these kinds of folders that says, "Surrender to the government of South Vietnam, and you will get some rewards." If you flip it over--

McDevitt: “Return your guns, sling your weapon across your back. Muzzle down, and raise your hands, and you will be treated fairly.”

Barker: And on the back it tells you what you get: bags of rice, some land, and a pair of boots. And, my guy Henri. That was his French name, or his American name was Henri. I don't

know what his Vietnamese name was. Well almost undoubtedly it started with Nguyen, properly pronounced as Win. I remember trying to describe the Marine Corps to Henri and how it operates, and he explained to me that Vietnamese is a put-together language. The word for Marines in the South Vietnamese Army was, "Mattram yanto yow pho, Minhnäm, Viet Nam", which translates as, "soldiers that come from the sea to fight on the land for the Republic of South Vietnam." So, it's like German. It's a composite language, so you can see these incredibly long words, but they only have one syllable per word and hence there is a melody. You can say nhà thờ and you're talking about a cathedral; you say nhà thổ [slightly different pronunciation], you're talking about a whorehouse. So singing is essential, and the guy who taught us at Quantico was from Kansas City and he was a good ole boy, and he didn't even know that this is a tonal language, so he didn't teach us to sing the tunes, so we don't know what we're saying when we get out of language school. But it allowed me to live in on-base housing with Bob and his wife. And in return for getting their dog's broken leg fixed, I got free housing. And when I got to Vietnam in '92 I remember really concentrating on trying to get the song right, and I have since learned that is inherited from Chinese. Chinese apparently is a very tonal language, and so when I try it in a Vietnamese restaurant, I still don't have the melodies right, and the people just stare at me, and they call another waiter over and say, (whispered) "I think he's trying to talk Vietnamese." [Chuckles]. And then they go get somebody out of the kitchen and say, "Maybe he'll do it again." It's embarrassing.

McDevitt: So, what was it like leading men, leading Marines into battle?

Barker: That was a scary proposition because I had so many classmates who were gung-ho and thank God they never got a platoon. They were immature, egocentric, used to being pampered boys. They were usually the son of somebody famous. We had a commandant's son who later became a commandant. We had guys who were track stars and football stars, and they were in it for the heroism. And after my experience on Okinawa commanding a platoon, the weight of responsibility was--I think of it now as really irresponsible of me to think that I could do that, but at the same time I got rave reviews from the troops and from my commanding officers, and so I must have been doing something right. But, I never felt comfortable with being responsible for, when I had a lot of attachments, it would jump from thirty-five to fifty-five guys, and so I never slept in the field, and I was always sleep deprived.

McDevitt: That's the sign of a good officer in my book.

Barker: Yeah.

McDevitt: Yeah. Did you... So as a lieutenant, who are you answering to in the chain? So kind of give me the structure that you are working within.

Barker: Okay, I'm very autonomous once I'm out in the field. I decide where I am going to take my platoon, and the whole idea was, you are going to occupy this area. Stay at a different place every night, which was easy because it needed to be a hill, and we could pick the hills that had already been occupied and had all the foxholes already dug. We just take the rusty cans out of it, and we were set for the night. And sometimes, we would set in on a hill while we sent out a scouting party to set-up the next hill, and as soon as it turned dark we slipped away and moved to the other hill like recon does sometimes.

McDevitt: Sure.

Barker: And when I was in the rear I was answerable to a company commander, and he would rotate his company CP [command post], about six guys, and just hang on with a platoon for a week or so and then fly over to another platoon. So stayed in touch with us all. And I had a really good captain and his name was Short, and he was short, and he had a good sense of humor, he was very relaxed, and he said, "I'm not here to run your platoon. I'm just here because I need a place to be protected and eat C-rats and get to know my officers." So, I was answerable immediately to him. I did get in trouble a couple of times with higher-ups because they were unhappy with something I was doing, and one time came out to the field to explain it to me in no uncertain terms. I called in a medevac for a guy who wasn't very badly hurt, but I found out it was because my own guys were trying to kill him. And he was my radioman. He was a very fast-talking jive-ass black guy, you know, and some of my white troopers were snipping at him. And he was kind of an idiot for standing up against the horizon, against the night sky--

McDevitt: Silhouette himself.

Barker: Silhouetting, yeah. And we warned him about it a couple of times. Finally someone took a potshot at him, hit his radio, and the fragments shattered and got him in the cheek. And I called in a medevac to get him out of my platoon, and I had to explain that to my colonel because the medevac guys were really pissed.

McDevitt: Talk to me about [a deliberate attempt to kill a soldier by a fellow soldier]. Did you experience any of that?

Barker: Sometimes, I thought I was better off in the field than in the rear. In the field, I had three platoons around--three squads around me, or usually if we were split up I had one squad around me, and I felt pretty safe, 'cause we had amazing firepower and amazing communications with all the radios that the NVA did not have. But when I got to the rear I had had--apparently had a meal at the mess hall with the captain who was the head of Headquarters and Service Company, and he was losing his executive officer, so he went to Captain Short and said, "Can I have Barker?" And I was not pleased with that. When they pulled me out of field, it was my birthday, and I thought, "Somebody's trying

to send me a message here." Was it because I blew away my hill? That was a long time back, you know. Was it because I was wearing hippie love beads? They were actually Mardi Gras beads my sister had sent on Mardi Gras. And my platoon had a tradition of wearing a hand grenade ring with two cotter pins made into a peace sign. So we thought that was pretty radical. We were being peaceniks out there in combat. And when the new colonel came out to meet everybody, he was flying from poz to poz out in the boonies, and he saw that, and he said, "What's with the love beads and the peace sign? Are we hippies here?" And Captain Williams, the head of Headquarters and Service Company heard that story and thought it was hilarious, and he said, "That's the guy I want for my XO [executive officer]. And Short let me go, and they just suddenly pulled me out, and I didn't know what to say to Sergeant Mack. I realized I'm never gonna see these guys again. And you can't hug. You're Marines. At least in that point in history, you'd have to be shot up to do a hug. Although we did have this expression, "rock 'em 'til they die". I don't know if that survived into your era. Sometimes when a guy gut-shot, and his intestines are snaking out of him, you know he's not gonna--even if he gets to the rear he's not gonna have a life anymore. You just--the expression, you hold onto them and rock 'em 'til they die. And that was--that was as close as you could come to male bonding, I think.

McDevitt: Well, can we go into that a little bit, talking about the realities of war, the things that you see out there? That expression, rock 'em 'til they die. You--the civilian world, they don't--we in the west we're really sheltered from those kinds of things. They're seen every day. You go into Sub-Saharan Africa, you go into all sorts of places in the Middle East, still in Southeast Asia, people see terrible things every day, and we're very insulated in the West. We don't see that stuff. Few people have those kinds of experiences. What was your first experience dealing with that, and can you talk about the impact that it had on you as a man?

Barker: Well, it inspired me to become an EMT [Emergency medical technician] after the war when I was living in a little town near Kankakee. It surprised me how much blood there is in a person. I think it's seven liters is like an average. And it surprised me that it separates in pools, and it gets yellow because of all the cholesterol or something floats to the top. I just, I was able to put in a couple of IVs, usually inside the elbow, on guys who are gonna go into shock from the loss of blood. And we just had saltwater and sugar water. And we didn't--we kind of intermixed them. It was just to bulk up the fluids in their bodies so they wouldn't go into shock from collapse.

McDevitt: Did you guys have morphine with you or anything like that?

Barker: We did have morphine syrettes that you could stick somebody in the thigh, and that helped a lot. And I never got wounded, so the worst that ever happened to me was leeches and jungle rot, you know. But the impression I got was so strong, seeing people

disassembled was that when I came back, and I was at Camp Pendleton, I'd be walking a street in Los Angeles or San Clemente or something like that, and looking at these buildings, and like you say people in America are kind of sheltered in that they don't have these life-or-death realities staring them in the face. They don't experience how quickly people can be killed and how utterly fragile we are, you know. When I think of the average Marine infantryman, he's all offense but very little defense. I mean, even a flak jacket and Kevlar are not gonna stop some things. And I had the--I started thinking of people as bags of blood waiting just for some surprise thing to pop them open, and they're gonna bleed out. And watching people walk down the street, I would think how trusting these people are that nobody's gonna pop up on a rooftop and start shooting at them. They're not watching for alleys, places they can dive behind. They're not keeping aware of where they can get into defilade, and they're so naive.

McDevitt: Yeah.

Barker: You know, and just watching people drive and thinking, here are these several tons in a vehicle hurtling at amazing speeds, and the only thing separates them is a strip of yellow paint, because they're all in agreement, they're all cooperating. They don't realize how fragile civilization is, how it can come apart just like that. Yeah, it affected me a lot in terms of--I couldn't look at a foldout in *Playboy* magazine without realizing, "It'd be so easy to kill her. It'd be so easy for her to die. She got a piece of shrapnel in her carotid; they're be nothing they could do." You know, and she's got great legs, but if a bullet ever hit her in her femoral artery--it was weird, you know. It was like people were bags of meat after that.

McDevitt: And when you--did you ever have to do, like body bag duty or anything like that?

Barker: Fortunately, no.

McDevitt: Yeah, 'cause that's what made me think of, is like, you know, talking about their bags of blood and everything, it kind of reinforces the same—

Barker: Oh, yeah, 'cause of the bags, right.

McDevitt: And it's--but it is. Life is very fragile, and it's very precious. Were you able--do you think the Marine Corps helped you kind of translate that and share it with other people, the beauty and fragility of life through your art? What kind of art do you do?

Barker: I do what's called photorealism, where you try to convince people that are looking at a picture. And I do the backdrops for museums and sometimes zoos and aquariums, where they're trying to recreate an environment. And the history thing, it could involve pyrotechnics and that sort of thing in the pictures. I can show you on my website. In a zoo it's usually trying to recreate a jungle where you've got foreground plants, but the

background is all painted. And it's the misty rainforest, or it's the Arctic or the African savannah, that sort of thing. I try to use the same photorealism when I'm doing art like what we see on the walls here. In this case it's fighter planes going through columns of smoke. And in my case it's usually some kind of light effect: sunset, early morning, lot of smoke. It's fun to use the scenic stuff, 'cause I just love throwing colored smoke. It's better than Mardi Gras, you know. Plus you've got a helicopter full of ammunition and water, you know. [Laughter] But I did find that I was able to approach people in a completely different way than when I'd grown up, I just thought of people as discreet entities who would remain that way, and then I realized they could be disassembled in a heartbeat. And it wouldn't have to be by enemy fire. It could be a gasoline fire in a car crash. Could be liquid oxygen in a harrow, when farmers are trying to--liquid nitrogen, which is super cold stuff, and farmers sometimes--when I was an EMT, farmers would open a stopcock by mistake and freeze their faces, freeze their hands.

McDevitt: [Whispering] That's terrible.

Barker: Yeah, ugly freeze burn, you know. And it just, it made me appreciate that people are just people. They're awfully fragile. No matter how beautiful they are, no matter how talented, no matter how educated. We're all vulnerable.

McDevitt: So I'm going kind of out of order here. You started bringing up liquid nitrogen, and it made me think of Fairbanks. What were you doing up in Fairbanks, Alaska? How did that happen?

Barker: I didn't spend any time. It was just being in the airport. We got off the plane, they refueled it, we got back on the plane. But it was the middle of the night, and I would have thought you'd fly straight across to Japan, which is what people do now. You can do it from O'Hare. Back then apparently whatever we were in had to--could only make it as far as Fairbanks, and from there it could get to Okinawa. And we all went to someplace to drink when we got off the plane. Everybody's in their khakis. And the alphas, I think it was, open-collar khakis and a piss-cutter, and went to a bar and got totally sloshed. And then somebody from the airline came up and said, "Your flight is being changed, and it's time for you to get back on the plane. You need to make an announcement to get all your troops." I said, "What do you mean make an announcement? Run around?" He said, "No, just take this telephone, and when I punch these buttons you'll be on the airport PA system." [Laughs] I got on the airport PA system and flubbed the number of the flight and got all screwed up and finally said, "Fuck it. Marines, get on the airplane, now." And I caught so much flak for that. I guess I was slurring my words. [Laughter] That was the beginning and end of my theatrical career.

McDevitt: So then you fly to Okinawa. How long were you on Okinawa for?

Barker: About six months. I have a timeline that I'll leave with you guys with the actual dates.

McDevitt: And that's where you're doing--are you doing jungle warfare there?

Barker: Yes.

McDevitt: Getting up to speed.

Barker: So I was in 3rd Marine Division, at that point, fox company, 2nd Battalion, 2-4, fourth Marines. And we went up to a place called the Northern Training Area where they had built a firebase by flattening a mountaintop, putting sandbag rings, but they didn't put any artillery in them because that was needed for the war. But they had little shelves built off the side of the mountain and tents set up, and then a lot of benches inside one of these rings of sandbags, which was our classroom. And we had guides from Okinawa who would talk about what was out in the jungle, what to be careful of. There were tiny, little green vipers called habu. And they said, "No snake is aggressive, right? You've all heard that." This guy took a cage full of snakes, and dumped it on the ground, and all the snakes started wandering around trying to get back in the cage. And he had a pickup stick with a little thing on the end trying to put them back in the cage. And he says, "Not the habu. The habu is aggressive." And it doesn't matter where he is. If he's pissed about you being in his territory, he'll come after you. And these two little green snakes popped their heads up like cobras and looked at him, and then looked at this bunch of benches full of guys and headed for us at high speeds. Everybody was up on the benches standing up going, "Jesus Christ!" And they went under the benches and doubled back again. So he said, "Don't mess with them. Sometimes they are referred to as two-steppers. Once they hit you, you can make two steps, and then you're down." And he said, "The other thing is, watch out for the giant centipedes, 'cause they'll really hurt." So I'm waiting in ambush on an exercise where the aggressors are coming down a mountain stream. And I'm in hiding, everybody else is in hiding. We've got an L-shaped ambush setup. And a habu comes down the tree. And he's right at face-level, and I'm thinking, "Can they strike like that or do they have to rear back or what?" I back up a little bit, I'm thinking, "I can't make any noise; it will blow this whole exercise." And the habu comes to the bottom of the tree and starts slowly heading for me like he was taunting me. So I said, "Fuck this." I flipped the selector on full automatic. And it was blanks, but it's like eighteen inches of flame, you know, so [sound of automatic fire] blew me back across like--that will take his ass. And he came right back. He rolled over and held his mouth open for a while like he was faking his death. And then he totally recovered, and he came back at me. So I beatty feet through the bushes to get to the trail going up the hillside, and he followed me up that. When he got to the trail, he came out of the weeds, and he looked both ways, and he saw me. He started heading up the--so I ran. And I kept running, and I dodged a little thinking he'll never track me. And he didn't fortunately, but I caught hell for blowing the exercise.

McDevitt: Were these some pretty grizzled veterans, some pretty salty dogs that you're out there with on Okinawa?

Barker: Yeah.

McDevitt: Yeah.

Barker: They had all had at least one tour, and they had really valuable advice, particularly about ambushes, and that's what we spent most of our time on. We did learn some things about how to disconnect a load from a CH-53 so that if we didn't have a landing team from the helicopter unit on the ground, we could receive supplies and know which pin to pull out, so you have to get things right. And I stood in back of one of the 53s when it was taking off, and because we were high up they really had to really put some wind out to get off the ground, and he turned his rotor like this, and he went to take off, and I'm standing directly behind him, and I know he had a side mirror because the next time I saw the pilot he said, "I have never enjoyed seeing somebody fly through the air backwards like that. I went down the mountainside into the bush, boom-boom-boom, you know.

McDevitt: I saw that happen, too. A couple of guys really good, picked up off their feet.

Barker: It's amazing how much wind those things can put out.

McDevitt: Yeah. Those 53s are--those are workhorses. Did you guys use those a lot? Did you get inserted a lot of times, or was it strictly patrols out from the base that you were staying? Or did you do helo[copter] inserts?

Barker: We did truck. We never did anything on foot like walk out, even though there was a mountain of line--low-ridge actually of hills that surrounded the back of the camp. We could have walked down the slope and been out in the areas we're supposed to be occupying. But sometimes we were parked at a bridge protecting it. A couple of big tanks of gasoline, that was a storage place protecting that. Other times they would truck us up to Hải Vân Pass. Or they'd truck us out in the boonies and drop us off. And the rest of the time it was a CH-46 [transport helicopter], which became the love of our lives because it meant everything--food, resupply, air conditioning. As soon as you got to high altitude, it was like, "God, it's cool up here. Why couldn't we fight up here?" And I think the rest of the time it was--once in a while it was a Huey where it was just me and the platoon sergeant who had to go to the rear for something or I had to--we just parked the platoon in a defensive position somewhere, and I had to be the petty officer and go to different sites in a Huey.

McDevitt: And that was after you had been--after Short had let you go, right? Was that when you were the pay...When did that happen in your--

Barker: I think the pay officer had to be when I was with at H&S [Headquarters & Service] Company.

McDevitt: H&S [Headquarters & Service]

Barker: Yeah, that's--I'm glad you pointed that out. The H&S, you asked about fraggings earlier. H&S became the catchall company because everybody else was needed out in the field. So we had all the heavy weapons, and we could farm out some of the heavy weapons: the rocket launchers, bazookas, and heavy machine guns. But we had 81mm mortars. And 60s were fine because they had the small baseplate, the tube was pretty light, and three men could easily move the 60. But an 81, it took two men to carry the baseplate, and one guy with the tube was overloaded. So they were not portable. They didn't have the range to get over that line of mountains behind the rear, and so they didn't have any use out in the field. So they used it as a slop catcher, as a slop basin for all the malcontents and drug-addicted guys and fellows who were waiting for an administrative discharge or waiting for their court date. All the bad apples went into this one 81 Mortar platoon. And I was theoretically responsible as the executive officer for each of these units. And they had fragged the previous three officers that were trying to control them. They were really a dangerous bunch of guys. And I was surprised because I thought only the Army has people as un-squared-away as this. But I had one totally stoned trooper walk past me with the front of his jungle blouse open with chocolate ice cream all running down the front, his boots were unlaced, he was shuffling along, and totally stoned and no hat, and he decided to salute without a hat, and I blew it. I tried to chew him up one side down the other, and I realized he's blasted--

McDevitt: It's beyond...You think it was opium? Was there a lot of opium in the area?

Barker: Yeah, I think it was stuff they would get from the skivvy girls, the washer women who would come in, collect intelligence, and sell stuff like cokes.

McDevitt: Yeah, tell me a little bit about the locals. You had quite a bit of experiences. You talked about the Kit Carson scout?

Barker: Yes.

McDevitt: So you explained the Kit Carson scout program a little bit. Your guide, what was his name, how helpful was he?

Barker: I never learned his Vietnamese name.

McDevitt: Did you guys have a nickname for him?

Barker: Ah, no we should have because he was really a problem in a lot of ways. He referred to himself as Henri spelled with an "I", and I've got some pictures of him somewhere. He

was really young. He had to be eighteen or nineteen. And he really missed his dad, and he hadn't had any mail for two years, living with the NVA out in the jungle. And he was sick all the time and always malnourished or undernourished. And so he quit, he said, mainly for the food. He said, "I wanted to live long enough to see my father again." He told me he was shocked at the Marine Corps. He said it's a dictatorship. I said, "Yes, it is. What is the North Vietnamese army?" He said, "Oh, it's a democracy?" How do you run a democratic military organization?" He says we have the political cadre who are equally powerful to the military cadre. The military cadre figure out what to do, the political cadre gets everybody on board and votes on it, and if we all agree we set a plan, but because we don't have communications--this is more articulate than he actually was--all we got is bugles or whistles. Once the plan is enacted, we just do the plan no matter what. Sometimes we get slaughtered and sometimes we win, but we are very disciplined. And he told me that the first time he crossed a Marine base, a position that the Marines had evacuated, he was horrified. He said, "I've been told that Marines have to eat their firstborn in order to join the Marine Corps." And we found all these little bottles with babies' faces on them." It was Gerber baby food that the Marines were augmenting their C-rations with.

McDevitt: [Chuckling] We should do that today.

Barker: [Chuckling] Yes and spread the rumor around. And he says, "We found these little jars of pureed baby. And so we gave them a funeral, and we put them in a grave, and we put flowers on them." I was laughing my ass off and thinking this can't be true. You're pulling my leg.

McDevitt: People still believe that. I heard the same thing in Afghanistan. I heard people—

Barker: Really?

McDevitt: Yeah, there was one that, that they thought we had to kill our mothers to be in the Marine Corps.

Barker: God.

McDevitt: There's all sorts of weird stuff about Marines all over the world.

Barker: Wow.

McDevitt: Yeah.

Barker: That's horrifying.

McDevitt: [Whispering to himself] What was it? Was it we kill our mothers, or was it--I can't remember exactly, but yeah, that's--so he flipped. And he was from North Vietnam?

Barker: He was from just outside of Hanoi, and when I went back in '92, I went to his neighborhood and just asked around if there were any guys who were Chiêu Hồi. That's their term for surrender. It means "open arms". If there was anybody in the neighborhood who had joined the US Marines. And I was told if there were they would keep it secret because they lost the war. When I was there in '92 the cyclo drivers driving the Pedi cabs, the lowest level of society, the least well-paying job--they spoke perfect English, they had been to command and staff college at Fort Benning, Georgia, and they had American friends they hadn't talked to in twenty years, 'cause there was no mail connection between the US. Clinton had not yet lifted the embargo against Vietnam. So it was this desperately poor country. And all these men driving the cyclos were these articulate, educated men. And periodically, the police would just impound their cyclo just to screw with them, and there was one guy who was gay and extremely effeminate, and the police really picked on him, so we adopted him. There were sixteen of us in this group—

McDevitt: Nice.

Barker: --and used him, and we said, "Just show up here every morning, and there will be somebody who needs a ride somewhere." So we managed to get a lot of money into his pocket. And the police were pissed. They had handlers who were following us around. And they'd be grumbling to themselves. "What are they doing with this gay guy, they're Marines. Geez, what are they thinking, you know?"

McDevitt: How about the Montagnards?

Barker: Never dealt with them.

McDevitt: No.

Barker: Never got far enough back into the--to get close enough to the Laotian border.

McDevitt: So you were in Đà Nẵng . What is Đà Nẵng proper like? What's the countryside surrounding it? I know you were talking about how beautiful Vietnam is. So Đà Nẵng is right on the coast, right? It's right near the coast and then it kind of goes in towards the central highlands. So can you walk me, like, what were your first impressions when you got to Đà Nẵng ?

Barker: If this were not entirely auditory experience for future people I would pull out this plastic relief map I've got in the bag here. And from it, you can see there is the East China Sea running along the coast of Vietnam, and there's a big island called Monkey Mountain with a couple of little bridges connecting it to the city of Đà Nẵng . And with that Monkey Mountain, the big curve in the beach it creates a harbor. So Đà Nẵng is the south edge of the harbor. And it's got a couple of rivers that empty into the harbor

there. At the time it was mostly French colonial architecture. I don't know what it's like today. Fairly beat-up streets, a lot of people in petty cabs, couple of vehicles every so often. During the war, it was surrounded by a mile-wide ring of trash, most of which was olive drab, cans, barbed wire, wood, leaky sandbags. And then outside of that line of trash was this huge airbase built by the Americans with a north/south set of runways and like, Quonset huts covered with sandbags. And that was the main way in and out of the northern part of Vietnam. Then there was open sandy land all around it so that sometimes you're fighting among sand dunes with sea oats, and it looked--a lot of vegetation and the low mud hills with the brush on them was very much like Los Angeles. Very much like the hills on the opposite sides of the Pacific. But then behind that were these verdant valleys that were mostly rice paddies, and then you'd see these clusters of giant bamboo, and that was the village. The bamboo was the fence around the village. The road was like a little bit wider than the standard rice paddy dike, and there'd be two or three roads out of the village, and inside were all these huts. Once in a while there'd be a French Catholic cathedral, which looked so out of place in these little thatched roof houses, but they were made out of cement, and they did a lot with cement and clay, tile, bricks. They were like hollow bricks made of the same stuff as a flowerpot. And there were always rain stains, mold, and mildew running down the buildings, and a lot of wrought iron, and it reminded me a little of New Orleans 'cause New Orleans is Caribbean architecture, and the French quarter is actually Spanish architecture from when Spain owned Louisiana. But this was like that, and it felt very at-home for me. When I went back in '92, the trash ring was gone, and in the thickest spot, just to one side of the airport, was now a park that was free to anybody with, had swan boats made of plywood that you would pedal with your feet. And the trash was all gone. When I went to find my firebase all the buildings were gone, all the poles were down. There wasn't a scrap of metal, there was no indication of--and I've got pictures of this--what had once been several thousand guys in a small village. The roads had all been eroded out. There were cattle roaming across the site. There were Buddhist graves on the ridge where shoulders had been chopped for the building that was my offices, the H&S X.O., and the ridge where the 81 mortars platoon had been. Everything had been recycled. The only two segments, pieces of the war left was the tail of a B-52 sticking out of a lake in Hanoi and the Huey with the rotors taken off propped up on the top of a pool hall somewhere in one of the burbs around Saigon. And everything else had been recycled. We had one other Marine in this group who had been on Hill 55, which was south of where I was operating, and we finally found it. We had maps from the time that the Library of Congress had run off black and white copies for us. And we found Hill 55. There was a paved road leading up to it, which was different. But it had been planted in neat rows of pine trees all perfectly aligned. And in between the pine trees were trenches, four feet deep, about a foot wide, and they had strip-mined this entire hill, took every piece of metal they could find out of it. All the aluminum they melted down, they made it into spoons. The brass they made into other things.

McDevitt: Well I know there's been--yeah, there's been a lot of efforts recently to try to de-mine Vietnam. I mean, there's still a lot of UXO [unexploded ordnance] around in there. We've put a decent amount of money in there. While you were--so, in '72 were there--would you patrol the same areas often? What was your--your kind of schedule? What was, like, an average week for you?

Barker: Okay, it would be usually a week to two weeks in one area. Sometimes, it would be a week or two weeks in one spot, like a bridge on Highway 1 going north towards the mountain pass or a railroad bridge someplace else. Other times it would be, "Here's your area of operation. If you go outside it make sure you let the combat operations center know so that you don't get yourself shot by friendlies. And here's some pre-plotted targets that you can adjust from if you need artillery." And that was, generally, west in those rice paddy valleys. Sometimes, we were in the sand dunes. If we were on the coast there would be little villages built in the sand along Highway 1. Highway 1 is one village from the south end of Vietnam up to Hanoi. And that's because it's a road. It was the only road up until the Japanese came in recently and started building other roads. And so, you could dry your crops by laying them out on this hardtop and letting people drive around them and them broom them all together. You could get on your cyclo or your bicycle or your scooter and go places. So there's buildings all along both sides or thrown-together kind of huts. We--if we spent two weeks in an area, usually there was some reason for it. Either there was something going on, some big operation, and they just needed us to stay out of the way. One time it was that they couldn't get us water for a while. We wound up drinking stream water, and it was cold, and it was moving, and we thought, "This would be okay." Well, we all got internal parasites. Corpsman went around checking everybody's stool saying, "If you got little white things crawling around, you know, after you go take a dump, let me know." So they got us some horse pills from a veterinarian, and we cut them in half with a K-Bar, crunch 'em up—they were hard--and swallow them, and the corpsman would make everybody fall into a formation and make sure everybody took this stuff. And after a week it killed them all off, but in the meantime we needed a lot of food, so they dropped us a net full of food, and we had big cans of bacon and eggs and stuff like that. I didn't know the mess hall had all this stuff hidden away, otherwise there would have been a raid. So they drop this big net full, so I immediately asked the village chief who was down--we were on a hilltop--down in the valley there if he would come up and see if he was interested in some of this food, and he said, "Oh, God, we would love the bacon and stuff." I was working through a woman who just happened to have some English. So I said, "Okay, here's the deal: no snipers for one week. No snipers for us for one week, you get everything that's left." And there was a lot left. And the deal worked. [Chuckles] It was great, you know.

McDevitt: Did you guys have to take, like, doxycycline or whatever for malaria? What did you guys take for malaria?

Barker: No, I don't think they were worried about it. We probably got shots on Okinawa. And they may have gone around in the rear giving shots to people, but it would have been something that just didn't stick in my memory 'cause it would have been pretty quick.

McDevitt: And talk to me about Agent Orange. What was your experience with Agent Orange?

Barker: When we got to the top of that first ridge, I was still not a platoon commander. I was still in the overlap position. And so I had the time to look around and observe the fact that this was a scary place 'cause everything was dead. And I realized, I thought, "Could they have sprayed a chemical or something? How would they have killed this--where's the fire? What made all this die?" And it started making me not want to touch the wet rocks all around me. When the clouds came over everything would get damp, but that was pointless 'cause you couldn't avoid it.

McDevitt: Yeah, you gotta sleep up there, you gotta—

Barker: Yeah. So my neurologist said, "That's the most likely cause of your Parkinson's," and the symptoms started to show up right after I got back to the States. Urinary issues, some difficulties falling asleep, and some lucid dreaming, which is a really strange thing. But I didn't know until this tremor started that these things were all related. It's a complicated-enough disease that it's not really like malaria. It's like a set of symptoms that can be caused by a set of, you know, chemical exposure, head injury, emotional traumas--

McDevitt: Possibly genetic, I mean—

Barker: Yeah, I wouldn't be surprised. I've met guys with Parkinson's who have no idea why they got it. They don't fit any of it, so it's a weird disease.

McDevitt: Modern technology like in modern medicine is getting so much better every day. It's pretty incredible, the rate that we're figuring things out.

Barker: Yes. So, didn't you have chemical issues with what they were exposing you to?

McDevitt: You know, I'd say--I don't know if you guys did the same thing, but the burn pits. So when we'd burn all of our trash, we'd go to these compounds, and there's a--what do you do with all your garbage? You can't, when you set up a position for four months or whatever it is, and you got all these guys, and you'd set up these burn pits and throw all the trash in there, and it's kind of like, you'd add some whatever it may be, gasoline or whatever. But I think that's pretty toxic stuff, and I breathed in that a few times. I think about that a little bit. And the dust, the dust in Afghanistan was so nasty. It was like walking on the moon. You step into it, and it's like puddles, it's like waves through the dust. It's really—

Barker: Wow.

McDevitt: Super fine sand, and you'd be in sandstorms, and you'd be breathing it in. I remember I had a pretty legitimate mustache while I was out there. I was looking like Tom Selleck walking around out there, and my NCO didn't care for it too much, if I may say so. But I remember coming back after I'd been out in the field for a while and coming back to home base. And we didn't have showers, so I was just washing it with baby wipes, and I remember it took like four baby wipes before my mustache was clean, and I was like, "I need to get rid of this. I need to get rid of this thing."

Barker: [Chuckling] Endless dust, yeah. You can look at it as a dust mask, as a strainer.

McDevitt: A little filter. One thing you talked about a little bit was--and it's been in a couple of books. I've read a couple of the Tim O'Brien books, and I read *Matterhorn* not too long ago.

Barker: Yeah.

McDevitt: So, talk to me about race relations in the Marine Corps during Vietnam. Because there was a lot of tension with that and with all the things that were happening back at home.

Barker: Yeah, and I thought it was just Army stuff. I couldn't imagine that the Marines were actually having race problems, and I kept saying you know, "In the field, we only have one color Marine, and it's Marine green."

McDevitt: Dark green.

Barker: Dark green, yeah. And I was developing a new attitude towards black men at least. I was still afraid of black women. [Laughs] Probably because as a kid in New Orleans everybody had maids. My maid was about 500 pounds and a lot meaner than Aunt Jemima, for instance. But she loved us, you know, and it's part of--made that weird contrast in race relations in the South. It's intimate and it's hostile at the same time. Really weird. We had racial problems mostly in the 81 Mortar platoon. There were just two factions. Well, there was three. There were the Hispanic guys; there were the white guys, and they were usually southerners; and the black guys, and they were usually northern inner-city kids. And we had to pay them. We couldn't find a way not to pay them every other Friday or whatever the thing was. And on payday, we could expect all hell to break loose up on the ridge where the 81 Mortar hooches were. So the platoon, I mean the company commander, Captain Williams and me and the first sergeant, got side-arms and little, we called them Prick-1s, tiny little radios, and we'd run patrols like figure eights through the hooches on Friday nights or on payday nights to try to break up the fights, and sooner or later, there'd be sound of gunfire, and you'd have to rush to the sound of the guns because somebody was pissed about losing a hand at cards or

something. It was always a gambling situation. And you'd burst into the hooch, and everybody would jump to attention. And there'd be smoke hanging in the air, and I'd say, "All right, who's shooting?" And it'd be dead silent, so I'd start doing individual things, and then the company commander and the first sergeant would arrive. We never were able to indict anybody because it was pointless to do that, but it really made me aware that the racial tensions back in the States were just as real here. And what impressed me was how the black guys stood their ground, because there was not a custom to resisting black guys as a kid in New Orleans, 'cause that was dangerous. You'd get yourself lynched if you did that. I never saw a lynching, I never heard of it, but I was horrified to discover what they were.

McDevitt: But the thought was there, I mean, the reality of it was there.

Barker: Right, and now you're dealing with a black guy who's got a flak jacket, a helmet, and an M-16. And he's not gonna put up with as much shit as a poor sharecropper. And I just, I really despaired because I came back with the view that, man, the social ills that infect America really do filter into the military. And it wasn't walled off by this noble attitude that we were all Marines. It was a leaky wall. The attitude towards women was so different than it is today. I did my teaching demonstration when we were learning how to be good teachers at basic school on women Marines, and when I think about it now it was shockingly sexist, you know. And it had lots of jokes, and I had a *Playboy* pinup with a woman marine's uniform on, and we were discussing this subject by disassembling as you would a machine gun, you know, and stripping down to underwear, and [sighs], I asked a warrant officer when I was back in '06 working on the murals, I went to basic school, and instead of a class of officers going through, it was a class of warrant officers, and I stopped one of them, and he said, "In your day the issue was black/white. In our day the issue is male/female. We have women Marine officer candidates in the bachelor officers' quarters. It's two women in a room sharing a bathroom with two other women in a room. And then it's two men sharing a bathroom with two other men." I said, "Wow, that's really different." He said, "It takes some getting used to." And with all the scandals that have been going on in the Marine Corps, now, it makes me proud that they're dealing with it directly. You know, I mean, they've just come out with a commercial featuring a woman Marine in combat, and I'm glad to see that. But I've got to say, women in combat, the first time I heard the thought, it was like, "This is like sending kids into combat. That's wrong." You know? I've since met some women Marines now who I would happily send into combat rather than me.

McDevitt: Yeah it's a--there's always something. There's always a new challenge to be overcome, and I do like--I think the Marine Corps addresses things pretty well. What were your experiences? 'Cause the uniform code of military justice had just come out during the Vietnam War. You said you guys never really convicted anybody, you never busted anybody for the incidents that happened with the 81mm or anything like that. Did you

have guys who needed to be punished? What kind of non-judicial punishments did you levy on marines?

Barker: We didn't have that experience in OCS. Everybody was--that's a ten-week screening program, and it's no different than regular boot camp. And I remember being impressed with how successful it was on the psychological aspect between exhaustion and sleeplessness. You really got broken down. And our platoon sergeant took care of all the discipline. The worst thing that happened to me was trying to get away with not shaving one morning, and he walked out, "Candidate! Did you not shave this morning? Go get your razor!" So I had to stand in front of the platoon and dry shave with the razor. It wasn't too bad, but I looked at my platoon, and half of them had tears in their eyes, and I thought, they have really screwed with our minds. You know, they have really broken us down. When it's so sad that somebody has to dry shave you're in tears, you're a basket case. I never heard of non-judicial justice within my platoons except when they tried to shoot the radioman. We had a rather large perimeter 'cause all three squads were together. And he's standing up on the skyline talking on his radio, and he's on the bullshit freak, which is the lowest and the highest numbers, and he's saying, "Yeah, baby." I can't imitate the guy. He could talk so fast, and you could understand every word he said, and all of a sudden a shot rings out. Nobody knows where it comes from, but it fractures off his helicopter, and he drops. And me and the platoon sergeant are trying to figure out what to do, and everybody's standing there all thinking it's a sniper. So we had them put out probably 10,000 dollars' worth of fire, of taxpayer dollars, hosing down everything in front of him so Sergeant Mack and I could run up, grab him by the armpits and drag him into the hole. And the corpsman's looking over him with a red lens flashlight, and he says, "Your cheek? That's it? That's all you got?" He says, "Yeah, and I got an upset stomach." And then Sergeant Mack says, "We gotta medevac him," and I said, "If I call in a medevac for a walking wounded who doesn't have a profuse amount of blood somewhere, my ass is grass." And sure enough I got into a lot of trouble for it.

McDevitt: And you said they came all the way out to your position to talk to you about it, or was that something different?

Barker: Actually the way that worked out was, I got chewed out a bit by the new battalion commander, and it was at the same time that he saw the love beads and the peace sign, so it was a bad day all around. But when I got into the rear I caught hell first from Captain Short, and he said, "You just can't do stuff like that," and I said, "Well, between you and me I didn't want the guy to get killed. We had to get him out of the platoon, and that night seemed as good as any other night." We couldn't be trying to protect him all the time. There was apparently some kind of loose organization of black guys, which I never was able to come up with a name or an organizational structure or whatever, but they used to get together socially, and the white guys would feel uncomfortable with it.

And they had their secret handshake and one of the reasons the black man, the radio man and I got in trouble was he taught me the handshake, so I would walk up to a black trooper and say, "Where you at, bro?" Boom, boom, boom. And they thought I was mocking them. I quit doing that pretty quick. Can't you make me an honorary black guy? They didn't think that was funny, at all.

McDevitt: So you did a full 365 in Vietnam, yeah? Was it 365 days that you were out there?

Barker: No, I got pulled back early because 1st Marine Division was a bargaining chip with, ooh, Hanoi. The deal was, Nixon had just come in, and he had a secret deal to end the war, which was all bullshit. And he was undermining Johnson's efforts to bring the war to an end by contacting extra outside-of-normal diplomatic circles. He had a woman agent contacting Hanoi saying, "Hold on, you can still win the war. Don't cooperate with--I want to be the one who solves the Vietnam War, so don't cooperate with Johnson." And that stunned me when I learned that. His deal was, we'll pull out the 1st Marine Division if you guys will pull back to the DMZ [demilitarized zone] and stay on the Laotian side of the border with the Ho Chi Minh Trail. And so a couple of months early, Captain Williams came to me and said, "We're gonna have to make up a loading plan. We're shipping everything back to Pendleton." I said, "When?" He said, "It could be a month, a month and a half." And he said, "I got one ticket open on a plane to Sydney, Australia if you want to go for R&R." I said, "What do I need R&R for? I'm flying a desk. I've got two clerk typists to command. We have a formation every morning." And he said, "Now or never." So I took the ticket, spent a week in Sydney, and it was fabulous, but when I came back it was real intense figuring out how to get everything loaded on pallets and who was gonna go on what planeload. And I had had embarkation training on Okinawa, so I had loaded this LST [landing ship tank] for the float and been responsible for how the load goes into the ship in what order so that it comes out in the right order when they lower the big door in the front. And they said, "You figure out how to get H&S back. We've got so many trucks, we got so many jeeps, we've got so much fuel, we got all this cooking equipment." And I said, "What are we doing about the hooches?" They said, "We're leaving them." I said, "Great, this could be a village, you know. Tin roofs are way better than thatch roofs. This is great for the civilians." But it turns out in '92 that they just took everything down and reutilized it all. So I wound up short--I'll have to confirm on that timeline exactly how much it was, but we flew back, and when we got back to Camp Pendleton Captain Williams said, "You can't be XO anymore. You're one of the most junior lieutenants in the unit, and this is the senior lieutenant's job. We're back in the real world. We've got to go back to the table of organization. So what do you want for a job? And I said, "Anything but the 81-mortar platoon." [Laughs] And he said, "I haven't got anybody else. You're it. You got the 81. I said, "Oh, geez, what am I gonna do now?" But they had a gunnery sergeant who they loved, Sergeant Diaz, who was a very maternal sort of guy, and he loved his guys, and they loved him back, and they never fragged him, so we quit trying to put platoon

commander in charge of the 81 mortar platoon, and Sergeant Diaz took care of them. And slowly they got their court dates, they got dismissed from the military, they went into drug rehab or whatever, and we started replacing them with new guys. So I thought up these competitions, and I got 81 mortar units from up and down the west coast to come to Pendleton, and we would shoot on ranges and test each other for time, and I could get--my guys could get five guns set up in five minutes with, what do they call, the fire control place with big plotting boards and the maps slipped under the plastic. And they could get the first rounds onto the target, which was in a rusty old jeep or tank or something out there. And it was a lot of fun, and we made up awards for ourselves. And it was so much fun that Captain Williams finally came to me after about six months and said, "I know where there's an opening in a recon unit just up the road at Camp Onofre. 1st Recon Company." And I said, "I'm there. What's the job?" He said, "S2." I said, "How are you gonna do intelligence when you're in California? There's no enemy. Protestors? What are we gonna use for an enemy?" He said, "You'll wind up being like an S3. You'll be thinking up training things to do." and that was true.

McDevitt: And how much time did you have left on your contract when you came back?

Barker: I think about six months. Yeah.

McDevitt: When I read a lot of the books about Vietnam I kind of walk away from them, kind of how I feel about Afghanistan, to tell you the truth, with kind of a pit in my stomach, kind of an empty feeling. You're talking about the politics a little bit and what was going on. How hard was life transitioning back into the real world? So you've got six months left on your contract. When you get out, do you start immediately thinking about the big picture of what's been going on in Vietnam, or have you ever really taken the time to kind of reflect and read and think about the big picture kind of thing and what your involvement was and what our involvement was in the Vietnam War?

Barker: I have read a lot of history, and I started with Stanley Karnow's book, which was a little unnecessarily big and thick. And I spent some time talking to Karl Marlantes when he was signing books for *Matterhorn*. And he recommended some other reading for me. But it sobered my appreciation of politics to a point where I got to be pretty cynical, and then Trump came along and completely blew any perceptions out of the water of--cynical is not the right word. Sometimes, hopeless seems like the right word. But I did read as much as I could on what was going on diplomatically behind the scenes. And I had a roommate in college who is now a Chinese politics professor at the University of Virginia at Charlottesville. And he was very pro-Vietnamese during the war, and I didn't understand why. He was a language expert. He taught himself Serbo-Croatian just for fun, and he never learned to speak it 'cause he couldn't find anybody who could speak it in Fort Worth, you know. So he speaks, reads, and writes in Chinese, in Mandarin, in Cantonese and in Vietnamese. And he writes books about the politics of it. I've tried to

read a couple of them, and they are just so dense I'm falling asleep after the second paragraph. What could that mean, geez. But it's been read into politburo and Beijing as an informative piece of literature about politics, and Hanoi and their politburo. And he's got friends in both places. When I went back in '92, by the time we got to Hanoi I had six or seven books from Brantly the roommate that I had to go find the minister of such-and-such and give him the book and say, "This is from Brantly." "Oh, wait a minute, I've got a book for Brantly." you know. He was sympathetic enough that he gave me the Vietnamese point of view, and when I read about Ho Chi Minh I came away impressed. Here's a guy who was very determined. And yes, he was a communist, but in his own way he had a really disciplined and honor about what he did. Very Zen-like, you know.

McDevitt: I kinda look at Ho Chi Minh, I think he is in some ways more of a nationalist than a communist. He appealed to the West first before he went to China. It seems like--he helped us in WWI, he was fighting on the side of the Allies. He was actually a truck driver for Clifton Cates, the Marine who won the Medal of Honor at Belleau Wood.

Barker: No. Really?

McDevitt: We had a gentleman here—

Barker: Cates stayed in the Marine Corps after he got his medal?

McDevitt: I believe so. I can't remember. Yeah, we had a talk here not too long ago with, his last name is Nelson, but he wrote a book called *I Will Hold*, and that was one of the strange facts. Ho Chi Minh was driving trucks for the Allies in France at the time, yeah.

Barker: Wow.

McDevitt: But I kinda looked at him as more of a nationalist, and then he died, and he became this martyred figurehead over there. But what did—

Barker: Did that really answer your question, or did I get sidetracked?

McDevitt: You know, I'm trying to think of what exactly my question was.

Barker: Something about the way it affected my thinking about politics.

McDevitt: Well, yeah, just kind of--'cause it seems like America in a lot of ways, and the military, there's definitely some morale problems after Vietnam, I think. But it seems like America became jaded with politics right around that time.

Barker: Yeah, yeah.

McDevitt: A huge part of the population. And so many military members came home and got really raw treatment when they came home. Did you experience anything like that?

Barker: I didn't. I wasn't treated badly because as soon as I got out of the Marine Corps--if it was gonna happen, it should have happened when I was stationed at Pendleton living off base in a civilian existence and living with a girlfriend I had met just before going overseas. But as soon as I got out, we moved to Canada to British Columbia where I got a teaching certificate and a job as an elementary school teacher, and I was pretty unscrewed-up by the war I think by most standards, except when the boys in my class would bring plastic guns to class, and I'd wind up doing a diatribe that I'm sure they were like, "What set him off?" You know, [Chuckling] and even the parents would say, "Mr. Barker, what is this about the plastic guns that you just go berserk?" And my friends in Canada from college were guys who left to avoid the draft. And they kept saying, "You got it totally backwards. You come here first, then you don't have to go over there. We don't need to hear what you experienced over there. That's what we were trying to avoid. What were you dumb?" And I guess I think the abuse of the troops was true, it's just that it's so horrifying that it's become like an urban legend and grown beyond what actually happened, but I do think the country was--is still in shock. I think that Vietnam was a turning point, but it's also on the tail end of three assassinations in a row. And so it was like suddenly we hit puberty as a nation or something, and everything was different, and we had to start looking at the world in a much more grownup way.

McDevitt: And in a lot of ways, the Civil Rights Era is when we really became a nation, because the things that were in the constitution were not made for all of the population until that time. So in a lot of ways, I think you can kind of look and say the country is about seventy years old, and I think we've come a long way in those seventy years, but it's a—

Barker: Yeah, that's a good way to look at it. I like that.

McDevitt: But, yeah, and I was able to talk with Karl Marlantes for a little while, too, and he's a pretty--he's a good guy; that's a good book. But what do you think when you look at the conflicts, everything that's going on nowadays? Well, hold on, before we get into that, that kind of stuff, is there any one particular thing that you witnessed in the Marine Corps that you were involved in that kind of typifies your service? Is there one moment or--that you're like, that's my time in the Marine Corps. That was it?

Barker: Yeah, it would have to be on that same defoliated ridge on the first night where we left a squad at the crest of the hill, right at sunset we managed to get to this spot after eight hours of hands-and-knees climbing. And one of the troops looked out at the ocean and said, "Lieutenant, you see that little gray smudge on the horizon? I bet that's Los Angeles." We were high--it was 3,300 feet, and when we left them there, the word was no smoking, no talking after dark unless you whisper, no flashlights, above all no

cigarettes, and no heating up your C-rations. Eat cold, you know, it's gonna be total blackness, and then I moved on with the next platoon, the next squad, and the third squad I had Sergeant Mack--no, I had the guy who was still the platoon leader, but me and Sergeant Mack were in the middle. And about midnight, we heard, boom, and thought Oh, boy what is this. Crawled over to the radio. All I could see was the little lit-up numbers on the radio. Couldn't see the radio, couldn't see anything, it was so black, and listened to this drama unfold. Three guys had found a Chinese claymore. They took the cover off of it and took the C-4 out, bunched it into a ball, and they were gonna light it and heat up their C-rations. But they were down in amongst some rocks, so they figured nobody would see them. And apparently, they forgot to take out the blasting cap. And boom, one of them was immediately disassembled. And we carried his body down the next day. It took four guys 'cause it was such a steep, rocky slope. And they lost his head on the way down, bounced out of the poncho lining that we had him snapped up in. The other two guys were bleeding out fast, and so we called for a medevac. As soon as the big CH-46 gets into the clouds he says, "I'm sorry guys, I can't come in and save your guy, I've got two Cobras spinning around up above in opposite directions, and I've got my bird with my whole crew, and like I got sixty feet of reach. And if I just touch one of those rocks down there, I'm down." And he says, "I know people who have died on this ridge. And I'm not gonna--I can't rescue your guy, I'm sorry." So everybody is thoroughly bummed thinking these guys are gonna bleed to death before morning. And then we get a call from a guy who says--I can't remember his name, he was Chicken Hawk or something. He was an artillery observer for the Army in a Loach [Light Observation & Artillery Control Helicopter] by himself, and he watched the big birds try and go down into the clouds, and he said, "I think I can get your guy if you've got some flashlights or something you can signal me." He came down and said, "Now let's do this by sound." He says, "Okay, it's sounds like you're on an azimuth of such-and-such, and he says, "Okay, so I'm flying on a back azimuth, real slow." And finally he said, I think I must be right on top of you, and they said, "It sounds so loud you've got to be right here," so he hit his headlights, and he was ten feet from the nearest rock. And he sidled up to the rock, and they used red flashlights to see what they were doing. They loaded the one guy—one of the guys had died from bleeding out--they loaded the one guy who was left, packed him in the little compartment behind the pilot, and the guy went straight up like that, and we could hear him [whooshing sound]) The sound was diminishing fast, and he said, "I'm out of the clouds." [Pause] It still chokes me up when I think about it. He said, "I'm out of the clouds. I can see the moon, I can see the harbor, I can see the [USS] Repose"—it was the hospital ship—and he said, "I'll have him on the deck in fifteen minutes." And we're in a combat zone, and we can hear cheering coming from the end of the ridge through the dark. And they were--eventually we were able to get a helicopter to get one of the bodies out. The other body, we didn't have it together fast enough. It was the teamwork, it was the willingness, and it was an Army officer. I badmouthed the Army from day one. And I never found out who the guy was. And I've talked to helicopter reunion places and guys

who said, "Oh, yeah, we can find out who that was." I can give them the date, I can give them the time of night, I can tell them exactly what the coordinates were, and I haven't been able to find that guy. So if you guys can help with that--what a hero. That to me was really, it was an uplifting moment because it was like a movie. It was such dramatic heroism. And that guy was in the same position, if his rotors had touched a rock, he'd been down and crumpled up inside the wreck, you know.

McDevitt: Wow.

Barker: Yeah, I've got a painting of that, and I finally got to do one ten or fifteen years ago of what I envisioned it happening. And I can locate the spot with Google Earth, but they don't drive cars around up there, so everything is kind of distorted and splayed out. But that ridge is still, to this day, it is brown. There's nothing green growing there.

McDevitt: So did you use the GI Bill when you got out? So real quick, what was the reaction of your parents when you got home?

Barker: My dad I think was confused. I don't think he knew what to do, 'cause he never expected me to join the Marines, and then he must have been terribly afraid. I was just thinking about that this morning, and he must have been terribly afraid I was gonna get killed, and he knew a lot of marines who did get killed in WWII when he was in the Pacific on the aircraft carrier. My mom was one of those martyrs who a good Catholic woman who just prayed and said novenas and burned candles to saint somebody, and she sent me a scapula to wear on my dog tags. And the one who I think was the most demonstrative was my older sister. She said, "I was so mad at you for doing that. That was so stupid, you could have been killed. And you used to climb trees and get way up in the top of these trees when you were just a little kid, and I'd think, 'How stupid is he? He's gonna fall and kill himself.'" She's a good alerter. You know, but she was very affectionate in the way that she did it, and my family was not prone to shows of emotion. My mom just said, "I'm just glad you're here. You didn't do anything you shouldn't do, did you?" [Laughs] Well, there was Sydney, but I didn't tell here about that. So, well I think it just threw my father for a loop because this was not the guy he thought he was raising.

McDevitt: And did you have any brothers? I didn't ask.

Barker: No, I was the Catholic American prince, the only boy with three girls.

McDevitt: So you get home, you do a little bit of S2, you set up the operations. When you get your EAS [End of Active Service] paperwork, you get your DD214, how long do you stay in the Pendleton area before you take off? Do you go home for a while before you head up to British Columbia?

Barker: Yes, I went home and had like a week to connect with high school friends and relatives. It's a very large family on my mom's side. And that was nice. I could bask in the glory of being a veteran. And I had the credentials that I was looking for of being an artist that if somebody said, "Artist?" I could say, "Marines, combat, officer, Vietnam." [Exploding sound, chuckling] Big thunderclap, and they would go, "Okay." So I was glad to do that, but I was still a young silly at that time. People would say, "How was war?" and I would say, "Oh, it was fun. Burn hooches, shoot babies. It was so much fun," [laughing] and they would be horrified. And it was cruel, and it was silly of me of say those kinds of things, but I really did feel that I was not screwed up. It was only after years of PTSD symptoms and realizing that it's not normal to check into a motel when you're going off on a mural job somewhere and have to open the door real quietly and kick the bathroom door open and then pull the curtain aside in the shower, because the last thing they're gonna be expecting is for me to be expecting that they're there. And I'm thinking, why would somebody want to attack a random stranger in a motel? And I knew it was crazy when I was doing, but it became normal. I felt better after that was going on. And I used to not lock the doors because if they were gonna come I wanted them to burst in. I wanted to see what I was up against. I wasn't up against anything except my imagination, you know.

McDevitt: I meant to ask you this. I hate to keep backtracking. I asked about your patrol areas, and then I asked about what kind of work schedule that you were on. Were there certain areas or like villages that were just like, oh, we gotta go back there again. Were there certain enemy hotspots? Yeah, was there anything like that where you just, like, you knew there were sympathizers or—

Barker: Yeah, there was an area directly west of Đà Nẵng in the valley there, there were villages like Trúc Đường and Song Mai, and there's another one in there. If they had a Catholic church or a Buddhist temple they were generally considered relatively safe. Then there was the Tuy Loan River along the bottom edge of the map, and on the other side of that we refer to as Injun Territory. And there were dozens of villages on the map there, but they all had "destroyed" in parenthesis underneath their names. And I went through one of those destroyed villages, and I kept checking my compass and shooting an azimuth at that mountain and looking on the map at that mountain. No sign of the village whatever. And that's probably because it was burned to the ground, and it apparently had been made a free fire zone earlier in the war. And every time we crossed into that, we got into trouble. And that's where the counterintelligence team wanted to go. And they did have good intelligence in that we did find a spot. But it might have been five or six guys, and I've got a platoon at that point of about fifty-five guys specially with artillery observers so I wouldn't kill us again, and if it was Trúc Đường or one of the other small villages, I got to a point where I knew the village chief's name and I had been taught enough by Henri to squat down and try and get my knees under my armpits, which is very hard to do, especially in jungle boots. And he would squat down next to

me side by side, and we would play with the dirt. And I would make small talk in Vietnamese, and we'd both look out this way, and every once in a while he would put some dirt in his mouth to taste it. So I learned how to do that, and that was checking the PH for a farmer to see whether this was good soil or not. It was a way of saying you're just passing time like one farmer to another. It was so weird. And he would put his hand on my knee, and the troops would all go, "What, is he gay? You're such an old guy." And I would have to point out to them the South Vietnamese troops used to hold hands with each other all the time walking down the road if they were buds, and they soon recovered from that. South of the Tuy Loan River was a danger area. And there were certain areas where we expected to get hit. We knew that there was an NVA presence on top of 1192, but they stayed away I think just because the visibility made it impossible to--you couldn't even move around much less find a target. When they were shooting RPGs, it was just because they had extra RPGs [rocket-propelled grenade].

McDevitt: Spray and pray, you know.

Barker: [Laughing] Yeah, right. That's a new one for me. I like that. Spray and pray.

McDevitt: Spray and pray, yeah.

Barker: It sounds like a late-night TV commercial.

McDevitt: And what kind of numbers--when you would be engaged, what kind of numbers were you going up against? Was it just like small teams of five guys like you were saying, or did you ever come across large forces?

Barker: In order to engage a big NVA unit, it would have been back in the mountains towards Laos, and we could see the peaks from Laos from Đà Nẵng . And so it wasn't that far away. Five, six miles. It's the narrowest point of Vietnam, right in the middle. That would have taken an operation. I think they would have packed a bunch of helicopters full of troops and landed us in some safe area and had us spread out to go after them. But as long as they stayed back there, I think the Marine Corps, the brass was content to let them stay back there as long as they don't come bothering us on this side of the border. The most troops I ever ran up across might have been six or seven. Usually, we'd find bloody bandages, sometimes blood trails. And I don't think I ever saw a dead enemy. We'd have to make conclusions about how many we were shooting at us by, "What did you see? I saw six spots firing." Or you find a brass in the grass, you know, and you could make a guess. And we would exaggerate the numbers. And when they'd get to the rear somebody at the combat operations center would exaggerate that numbers again. 'Guess how many we killed today in this war of attrition. Boy, doesn't that make you feel good?' The next day those undead would come back at you.

McDevitt: And then was Henri like monitoring radio traffic to try to get intel on that stuff? Did he go out on the patrols with you all the time?

Barker: I never sent him out on an ambush, and that's because he asked not to do that. An ambush seemed cowardly to him, and frankly, it seems a bit cowardly to me. But I sat in on a few ambushes, and I'd gotten really good advice from the jungle warfare training. Among the things they told us was camo up as much as you can. Stick leaves in your collar. Just turn yourself into a bush so that you can get as close as you can to the streambed or the trail or the roadway or the bridge or whatever is gonna be your fire zone, your kill zone. And he said, and if you are letting them walk past you so that you can get them all into the kill zone, don't make eye contact with them because they will sense it. They will know immediately, somebody's looking at me. And they'll look you right in the eyes, and that jig is up. And I've since tried that at red lights, stop signs, several times where I just look at the person next to me, and sooner or later they go--it's some kind of ray, like superman. But they're such sitting ducks, there'd be a second and a half of extreme violence and this stroboscopic vision at night from all the flashes of these people writhing in pain, and then dead silence, and then you'd check for--you'd kick the weapons away from them, and then you check for any kind of paperwork. And you'd find a guy's wallet with pictures of his wife and daughter. You know, and sometimes you--you look at their face and think this is somebody I could have known. I had a math teacher that looked like this. It is so weird. And you know, I don't know if you've read that book *On Killing*.

McDevitt: By Lieutenant Colonel Grossman? Yes.

Barker: Yes, excellent. Really gets to the heart of the matter thou shalt not kill, especially when directed by Richard Nixon to do so.

[Laughter]

McDevitt: That's a great caveat. That's a great caveat. Did you ever get caught in an ambush? Did you guys ever face that?

Barker: We think it was an ambush--we thought it was an ambush at the time--that my guys came out of pretty much intact. I can't remember if somebody--were any serious wounds. But it could have also been stumbling upon somebody who wasn't ready but had enough time to fire the first shots. But it was a close-in thing, so we called it an ambush and I've read over that little office booklet I've got sort of like a day-timer thing that I made up. I've read over daily reports, and I've got one that covers three or four days, and it's got the position numbers, the coordinates, the time of day, the date, and just simple things like five NVA fired a few rounds and then boogied. Or guys in black t-shirts ran away, didn't fire any shots, we fired after them. And I don't remember any of

that stuff. And I often wondered how much I've just purposely let go, because there's a lot of shooting in those things that I just don't remember.

McDevitt: Did you come to a point, was there a time--you talked about the out of body experience a little bit, but was there a time where you just come to a point where, if my number is time to punch, if it's time to punch my number it's time to punch my number? There's nothing I can do about it, you just gotta keep—

Barker: Yeah, I went in with the assumption that the more--the better you work out, the stronger you are. The more coordinated, the more knowledgeable, the more professional, the more you're squared away, the braver you are, the more resolve you have, the better. And I came away thinking, what a craps shoot. This is total luck, and trying to organize combat, one of the things I love about Marine doctrine is what an Army general told me when I was painting a mural at Cantigny out west at the First Division Museum. This guy said he was the first-- he was a general--sorry, a one star general. I think he said he was the first commander of the Delta Force but that I was not supposed to mention that to anybody. You know it spooks a lot to say, "I can't tell you that or I'd have to kill you." That kind of thing. He might have been pulling my leg, but he said he had taken all of the Marine Corps senior officer training as an Army guy. And he said the Marines have one philosophy. Hey diddle diddle, right up the middle. And he said, it's that simple solution to problems, go at it full bore, and that's how they're dealing with the women in the Marine Corps issue. I think they just--do the obvious when all else fails. And I appreciate that about the Marine Corps.

McDevitt: Me too.

Barker: And I came out thinking that it is chaos. I can make an elaborate plan where you guys are gonna do a right envelopment, and you guys are gonna do a left envelopment, and I'll tell them to call off the artillery at the last minute when our own guys are getting fragmentation, and then you rush in from either side, and one side will wear little red bandanas, and the other--you know. There's just, hit them with all you got as far away as you can hit them.

McDevitt: Get them to put their heads down, and you move up, get closer.

Barker: If you've got fire superiority. I never understood in school what that meant until experiencing it. Yeah, if you can't stick your head around the tree to fire back, you're sunk because they're moving up on you. So the first thing you do is be as aggressive and unload everything you got.

McDevitt: Yeah. Well, that seems like a pretty Marine Corps place to end the interview. Is--let's go on, so your art. I didn't know you had a mural at Cantigny. You went to school, you went in Canada, so they don't honor the GI Bill up there, obviously. Did you--

Barker: They did.

McDevitt: They did!

Barker: To my utter surprise. Simon Fraser University, they honored it. The GI Bill was willing to pay, and I don't know if that was a window of opportunity that later closed.

McDevitt: Yeah, or maybe I'm wrong. I may be mistaken on that. I didn't think that they did, so—

Barker: One of the reasons I picked a teaching certificate was because I enjoyed the teaching part of being an officer. "Cause when you're not in combat, you got nothing for your troops to do, you go into the classroom mode, right. So I really enjoyed being a teacher and interpreting a complex subject in such a way that Marines could understand it. That led me to be a really good with great reason for it.

[Laughter]

Barker: Sorry. It was the idea of compressing a complex subject that got me turned on to teaching. And it had to be paid for by the GI Bill 'cause I didn't have any money. I hadn't been saving much while I was being an officer, and we didn't get paid much, anyway. I tried to sell all of my uniforms back to the used uniform shop at Quantico, and they were already obsolete. They said, "No, we don't wear that anymore. Now we got the new gabardine whatever," so I've still got all my uniforms, and I would have to find a young teenager to be able to fit them, you know.

McDevitt: Were you married at the time? Were you already married?

Barker: No, I got married after going up to Canada. I got my teaching certificate, my then wife-- she wasn't my wife yet. She was getting a psych degree. So we came back to her hometown in California and got married, went back so she could finish her last two years and I could make money teaching, and it was a kick. I really enjoyed being a teacher. Eventually, I moved to the Chicago area, and I tried teaching in cabinet making and building pull-barns and all sorts of things out in the countryside and eventually, hit on doing residential murals as an adjunct to being a cabinet maker, 'cause we were doing high end cabinets for rich people on the north shore and trucking them up and assembling them in their kitchens and living rooms and entertainment units and that sort of thing. Started doing murals on the side 'cause I had an art degree from college, and it took off like a rocket. Then it turned out the Milwaukee County Zoo needed murals for an aviary, and I said, "I think I can do that." And I went to Lincoln Park Zoo to look at their aviary, and lo and behold there's a guy painting murals there. His name was Dave Rock, and fabulous artist, and he spent a couple hours explaining his process and regretted it for the rest of his life [laughs] because I think I became his chief competition. And I took his methodologies and improved them in the sense that I found

ways to do the same sort of stuff but much faster than how he did it, and that was from cabinet making. My mentor there said, "Any process is better than no process. Come up with a plan and stick to it." So I found out using sponges and big spray guns and little airbrushes and regular brushes and your thumb, you could create these effects that people will walk up and say, "God, it looks like you could walk right into it." And one zoo director told me--I painted a photo op for him, this was in Madison, and he was a former Green Beret, and so we got along very well. And he said, "I want a photo op of a jungle with a sunset in the background, light coming through the trees so people will stand there and get their picture taken." And he said, "Damn, that thing is so realistic, somebody's gonna walk into that and break their nose, and I'm gonna call you." And I said, "Great. Public relations value for a broken nose it's priceless. I would love to do that." So eventually that got to things like the Marine Corps, and I did their Phase One, which was the history from WWII through Vietnam, and that required a lot of months of trips back and forth. And in one room is 120 feet of circular mural with a helicopter that you walk off, and you're on Hill 881 South. And I got to interview--there were 400 survivors from this siege, two companies on a promontory surrounded by the NVA for seven months getting barraged. And I got to talk to a lot of the guys who were holding Toktong Pass and—

McDevitt: How was that? Did you find some sort of catharsis with talking with them?

Barker: Yes. It was great because the designers didn't understand that for these guys, the veterans--the survivors who were gonna come back the day after the opening and walk through this exhibit of their home for seven months, if it wasn't exactly right they're gonna feel offended 'cause this is the most important thing in their lives. And I said to the designer, "If you got famous and they decided to do a museum exhibit about you, and they wanted to do your boyhood bedroom, and they just did a bedroom from the period without any attention to what it really was like, couldn't care less about what it really looked like, wouldn't you be hurt? Wouldn't you be offended?" These guys will have the surrounding hillsides around Hill 881 memorized, burned into their memories, and they'll know which North Vietnamese unit was where, what kind of weapons they had, how many seconds they had before they dropped the rounds down the mortar tubes and they started to hit the landing zones and how many seconds you had to get new guys off, wounded guys and dead guys on, mail on, C-rats off, ammunition, and so it was great fun, and so they called me back for Phase Two, which went up through WWI, and I got to paint Belleau Wood watching from Green Verdant, this little octagonal stone hunting lodge in a clearing to this devastated moonscape of dead sticks and puddles and craters with boards to get across the water. And this transition had to happen over about 150-foot length, and it had to be slow enough to be convincing, so it was really fun to do.

McDevitt: That's incredible. I remember--so I went to, after I got out I did kind of a Civil War tour up and down the East Coast. And I went to Gettysburg, and I remember seeing that cyclorama. Have you ever seen that?

Barker: Yeah, yeah.

McDevitt: And the guy I was talking with, who, it was a slow day in the middle of the week, nobody was there, and he was telling me, he was like, yeah, the person who painted it--I can't remember his name. I apologize to his family—

Barker: Philippoteaux.

McDevitt: Yeah, thank you. But he painted it not too long after the battle, and Gettysburg veterans were able to go and see this thing. And there's a lot of stories about those guys seeing this cyclorama and just seeing this beautiful mural, and it really transferred them back to the time. And that's immediately what that brought me to. So I'll have to get out there and see some of your--I've never seen that before.

Barker: Yeah, just ask him at Cantigny--I'm trying to remember his name. There's a Colonel Paul Herbert. Just ask him which parts were done by Paul Barker, because there are some that preceded my appearance there. But the one I did the most on and got to design from scratch was the Battle of the Bulge. It's a snowy forest with disabled tanks in the distance and a lot of troops. And then there's three-dimensional troops. That was a really fun one.

McDevitt: How long does it take you to prepare and kinda get an idea and do the layout and map it out in your head?

Barker: For ones where I get a lot of cooperation, it can be two or three weeks of just emailing back and forth. Then sometimes it's as little as two weeks to get the mural painted if it's like the Battle of the Bulge, if there's a lot of--it fades to black and there's a lot of foliage. That's done with a sponge, and you do three colors, with plop plop plop plop, and you got a tree. But then doing the figures, I went to "Band of Brothers" and did screen captures to get poses. And that worked out real nicely. Then I had that guy advising me from the Army who turned out was an expert on the equipment of WWII, then had two or three tank drivers from the Battle of the Bulge who were in their late eighties. And they said, "Yeah, I want you to paint the name of my tank on the side." Lulu Belle, or whatever. "Oh, and we had sleeping bags tied to the front, and we had dead branches [stuck] all over the tank." It's great fun to do that.

McDevitt: Do you find yourself kind of putting yourself in the shoes of the service member that you're—

Barker: Yeah.

McDevitt: Yeah. And thinking about what it would be like to be in battle?

Barker: I got to actually put myself in the Battle of Huế in the imperial city.

McDevitt: 'Cause that was right down the street from where you were. That was right down the street from where you were stationed.

Barker: From Đà Nẵng , right. But I was not in the Battle of the Bulge. But General Christmas, whose name is undistinguishable. I actually met him in Vietnam. He was Captain Christmas then. And with a name like that, you remember. I wouldn't have recognized the face, but I said, "Christmas. Did you go through Đà Nẵng ?" And he said, "Yeah, that was after the battle. This is my second tour." He was in the Battle of Huế. And I think it was him who suggested--the designers didn't want me to sign any of the murals. And they had an exhibit on the Battle of Huế that had an Ontose--six recoilless rifles on top of a little track vehicle. It was a two-man crew. But they needed some marines in the street in the background, so I put myself in there at his suggestion as a kind of a signature. So I took one of the black and white photos of myself doing this, you know, and put a radio in there and got rid of the silly grin. And instead of a real map, I had a map of the museum. I had just been reading the--what was that movie with Tom Hanks?

McDevitt: "We Were Soldiers?"

Barker: No.

McDevitt: Oh, no, I'm sorry. "Saving Private Ryan?"

Barker: No, wasn't even a war movie. It was about finding the chalice of Jesus.

McDevitt: Oh, Da Vinci Code.

Barker: Da Vinci Code, right. So it's a map of the museum with an X where the exhibit that you're looking at is, and I thought that doesn't really make any sense, but it's cool. So I can show you that later in pictures. But I have also done the one at Fort Bragg there at Airborne Special Ops Museum, and that was a kick. In one case we did an exhibit about a guy who was rescued from Noriega's worst prison in Panama for setting up radio free Panama. He was an American but also a Panamanian citizen as well. And he set up this radio station where that used to embarrass Noriega and his goons to the point where they finally captured him. They put him in this prison. The local Army commanders went and said, "You put him in prison. We understand that's legal according to your laws, nothing is gonna happen to this man while he is in prison. If anything does, not a single soul will walk out of this prison alive. And you know that we mean that. We're watching you every step of the way." So they brought innocent people off the street and tortured them to death in front of this guy trying to intimidate him and scare him. And they hung people on the basketball court where he could watch. He really had a rough time of it.

But he spent six months in this prison. And then just before Bush One decided to invade Panama and capture Noriega, they sent in a Delta Force guys with six little birds with the guys riding on the skids on the outside. They landed on the roof of the prison, jumped off, blew the door, down to the basement on this little cupola sort of thing, ran down the stairs, and told--what was the guy's name—anyway, they told this guy, "Get back into your lavatory area. We're gonna blow the door open." Blew the door, he came running out, they handed him a 45, 'cause he's ex-Army. And they ran back up the stairs, jumped into the little bird, and just as they're taking off Noriega's police headquarters is across the street, and they're hosing down the whole thing. Meanwhile there are Cobras up there hosing down the neighborhood all around. Buildings were on fire. He said it was like a sheet of red fire coming out of the sky. And they had an old CH-47 with the mini-gun on it. I forget what they call them, Snoopy or Puff the Magic Dragon. Yeah, so they're hosing down this perimeter, and they're killing millions of these guys in their police station. But the building, it just looked like a pile of rubble by the time the US was done with it. But a stray round hit the little bird that they were both in, and it lost power, went down, hit the street. But it could still move, so they rolled along the street, went to the corner, took a left, took a right, took a left, took a right, wound up by a parking structure where they started to get some height, soon as they got up off the ground they got tangled in wires they couldn't see, went down again, they ran into the parking structure, and what is that guy's name. It was called Operation Acid Gambit, and it was totally secret up until this exhibit came out.

McDevitt: I'll have to do a little reading. That seems like a—

Barker: I've got a great book I'll loan you. It's called *Six Seconds to Freedom*. And it's about the whole operation.

McDevitt: Yeah, what kind of--are there any books a former jarhead from Vietnam would recommend to the people who are listening? What are you—

Barker: Karl Marlantes' book, apparently somebody's bought the movie rights to it. I would like to write him sometime and find out if there are any good names attached to it. The--to me *Platoon*, it's an old movie, is one that gets it pretty right. It's exaggerated, because there's so much hostility within the platoon, but it's exaggerated because it's a movie. But the combat scenes and firing flares at night and finding the rotting corpses, that's right one. He really gets that right. *Saving Private Ryan* is good, the whole *Band of Brothers* series is very well done.

McDevitt: Did you watch *The Pacific*?

Barker: Yes, that was grizzly, because my wife's dad was one of those grunts. And he didn't talk about much. I never knew him 'cause we've only been married for a year and a half. Trying to think what other really good movies there are about the subject.

McDevitt: Well, is there anything that you thought we would get to during this interview that we didn't cover? Are there any names of people that you thought would come up, or is there anything that you wanted to touch on that we didn't cover?

Barker: [Pause] No, I think that's about it. I think I would like to say, anybody who wants to know anything about the Marine Corps, the Marine Corps Museum is really the place to shop for information and knowledge. And I'm very proud to have two exhibits on display there that were donations from me. One is a peace symbol made from grenade ranks on a dog tag chain. The exhibit's at least that big. And the other one is, I sent them a case of C-rations. So they took one C-ration box out of it. They weren't gonna dedicate a whole case worth of space to--but there's one thing that is a box, and it has the can sitting out and a P-38 [can opener], and it used to have, "donated by Paul Barker", but then they've been asking donors if they wanted their name on something if they donate so much money, so now there's some donor's name there who I don't know and did not own those C-rations and probably couldn't tell beans and balls from pound cake if they had to. But I had an opportunity when I was working on Belleau Woods the Marine Corps commandant came through with a Marine Corps sergeant major.

McDevitt: Which commandant and sergeant major?

Barker: I'm gonna have to look back to find his name. He was the first one who is not a Vietnam veteran. He told me he got his combat action ribbon in the Balkans. But he was close to seven feet tall. This guy is gigantic. And the sergeant major is shorter than I am but wider than I am at the shoulders. He's a black guy, and he's got stripes all the way down his arms practically down his fingers. And I said, "I've always wanted to ask a commandant if you carry a P-38 can opener on your keychain." And he says, "No, that's why I've got a sergeant major." [Laughing] I thought, that's not somebody I would piss off, you know.

McDevitt: Well, Paul, on behalf of the Pritzker Military Museum and Library, I would like to say thank you very much for joining us today and sharing your story. It's been my pleasure to have you here. Semper Fidelis.

Barker: Wouldn't have worked with a civilian in the other seat, I'll tell ya. Likewise. It's been a pleasure.

C. Paul Barker

June 27, 2018

Interviewed by Leah Cohen

Transcribed by Rachel Berlinski

Edited by Leah Cohen

Web biography by Rachel Berlinski, Leah Cohen & Paul Barker

Production by Brad Guidera & Angel Melendez

Cohen: Today is June 27, 2018. My name is Leah Cohen, and I'm joined here with Mr. Paul Barker. He was with the 1st and 3rd Marine Divisions in Vietnam and Okinawa. He gave a fascinating interview last year on May 16, 2017 conducted by Mr. Thom Webb [Should read: Mr. Brian McDevitt]. Today, Mr. Barker will complement his previous interview by showing artifacts, maps, and photos that reflect his service in Vietnam.

Barker: Okay. Thank you for that nice introduction. I should explain that in 1970 I was assigned to go to Vietnam, got hijacked somewhere over Alaska when we were refueling, and the whole planeload of us wound up redirected to Okinawa. So I spent six months on Okinawa with the 3rd Marine Division and had a lot of interesting adventures, all training kind of stuff, beach landings, spending Christmas in Hong Kong, jungle warfare training, and a lot of fun stories come out of that. But that's prior to the Vietnam experience. I got sudden orders saying, "You're going to Vietnam in fifteen minutes. Pack all your stuff." And I was in Subic Bay having been stationed on a ship. Flew back to Okinawa, got my tree suit, a camouflage suit that only [United States] Marines had. We were very jealous of not letting other people have camo like we did--and flew into Đà Nẵng and that will be the start of the pictures. I took a lot of pictures landing just because I was going into a war, and I really didn't know what to expect, and I was anxious, and I was shooting pictures out the window. So, this is not quite like a flip chart where it looks like it's animated, but you can watch every five minutes of the landing. So, before we do that I want to get everybody oriented. It's the first step in a good presentation in the military is, "Here's the map. Here's us, and here's them. And this way is north, okay? Now, let's talk about it." Someone gave me a relief map made out of VacuForm plastic of the Đà Nẵng area. This little gray and brown spot is the town of Đà Nẵng, and if you could see this in a close-up you'd see that the airfield represents two long, gray lines running north to south. The harbor is deep all along here. I think they could handle floor deep drafts ships at one time. I'm sure it's improved since then. This island here is called...Monkey Mountain. But to the west, Monkey Mountain. It was bristling

with antennae because it was a good place to connect up to the city, and so that's where a lot of electronics were situated. I don't think there was every any fighting on Monkey Mountain. But to the west of the city were a lot of army bases, and the army areas were probably greater in square footage than the city itself. There was also a ring of military trash around the city that was maybe a thousand yards wide, had barbed wire fences on either side, and it was just accumulated stuff of ten years of war. There were carcasses of vehicles--tanks, trucks, jeeps-- and there were people living in all this trash and making a living by scouting it out, recycling parts. My cantonment, which was the name for a base camp back then, for 3rd Battalion 1st Marines, was right up against this ridge tucked into a little notch in the ridges. And I'll show you pictures of that. I apologize for the tremor. I was exposed to Agent Orange right here, Hill 1192. The place had been defoliated, and the symptoms didn't show up for twenty-something years. So I had some free time in there, but now it's come back with a vengeance. And medication helps a lot, but there's still this annoying tremor, which means my penmanship would not pass muster in second grade, at this point. So when you're looking at the photographs, to keep yourself oriented, bear in mind that this way is north, this is the big harbor, this is the city at the south end of the harbor [chuckles]. There's a highway, Highway 1, "the street without joy", that runs up to this side of Đà Nẵng and connects up with the main street and then runs along this beach and begins climbing up the mountains until it gets to this notch. That notch is called Hải Vân Pass in Vietnamese. Hải Vân means cloud pass. And the reason for it is, clouds coming from the north are not high enough to get over these mountains. This is 3,000 feet. And so they try and squeeze through the pass. The end result is that if you're standing on the pass in bright sunny, warm, tropical weather, two minutes later you could not see your hand in front of your face from the intense fog that appears and the cold wind and the dampness. You start shivering, and then, pop, the sunlight comes out, and the cloud continues on its way to the south. It's an eerie place, and you'll see in the pictures that there's a strange old French fort up there. So Hải Vân Pass is important. You can see Hải Vân Pass from the basecamp. All I had to do was photograph north. You see this bright white sand. You'll see that in the photographs, too. Pictures taken from the top of the ridge behind the cantonment looking down on this area, there's a river, the Song Cu De, Cu De River in Vietnamese--I mean, in English. And a bridge, which you will see, it's a railroad and car bridge that is also critical--and it's next to a town called Kin Ville. There's a village out here--in fact there are two of them. I can only remember the name of one. Trúc Đường, it's a Catholic village. And there's a second one with a cathedral in the middle of thatch roofs and mud huts. It's very interesting. Obviously, built by the French.

Cohen: Was it built out of stone?

Barker: Yes, it's made out of limestone, has great rain stains, and it looks like it's been there since Notre Dame was built, you know. I know they weren't there in the Middle Ages, but they're very gothic, and big enough that you could take the whole village, I

think, inside. In this valley is mostly rice farming, but there's this one ridge that pops up, and you'll see pictures taken from a helicopter coming from this direction to land there. It's called OP Reno to the Americans, observation post Reno, and it has a really interesting secret device on top of it, which I'll go into with the photographs. You'll also notice at the very beginning that the flight that I took from Okinawa into Vietnam flew over this little bump of land. You'll see that in the photographs. Across the harbor, with helicopters passing below us until it got into this area where you can see Navy ships parked in the water and then landing, and you can see that it's a military airport because of all the fighter jets tucked into these half-round Quonset hut sort of things. So if you keep that in mind it will help you stay oriented. And in case you get lost we'll issue your maps later.

Cohen: [Laughs]

Barker: You'll get the grid coordinates for where you are. Okay. Chapter one is called "Arrival in RVN, Republic of Vietnam." The flight over is about three hours, and it's from Kadena Air Force Base in Okinawa to Đà Nẵng airbase. And I was bright, sunny weather, and there were a bunch of my classmates from basic school, fellow officers, all of us butter bars. Little gold second lieutenant's bar.

Cohen: Okay.

Barker: And this photograph number one is descending through a cloud cover that seemed a bit ominous because it looked dark even from above. I'll put these over. And that little landmass I showed you sticking out in the water--

Cohen: Yeah.

Barker: This is it. Hải Vân Pass is further up that same ridge underneath the clouds. You can't see it. But as we're descending through the clouds the excited talk all dies down in the cabin, and it starts getting very quiet. And we look down, and there's a CH-46, which we're all familiar with from training and using them throughout the Marine Corps was sort of the airbus of the Marines. There's the 46, that tiny little dot over the ocean. And in the background you see a bit of the beach. And I realize we were pretty high up. Now you can see more of the beach and some of the white sand, and you can see Navy ships anchored in the harbor there. I didn't get a picture of the big one, the [USS] *Repose*. It was the hospital ship that looked like a destroyer, it was so big, but it was full of helicopter landing pads and had a big red cross on the side, and it had complete set up for surgery and saving lives. And many of my troops were flown out there, but once they got into that system I had no more contact with them. It was hard to find out what happened to them. Finally, I'd start seeing houses looking down on Đà Nẵng. That's picture number five. And we hit the tarmac, and we're sailing along at whatever landing speed is, and in the background you can see hills, which means I'm looking from the runway, which is oriented north/south. That means I'm looking west. And passing sandbagged bunkers with fighter jets inside.

There were also a lot of helicopters and big cargo planes: the Hercules, the C-130s. And all very busy. It was like O'Hare, just a lot of traffic in and out. Finally, they open the door. And this point all of us are dead quiet, and we walk out the door to take the stairs down to the ground, and I could swear it was almost impossible to avoid the urge to duck. When you stepped off the plane you started crouching and looking for cover. And I'm looking down at the guys with the big Mickey Mouse earmuffs on just minding their business, not paying any attention. I'm thinking, "This is a war. What are you guys doing wandering around like nothing's gonna happen? They could rocket this place any minute." And I looked at some of my classmates, and they were all equally cautious about the whole thing. And it was embarrassing and at the same time it was funny. We all started comparing notes. One of my closer friends, Bob Bolman, with this little butter bar on his hat, is turning around to say something about the fact that, well, I don't hear any popping sounds.

Cohen: [Laughing] So far so good.

Barker: Nobody's making popcorn. That always scared us. This is Jim Collins. He's walking past a truck. They had vehicles lined up to take us to various places. Apparently they made some decisions--this is picture number ten--they had made some decisions about some of us, and there were vehicles waiting to take us to some headquarters. There's the back end of Bob walking away. And here's yours truly, Second Lieutenant Paul Barker, trying my best to look unfazed by stepping into this war. And you can see why troops, sometimes refer to them as puppy lieutenants. We all seemed so fresh faced. I was twenty-three at the time. No, I was twenty-two. I had my birthday out in the field. And somebody brought me a can of C-rations with a birthday candle stuck in it. It was very nice. These are three more classmates. There's my future home back there against those hills.

Cohen: Yeah.

Barker: It's so hard to see in the haze, of course. This guy is hard to make out, but for a second lieutenant he is behaving most moronically. He's shooting the finger at the camera and grinning like a Cheshire cat. His name is Gene Armistead, and people who study Civil War history might recognize his name. General Lewis Armistead, his great-great-great-great grandfather was the peak of Pickett's Charge, and so the high-water mark of the Confederacy after Pickett's charge failed is countered as the spot where Gene's great-great-great-great grandfather died, stepped up to a cannon, capturing a federal cannon, and he was turned into Swiss cheese. Didn't die for several hours, but it makes a good scene in the movie *Gettysburg*. And the guy doesn't look like Gene's grandfather at all, but it's funny when I look at a picture of Lewis Armistead and Gene Armistead, the only difference--they both have a head shaped like a potato with balding dark hair on his ancestor and balding blond hair on Gene, who was only twenty-two, twenty-three. I don't know. He and Craig McClellan, a great-great grandson of General McClellan were constantly refighting the war at lunch, complaining about each other. It was a riot to listen to.

Cohen: Do you mean the Civil War or the more recent war?

Barker: They're refighting the Civil War, and everybody is complaining about General McClellan that he did nothing, and he was a bane on the White House. They couldn't get him moving. And Craig is--General McClellan was unusually short, had baby-like skin, had a high squeaky doll-duck sort of voice, and just looked like a kid, but he was a perfectionist and he never wanted to use up his beautiful army by sending them into combat where they could get shot and get dirty. And it really created a problem for Lincoln. Meanwhile out west, Ulysses Grant, who was always dirty and poorly shaven and chomping on cigars, is winning battles left and right because he understands the nature of the beast, you know. So Craig McClellan also had a similar high-pitched voice, was small, and had baby skin. It was amazing to compare these two guys to their ancestors. Okay, so we get assigned to go to different places, and in my case I got into a jeep with one other officer behind me and a driver who was taking us to 1st Marine Regiment headquarters. And as we're driving through town I'm looking at the Đà Nẵng architecture. It looks surprisingly European. This is number fourteen. Yeah, this is fifteen. And there is Asian influence. You do see some pagodas and shrines, but you also see a lot of construction that is reminiscent of France, in particular Normandy, where I spent some time years before. Traffic was not particularly great on the street, but there were a lot of pedestrians. There were a lot of ad hoc markets that popped up. This is picture number eighteen. But off to one side, inside of the ring of trash I mentioned were bunkers whose sandbags had rotted in the sun over the years, which tells me they were burlap sandbags, whereas what we had was polyethylene, and it didn't rot, and it kept its green color. The burlap bags were brown. Later they issued them in olive drab color, but they were still burlap, they deteriorated, and the sand began to leak out. You notice it's very white sand. It's clear they brought it in from the beach. But these are pretty old-fashioned bunkers in their design, and I thought that they were interesting because they were so different to what we were building in the modern times. That's the same shot. And I noticed that in many places where you looked around the horizon, there was something burning. And I thought, well, it's a war. I've got to expect something to be on fire. This is probably a trash fire. There were days when nothing happened, you know. Somebody stumbled on a mine or something. The kids--this is maybe a four-year-old kid. The kids all spoke impeccable English, and I'm thinking it's because they're at the point in their life when they're learning languages; they pick up that second one easily.

Cohen: Yeah.

Barker: They're not just savvy in terms of the language, but the culture as well. And they're always walking up to us and making the most astonishing statements. They were so precocious. This guy is trying to thumb a ride. He's got his thumb up, and he's asking us to stop and pick him up. And when I had my perimeter set up on a hill, next to a village at one point in that big valley west of Đà Nẵng, a little kid came up to me--he

didn't look like he was old enough to talk--and he said, "Hey, GI, you got cigarette?" I said, "Cigarette? Do you smoke?" He said, "Yeah, I want cigarette." I said, "You shouldn't be smoking at your age." And he said, "You give me cigarette." I said, "No, I'm not gonna give you a cigarette. Get out of here." And he looked at me, and he said, "Screw you. It's my country." And he walks off.

[Laughter]

Barker: I don't know how they got that, but the other thing I noticed a lot when I was in town is, the Vietnamese women have this national dress, formal dress, called an Ao Dai [pronounced ow yai], which to give you an example of the difference in pronunciations between North Vietnamese and South Vietnamese, in North Vietnam it's pronounced Owd Zai, so the two cannot talk to each other very easily, and that creates a problem which will show up in my platoon later on. But here are two ladies who are being coy and flirting at us. And flirting is the national pastime in Vietnamese culture. And that's why they hated the Russians so much after the war when the Russians came in. They didn't know how to flirt, they didn't know how to have a good time, they just wanted to get drunk and pass out. They stayed with their own kind, and they said, "In America, they got rock and roll, they got blue jeans, and they love our women."

[Laughing]

Cohen: They're more fun.

Barker: They were very proud of that. But I've got to say mixing French and Vietnamese produces some beautiful people, male and female. They're just elegant, I thought. Here's a busy intersection, which I actually got to see twenty years later when they switched from traffic cop to a stop light. It was big progress. Finally, I arrive at the destination. This thing on the hill is called Freedom Hill. It's the headquarters for the 1st Regiment of the 1st Division. And I get there and get a presentation in an amphitheater on what's going on with the war now, and then I get assigned to my unit which is gonna be the 3rd Battalion of the 1st Marine Regiment of the 1st Marine Division. And the short name for 3rd Battalion 1st Marines is 3/1. I don't know if the cantonment, as they called it, actually had a name like camp something or other. They usually do, but for some reason I never learned that. Or I never heard it. It didn't have it as a sign over the entrance. Usually all signs in the Marine Corps are red with yellow type. So this next chapter is called—

Cohen: Before you go on to the next chapter, can I just ask you, was it unusual that you had a camera? Did most of the soldiers bring cameras, or was it because your interest in art drew you to photography?

Barker: I don't remember ever seeing anybody else with a camera. But the problem is that, one, I was a bad photographer, and two, photography was not very advanced for the non-professional at that point in history in 1970, and three, when you got a really

tough job to do, if you're going out into combat you don't bring a camera. So I've got a few pictures out in the field, but they don't show fighting, they don't show explosions, they don't show smoke. And so they're not gonna be any bloodcurdling or exciting photographs, unfortunately. The pictures in the field look like a bunch of scruffy guys on a camping trip. And it's very unglamorous, and that's--most of combat is absolute boredom, and then you have moments--as the pilots used to say in WWII--moments of extreme terror interrupted by hours of pathological boredom.

Cohen: That's part of it, too, Yeah.

Barker: When you drive into 3/1, it's next to an army camp on one side and some kind of South Vietnamese unit on the other side. There's barbed wire, fences everywhere. You can't tell what's what or where the borders are from one camp to the other, and you drive through several gates that are all security, and they stop you and check who you are. Very unimpressive way to arrive at my new home, so I thought it would be better to introduce it via helicopters. Many times, I was coming back from an operation and needed to be pulled in just by myself for medical reasons or administrative reasons, and that gave me the opportunity to use the camera. So, here on picture number twenty is part of an army base that was near to the 3/1 cantonment, and that pile of obscure buildings in the back is 3/1, gonna be my new home. Twenty-six, okay. This is a 50-caliber machine gun sticking out of the side of a CH-46 looking down on about half of the 3/1 cantonment. Notice a tiny little gray speck up here on the ridge.

Cohen: Yeah.

Barker: That is a lookout tower. On this ridge, which theoretically semi-surrounds us, you need to have bunkers along the top of the ridge to act as what would be picket lines in the Civil War, widely spread people, to alert you if anything is coming your way. And the call signs to those different bunkers were Satan 1, Satan 2, Satan 3. I believe this watchtower was at Satan 3, but it will occur in other photographs, and I used to use it as a way to orient myself. If you fell asleep when you got on the helicopter 'cause you haven't slept in several days, you wake up and wonder where the heck you are, and you're coming in to land and you're wondering, is this a short stop or is this home? And so that little guard tower was useful. Let's see. There's the LZ [landing zone]. It's gray rubber matting, trying to keep the dust down, and it's got big, white letters, says LZ 460, I think, along the bottom there.

Cohen: Do you want to explain what the LZ is?

Barker: Landing zone. Thank you. The same LZ occurs in this photograph, but it's taken from that watchtower shooting down on the base. So, we were flying in like this about to land on that gray rubber, and this now at some point my platoon is assigned to the Satans, so we're protecting the backside of the cantonment from anything that might be coming up the far side of that mountain.

Cohen: Oh, okay.

Barker: And each of these places I could explain, but it gets to be too confusing. Infantry hooches--hooches are tin roof plywood buildings where the infantry guys sleep when they're in the rear--office hooches, and when I got "promoted" out of being a platoon commander into being an executive officer--I use the word in quotation marks because I would much rather have stayed with my platoon, but I'm flying a desk, and I've got two clerk typists to command as opposed to fifty-five guys out in the boonies, you know. But that gives you an idea of the size of the basecamp. And you get down inside of it, here's one of the most critical places inside 3/1 cantonment. The shower house, everybody's friend when you come out of the field. A warm shower, especially if you've been up at Hải Vân Pass freezing your buns off for a couple of weeks, a warm shower was--they used to say, "This is better than sex." I would take issue with that, but warm water would, like, bring people back to life after a little exposure. That's the mess hall on the top. Now, I went back to Vietnam twenty years after the war with a veterans group called the Vietnam Veterans Restoration Program. Built a clinic, traveled, and I went and found my base. All of the eucalyptus trees are gone, all of the roads had eroded really deeply, all of the buildings were gone, everything was stripped, everything was recycled. It was like there was no evidence that there had ever been a basecamp there. There were Buddhist graves on the ridge where my office hooch had been, and there were cattle roaming all around. There were two kinds of cows in Vietnam. Con Trau are the ones with the scimitar horns, water buffalos, but then there's the Indian sacred cow, which are Con Bo, and they have little short, stumpy horns and sometimes a hump on their back, and they come in pastel colors. Water buffalos are uniformly dark gray, and they're almost always covered in mud because like pigs they don't sweat. They need the wet mud to keep their temperature regulated. Those are the hooches where the infantry lived, so one of those hooches was for 3rd platoon, which I was put in command of. Unfortunately, we switch to black and white. There's the backside of the shower house, and here are the office buildings I was talking about. My office was at the end. It had a banana tree planted in front of it. It might have been plantains. I'm not sure I could tell the difference between the two plants, but here's a closer shot with the office hooch with a little window that says Business Window. People would walk up to it to ask questions. There's the banana tree. It never produced bananas the whole time I was there. I was really looking forward to that. And there's a jeep parked in dead center of the picture with another one over here next to a little bridge over an erosion cut, and next to that jeep at a closer range is a strange mobile platform with big balloon tires, a motor underneath, its aluminum-framed four-by-eight sheet with little rails along it, called a mule, and it did exactly what mules do in previous war. It hauled ammunition and water. And it had a flip-up seat with a flip-up steering wheel and two pedals that you put your foot on, and they'd drive them around these firebases. You could carry a dozen of them on a helicopter or slung on the bottom of a helicopter. They were really handy, and I've only seen two or three that survived. None of them seemed to be

operational, but it seems to me they'd be useful in camps, Boy Scout camps or something.

Cohen: Yeah.

Barker: They were, I thought, a great invention. So I was sorry not to see them proliferate. There's the backside of the mess hall, and there looking straight north is that ridge of mountains. And right where that smudge is in the picture is pointing at Hải Vân Pass. So, my first big mission is the go up Hải Vân Pass in trucks, get out, go inside the old French castle, which is up there as a defensive place--this big brick monstrosity, I'll show you a picture shortly--and then climb this ridge up to this point, stop just short of 1192. It's called that because its altitude on the contour interval lines on the map marks it as the peak and identifies it as 1,192 meters tall, so in military parlance, that's the name of the mountain, 1192, which means about 3,000 feet, but half of that is taken care of by the fact that we drove to get to the pass, and then we climbed for eight hours up into the clouds, and it was an eerie place.

Cohen: Was the route going there also dangerous?

Barker: On this side, it was not. On the opposite side of the pass it was because there were clear fields of fire all along the ridge where the North Vietnamese and, mostly the NVA. The Viet Cong had been knocked out during the Tet Offensive two years before, and they showed who they were, 'cause they had been a secret organization up to that point, and they got decimated. And then they got screwed over royally by the North Vietnamese when they won the war. They didn't give them the pensions they had promised; they didn't give them the respect they deserved. Here I am feeling sorry for the Viet Cong, the guys who were not very polite to us. But the North Vietnamese would get along the top of that ridge and fire down on the road with rocket-propelled grenades, and they could close down the pass without half trying. So, many other platoons had gone up that ridge before me, and I found pictures from those adventures, which I could bring at some point. Okay, to get back to the camp, this is the combat operations center. As I was saying, most signs in the Marine Corps are red with yellow writing. It's supposed to be red and gold. And it's bristling with antennae because it's all communication. So this is the nerve center. It takes all the radio communication incoming and outgoing, and it's right down the hill from the commanding officer's hooch. Now, if you go up to the top of the ridge in back, the very highest of the Satans, Satan 1 I guess, had a little landing zone on the top so we wouldn't have to climb all the way down. But still every day, I would allow one trooper to take the path down to the gedunk, which was a Navy term for a place where you could get candy, and they'd come back with *Playboy* magazines and mail and candy and cigarettes, and then distribute along the lineup, Satan bunkers, but this does demonstrate the white sand I was talking about earlier. That's why it looks so bright on that three-dimensional map. It was brilliant in sunlight. And here is from the same position turning a little bit to the left, that is to the north, is more of

the white sand, the Song Cu De River, way back in here there's a little gray spot you can just make out. That's the railroad bridge at Kim Ville called--I'll remember the name in a minute. Anyway, it was an important bridge. I wound up protecting that for a couple of weeks at a time. And there's Hải Vân Pass in the distance. And here it is. There's the bridge with an old French watchtower in the back at one end of it.

Cohen: Was the sand made out of—was it from limestone?

Barker: That's a good question. It was identical to the sand that I grew up with along the gulf coast in Alabama, Biloxi, Fort Morgan, Gulf Shores, this whole area. Same sand dunes, same sea oats as on the other side and the Pacific. And when you get into the hills upon which the Satans are placed, the brush and the color of the dirt was identical to Los Angeles and the stuff you see on the west coast of the Pacific. Same Manzanita plants, same kind of scruffy dry scrub. It just surprised me that there were so many similarities. And then eucalyptus trees, that's from Australia. It's just, the world got a little smaller. Okay, now I'm gonna cover the neighborhood. Meaning what's around the 3/1 cantonment. Here is one of the villages, the one whose name I can't remember. That's the Catholic church for the village. That meant that if it was a Catholic village, it was probably safe, 'cause they were violently opposed to communism. And they had nuns and priests who were all Vietnamese who had gone to Rome. This is a Gothic church that is maybe bigger than the village it's in. There's a decent picture of it. This is where I--number forty-one. Let me just check. Yeah, okay. So, I was always happy to see that cathedral if we had a patrol route to go through because I figured I was going into safe territory, and some of the other villages were a little more dicey. And I found to my surprise that they could be bribed into making us safe. At some point, when they couldn't get us water for about a week, and we were pretty far from the basecamp we wound up drinking out of the clearest fast-running streams we could find, but we all got internal parasites. So they told us to just stay put. They dropped a net full of food mostly canned goods, stuff we'd never see except in the rear at a mess hall. Scrambled eggs and bacon all mixed together, spaghetti and meatballs, these big number ten cans. And we couldn't eat it all, but after a week, we'd been taking medication, and the parasites were gone, so I realized that was going to happen ahead of time, so I asked the village chief to come talk to us. And I said, "If we don't get any sniper fire for the next week, all this that is left goes to you. We'll bring it down to the village for you." No problem. We had our PRC-1s [pronounced prick-ones], they called them, radios, private radios playing rock music, and troops were dancing, and we were having a picnic for a week. It was great. This is the castle at Hải Vân Pass. It's part of a more complex arrangement, but it's on one side of the road, it's brick, and it really smells inside, but Captain Tap the local South Vietnamese commander gave us one of his platoons in my platoon, and we were gonna go up to the top of the ridge, and I knew we were in trouble when we got the South Vietnamese troops, because they were notorious for avoiding any kind of confrontation. So, while we're sneaking for eight hours on hands and knees climbing on these rocks, they're what we referred to as ditty-bopping up the hill and

accidentally setting off their weapons and accidentally calling out loud, just letting the enemy know, "Back up, we're coming. Just back up and nobody will get hurt." So, we didn't surprise anybody, surprisingly. Okay, you know what? Okay. Not only is my vision going, but my handwriting is going because of the tremor, so I can't read my own writing sometimes. These are pictures of bases around us. I just thought that one was kind of cool. There were firebases scattered everywhere, and they all had gungy¹ names. I was a pay officer at one point, where I flew around in a Huey with a box full of cash in military payment certificates. I had like 40,000 dollars, paying it out to troops at different—

Cohen: [Chuckling] Locations.

Barker: --pay the troops, five minutes later get back in the helicopter, go to the next firebase, and the thing about firebases is I always felt that they were like a scar on the landscape. It was like a dirt and sandbag slum hit by a tornado. There's no military policing-up or organization. Okay, here, three--I'll have to check these for order when we're done. Radioman smoking a cigar who looks like he might eighteen years old if he's lucky. I saw a lot of cigars. It was a riot. The affectations that the troops take on, and I'm one to talk because I posed for gungy pictures myself, but it was always entertaining when I would say, "That's Corporal so-and-so. Take my camera and just get some pictures of the guys." And immediately, guys would go into their Rambo poses.

[Laughter]

Barker: This is one of the observations posts I stopped to pay. It had a picture of somebody's bulldog attached to the sign. They had named themselves OP Goodwin, and someone told me that Goodwin was the name of the dog. And it says R&R center. R&R was rest and recuperation, but we used to use another term with retaliation in it. I can't remember exactly what it was. An R&R center was a vacation, and that was such a scenic spot. I brought this picture because it shows this guy with a big bandage on his back going into a tent, and it indicated to me that you could be wounded, maybe even seriously wounded, but put back into combat if you had a critical job. If you were a communication specialist or a linguist specialist. And the needs of the Marine Corps meant you didn't get a pass just 'cause you got shot. So you'd be patched up and sent back out there.

Cohen: Was the picture of the radio operator the one that you refer to in the previous interview, I think by the name of Bouncing Denny or something?

Barker: Bouncing Denny?

¹ Barker later explained that gungy is Marine speak for "gung-ho", derived from the Chinese expression of 'work together'. It was adopted by the Marines during the Boxer Rebellion.

Cohen: Or—

Barker: There was a corporal, Lance Corporal Blackman, who was the fastest human speaker I've ever run across. He was my radioman until he stood up on the skyline at night against the glow of Đà Nẵng and got himself snipered. And his replacement is in these pictures. He's in the pictures later.

Cohen: I see.

Barker: I seem to have gotten some things out of order. I need to drop back to Hải Vân Pass. Across the road from the French castle was a mom and pop shop, what they used to call--it was like a grocery--it was a 7/11 in Vietnamese culture, with the little Buddhist shrine. This picture was taken in '72 when I went back with the veteran's group. This big billboard wasn't there during the war. The trail we took to get to the top was just off to the side of that little pagoda shrine. Here's the same place almost in the same footprint after the clouds came through. And that's not as bad as it got. It really got to be a pea-souper. The little shrine is there, so I walked up to get a better picture of the shrine closer up. But you can see it's pretty foggy when the clouds are determined to come through. Now, I've pointed out OP Reno on a three-dimensional map. And coming in from the west on this map, coming in at an angle like this, I don't know what the helicopter was doing over here 'cause we didn't mess with this area at all, but he must have been making a big curve. He's coming in - to land at OP Reno there, so you're seeing it from a northwesterly direction, and it's--the clever engineers with the army brought their bulldozers they can helicopter dropped them on the hill and flattened off a low part and a high part. And on the high part--oh here, as we're coming in they pop smoke, yellow smoke. There's no reason for them to pop smoke except that people like doing it because it's like fireworks, puts out a lot of smoke for a long time, and the colors were brilliant, you know, red, green, yellow, blue, all the primary colors. And they had a counterintelligence team from the navy who were equipped to the teeth. They had derringers in their socks. You know, it was just ridiculous, and they had mini smoke grenades. They look like a film canister. You take a wick out of the lid, you scratch them on some sandpaper inside the rim of the thing, and it would start it burning. And they had purple, and they had, like, turquoise and orange. So they were really different, and they were proud of their gear. But they were also a problem; I'll get to that later. So they're popping smoke for no reason. Normally if you're invisible to a helicopter pilot and you're calling in a medevac, when you say, "Okay we're at these coordinates," he can be right on top of you and not see you, 'cause we're all camouflaged, right.

Cohen: Right, right.

Barker: We're all the same color as the dirt and the landscape. So we'd say, "We're popping smoke," and we'd throw a grenade out in the road or in a field or something, and this red smoke would go up, and they'd say, "Okay, I got your red, red." meaning if the enemy pops smoke, and they have all the same stuff we do 'cause they'd been

stealing it. If they say--if I say, "I'm popping red smoke," they'll pull out a red smoke somewhere to attract the helicopter over so they can shoot him up. So he identifies the color, and that way if there's two smokes, if they pop a yellow and I pop a red, I'll say I'm a red smoke, and now we know where the yellow smoke is, right. So there's little trickery going on there. Once we landed from the landing zone looking up I see all these antennas, all this communication happening from this hill, and this strange little cupola sort of thing on the top. Now, I don't know how or why--I must have been there twice because some of these pictures are in color. There's the cupola, and in back of the guy carrying the clipboard, just over his shoulder you see a dark space inside under the lid. It's a laser range finder, and at this point in 1970 I thought lasers were sci-fi. I didn't know they were actually in existence. But this thing, today it would probably be big enough to fit in your hand, but it looks like an old television camera from the '60s. It's this giant box on a swivel with a thing you look through. And this is the man who operated it. I think he was a warrant officer. But he was the technician, and he's about to look through the eyepieces. He could ping a red laser off of something, and he had a 360-degree view all around the valley from OP Reno. He could bounce a laser light off of and get exact coordinates. And our artillery unit who you cannot hear, cannot see, it's somewhere behind the ridge, can fire one shot and destroy the thing on the first try. You can hit exactly where, they're so well coordinated, exactly where the laser pointed. And later they came out with laser bombs and laser guided missiles. And I was very impressed.

Cohen: Yeah, was this probably one of the first applied uses of laser in the military?

Barker: It must have been. It was certainly the first I knew of. They also had seismic devices, earthquake sensors, except they were so sensitive they could pick up footsteps. They would fly along a helicopter on what they saw was a trail, they'd fly low with a helicopter and drop these things that look like upside down rockets that were painted camouflage, they'd hit the ground and the jolt would cause an antenna to rise up out of the back end of the thing, and the antenna had branches that made it look like a stick and had a camouflage parachute that was made up of triangles and designed so that it would spin and give the thing greater force, I guess, when it hit, the antenna would come out and turn itself on. And somewhere in a hooch, miles away they start monitoring and listening for footsteps going past this thing. My troops would see them and say, "There's another one of those funny devices." They'd pick them up, turn them upside down, and acid would burn through the thing to destroy it so that the enemy couldn't put it to any use. So even if you just tapped them you'd hear [hissing noise] and smoke would start coming out through little screw holes, and there would be another 3,000 dollars in taxpayers' dollars.

[Laughter]

Barker: I really had to prevent them. They tried to buy me off by giving me the parachute.

[Laughter]

Barker: Okay, so this next chapter is called "Meet the Troopies." This is my platoon outside of one of their hooches doing an assembly. They were actually in three ranks, but I think this is the squad leaders off to the side there having a conference about something. Here's another picture of the same. And what they look like out in the field--if everything was safe and we had a perimeter set up around us, then things could get very causal--you'll notice no helmets, no flak jackets. It's hot, so everybody is stripped down, they're playing cards while another patrol, another squad, is coming in from having spent the night in an ambush site or just had a patrol route that had certain points they had to radio from. Often I knew they were sandbagging the patrol. In other words, I'd tell them, "Okay, go out and hit these grid coordinates. This point, this village, this bridge, this trial intersection, then back to us. They would go off out of sight. Everyone would lay down and go to sleep except the radioman who would say, "Okay, we're at coordinates such and such, such and such, checking in." And then they'd wait an appropriate amount of time, call in the next one. And that was fine by me as long as there was nothing serious going on. And the platoon sergeant knew it, and if he was cool with it he was a far more experienced guy than myself, then I was okay with it too. The radioman is carrying an upside-down parachute. Because it's white that tells me it's a flare parachute from an artillery round where the rounds burst at a certain altitude. And these brilliant, blinding flares come down, light up the countryside, and they're hanging on a parachute so they're descending slowly. The problem is—

Cohen: Oh, so the parachutes are for the flares.

Barker: Yeah. The parachute keeps the flare up in the sky. The problem is once it pops out of its shell, the parachute has to deploy, and it results in the flare spinning like this as it comes down. So the spin gradually diminishes, but the initial impression is, you look out on the landscape from your fighting hole or where you're hiding behind a tree, and when the flare goes off you can't look at it or you screw up your night vision for half an hour or so. So you block your view of the flare, and you look at the countryside, and because of the spin all the shadows are swimming like this. You start getting seasick.

Cohen: Oh, gosh.

Barker: It's like being in another world. All of a sudden it's like the sun is moving, you know. But black shadows at night and brilliant day-lit flare light. I didn't like using them, frankly, even if I could hear sounds in front of me, I'd just as soon do without the flares. One of the tricks we learned was to look at where you think the motion is happening, and then look to the side. And you'd be using your side vision paying attention to that 'cause it's less burned out.

Cohen: Oh, then looking forward.

Barker: Yeah, if you've got a sensation of movement using the outer edges of your eye, the far limits of your perception, you can pick up movement much better than if you look straight at it. Yeah, it was a useful trick. Here is my platoon sergeant, R.L. McCauslin. I never found out what the R.L. stands for. He might have been Ron, he might have been Richard, I don't know. But to everybody he was Sergeant Mack. Second tour, so he really knew his stuff. And because I had commanded a platoon on Okinawa, I knew how it really works. Lieutenant gets the blame when something goes wrong, and sometimes the glory, but he's just the figurehead. The guy who really runs the show is the platoon sergeant, and he's more knowledgeable, generally older, and he was the old man at twenty-four. I was twenty-three, but it really mattered back then. And he really knew his stuff. He was practical, grounded, and just an interesting individual. And to get raised to the platoon sergeant level you have to be someone very trustworthy. Okay, here's where I gave up my box camera to the troops, and I said just go take pictures of each other and give them back to me.

Cohen: Oh, cool.

Barker: And they were all goofing off of doing something silly or trying to make themselves look gungy. We're up to picture, this one is, number sixty-four. This is Lance Corporal Blackman, my radioman, in back of Sergeant Mack, and this is a couple of days before sniper sent him to the rear. He was okay. He got hit in the cheek 'cause the round hit his radio and fragmented. But we medevacked him anyway, and he was very unpopular because he was such a smart aleck. So the platoon sergeant said, "We're gonna make a judgment call here. We can get another radioman." And once he stood up against the skyline, what we called sniper's delight where you'd get shot, I'm thinking maybe he's not paying close attention to the limits of his immortality. This is me in my home away from home. It's a poncho, waterproof poncho held up on sticks and branches, and underneath is a poncho liner, camouflaged sort of nylon blanket that we had. The Roman Army had their big red capes that they slept in, and the Confederates and the Union had blanket rolls over their shoulder. I think even into WWI you were still seeing that, with Europeans. And we had our Blankie; it was a poncho liner. In summer I still use one on the bed because it's very lightweight, and it dries out in a heartbeat after a rain. Here's a CH-46 helicopter, and that is the infamous counterintelligence team of five Navy--well three American Navy guys and two South Vietnamese guys. They had intelligence as to where the VC headquarters was, and I was assigned to protect them and be their muscle. They would call the shots of where we're going and what we're doing. But it was clear to me that they were hoping to capture troops, and in an unguarded moment I said, "What do you do once you've got enemy captured? Do you take them to the rear for questioning?" And he said, "No, I question them out in the field." I said, "Well, are you an interrogator?" He said, "Yeah, and I don't need any electrical generators hooked up to their genitalia. I've got my fingers, and that's all I need." and I said, "Well, I've got the Geneva Convention, and I'm willing to uphold it." He said, "Well, look, you're in a real war now. I'm not gonna have any shave tail

lieutenant telling me what to do." He was a warrant officer, which is kind of a weird hybrid between officer and enlisted. So it came down to it, and I said, "You've got five guys. I've got fifty-five guys. Push comes to shove, you're gonna be in a bad way. I don't want you torturing anybody. Once you're out of my jurisdiction there's not much I can do about it." We didn't capture anybody. We did find what we thought was a grave, and when his own troops, the warrant office who was in charge of the counterintelligence team, when his troops sort of demurred from digging up the grave to see who was under there, he pushed them aside and said, "Get out of here, you wienies. Let me show you how it's done," and started digging with his hands, and then all of a sudden he gets an ugly look on his face. And he goes, "Oh, my god." He smells his hand, and he says, "It's a latrine."

[Laughter]

Barker: That went around the platoon real fast. Hey, the jerk from the navy just dug up a latrine. And we found the VC headquarters. It amounted to a flattened-out spot in the weeds with a couple bags of rice and a little red flag that in Vietnamese was some kind of congratulations for rigging up explosive devices. It wasn't the headquarters. Viet Cong didn't have headquarters. They were so mobile, they were so loosely organized, and I said, "Where do you come up with these terms? That's a European army term." We were fighting an insurgency here. Well, even these weren't insurgents. They were locals who considered themselves patriots, and they were fighting a guerilla war against us. They didn't need a headquarters. So the whole thing was very disappointing. I was really glad when they got back on the helicopter and left because--and they got us into a firefight, you know.

Cohen: How did they get—

Barker: And that was the one where I lifted out of my body—

Cohen: Yes, yes.

Barker: --when they call me by name. And I still blame that warrant officer. We had a good thing going. The enemy would wake up at night and move around during the night. We'd set in, make a little noise so they knew where we were, they would avoid us, and then we'd move around during the day. They would go to sleep, and at dawn and dusk the flies and the mosquitos change places. It was like punching the clock at a factory, you know? And the deal was, we all go home alive, right. Shift change, okay, you guys are up. Don't shoot us. We're sitting over here in an ambush, [fakes a cough] clearing our throats and knocking things over so you know where we are. So don't come around here or we'll have to shoot you. But we would still bump into each other every once in a while and feel obliged to fight it out. My first reaction to combat was to jump up out of the hole and say, "Stop it. This is stupid. You don't know me; I don't know you. What are you shooting at me for? You know, I mean, it's

such a weird experience to have people actively trying to kill you, and there's no good reason. There's no personal reason.

Cohen: For a while there was, like you're saying, the Cold War, the shift work.

Barker: Yeah, and that was because they all knew Nixon was gonna pull the 1st Marine Division out. Or was it 1st Marine Regiment? No, it was 1st Marine Division, and leave in some of the air units.

Cohen: I see.

Barker: And support units. So we were just marking time until he did. And he did. And it actually shortened up my tour by four days, I think. But I'll take the four days. Here's another guy shooting the finger. And that is very common. You see a camera. You put up your middle finger. I don't know why. This is Apollonia. That was my weatherman, my radioman who replaced Blackman. Here's crossing rice paddy dykes. You stay on the dyke. This side is just wet mud. This side is growing plants, so that's just about to be harvested, and when they harvest it they'll break the dyke and flood this area. So first they have to plant that, then they have to harvest these things. And then they start the cycle all over again. And this guy is a Vietnamese, former North Vietnamese soldier. This is the enemy. His name is Henri, and I never found out his Vietnamese name, but he went by Henri because, and he spelled it H-E-N-R-I, because it's—

Both: French.

Barker: And he's sitting on a 46 just minding his own business. He was an interesting kid. I talked to him quite a bit. His North Vietnamese accent was so thick that the South Vietnamese couldn't understand him at all, so I wound up being a translator between him and the village chief.

[Laughter]

Barker: I'd say, "Henri, I think what he's saying is, 'What's the word for canned goods.'" You know, and he was a nice kid, though.

Cohen: Where did you learn Vietnamese? And was it southern or northern that you learned?

Barker: It was all southern. It was at High Intensity Language Training at Quantico. It was after basic school when I got out, so I got to be friends with Bob Bolman. He was married, so he raided an on-base housing unit with a second bedroom. His wife's poodle had had its leg run over and was patched up. So, he said, "You pay for the poodle leg and you've got free room and board at our place." Both of us were in High Intensity Language Training, so we both studied Vietnamese. He was pretty good, but the teacher was from Kansas City. He had never been to Vietnam, and he didn't know the most basic stuff about the language. He had a textbook to use, you know.

And the thing about Vietnamese is you don't speak it; you sing it. It's a tonal language like Chinese. So the example I always use is, if you jump into a cyclo and say, "Take me to the cathedral," you'd be using the word *nha thờ* for cathedral, but if you say [pronounced slightly differently] *nhà thổ*, it's a house of prostitution.

[Laughter]

Barker: Getting yourself into a--big difference. It was one of the more glaring ones. But I found when I got back from the war and I still had a lot of the language, that I would try it in Vietnamese restaurants, and the waitress would just look at me like, "What was that?" and I would say, "Chao co dep, chung to, muon mot, [pause] something [such as a beer, noodles, etc]"², and she'd kind of back away and go into the kitchen and get a couple other people and say, come out, as if to say let's see if he'll do it again.

[Laughter]

Barker: They'd have no idea what I was saying. I finally found out, you gotta sing it. You can't speak it. And I had more luck after that, but not during the war. On the return trip in '92, I found I could really communicate with cattle. You know.

Cohen: With cattle?

Barker: I'd say, "Xin loi, di di mau." Excuse me, get out of the way. And they're going, ewww, you know. So, here's a picture of Henri, sitting in a firebase somewhere facing out probably saying his Buddhist rosary. Now, this is a former North Vietnamese assailant, and this is the enemy, and he chieu hoi'ed. Chieu Hoi was the name of the program, open arms, for surrendering to the South so he could get some rice, some medical attention, a pair of boots, and a little piece of land. He's been in the jungle for two years. He was sick the whole time, underfed, got no mail, had no idea if his father was still alive, and it was considered a hero in the family. And we used to talk about the difference between the Marine Corps and the North Vietnamese army, what basic training was like, what boot camp was like. It was radically different, wildly different practices. When they graduated their drill instructor gave each of them a chrysanthemum. Quite different than what the Marine Corps does. And when I said, "What do you think of the Marines, he said, "I think that they are a dictatorship." I said, well of course." He said, "No, no, no, we vote in the North Vietnamese Army. The political cadre has to agree with the military cadre, and then they go out and do whatever they've agreed to do, but it's a democracy." There were a lot of surprises for me. One day walking up the road I took a picture of the platoon--this is when my numbers were up thanks to having artillery forward observers and the counterintelligence team and other attachments, I was up to fifty-five, and that is a line of space guys, far enough apart that a mortar round will only get one and not

² "Hello, Beautiful Young Lady, we would like one [pause] something [e.g. beer, noodles]"

two. And it goes off into the hazy humid air so you can't see the point man, and if I turn around backwards there's another line of troops going behind me, you know, off into the distance and there's a rear-end-Charlie who turns around every few steps and faces to the rear to make sure nothing's coming up behind us. And whenever we made a stop each guy would look at the guy in front of him and see which way he was facing. You'd face outboard, just in case there was anybody lined up on one side. You'd never have an ambush on both sides, because that's like setting up a circular firing squad. You'll wind up shooting at each other, so ambushes only come in a straight, one line shooting one direction or an L-shaped ambush where the bottom part of the "L" has to be really careful not to swing their weapons to the left 'cause they'll start shooting their own guys, so L-shaped ambushes take some coordinating. But this guy is facing outboard, and he's checked to see the other guy is facing outboard in the other direction. So he faces right, the next guy faces left, the next one right, the next one left, and that way if anything pops up half the platoon is already facing the right direction for return fire.

Cohen: Oh, I see, I see.

Barker: And here's a couple of shell craters further up the road reflecting with the sky. These are small, so it's probably artillery--155 or 105s. I'll show you the big craters in a little bit. One of my troopers, being dashing, really wanted a copy of that to send to his girlfriend. And he says, "You've got to admit I'm handsome, right, Lieutenant?" I said, "You'd look better if you had a weapon strung across you." He says, "No, man, I'm into peace."

[Laughter]

Barker: The hippie influence was very strong. Most of my classmate of officers had formerly been hippies, and we all got haircuts before we went into the Marine Corps.

Cohen: Do you think it's because of the timing of when you were in Vietnam, like 1970 versus 1967 or something?

Barker: Right. Right. Normal American kids were happening in the first four or five years of the war. By the end of the war it was all draftees. Most of mine were court referrals, where the judge said, "You're in trouble. You can either go to a home for wayward youth, or you can join the Marines. Take your pick." And it was all for petty stuff, you know, but again many of them had never been off the block. They had never been two streets from where they were born in Detroit, and they find themselves in a foreign land with a foreign language where they know all the locals are talking about them. You know, where the men hold hands with each other if they're friends. That freaked them out totally. Where, if you want to talk to a village chief or an older person, you have to be very deferential to the fact that they're older than you. You have to learn to squat down until your knees are ready to break and put your knees in your armpit. And you always face side by side, never directly opposite each other.

That's confrontational. You face the same direction. And while you're talking you pick up some dirt and put it in your mouth just to test the soil, 'cause every good farmer knows what good dirt tastes like, and it's like an agreed-upon thing. "I must say, dirt's pretty good here. You could grow rice here."

Cohen: Like a basic courtesy.

Barker: Right. And after you've been talking for a while the village chief will put his hand on your knee and leave it there, and for the troops that was like, "Man, what is he doing?"

[Laughter]

Barker: "What does this mean? Are we engaged or what?" [Laughing] So, I had to do acculturation classes, you know. It was often pretty weird. So, this is a chapter that's dedicated to one of my most favorite things in the world, the CH-46 double rotor helicopter, the cargo helicopter. Smaller than the army's Chinook, which it gets mistaken for, periodically. The way you can tell the difference is the CH-46 has little hips for the two back wheels and one wheel in the front. The Chinook has a gas tank that runs the whole length of it. And if you had them side by side the Chinook has a square body. This has a round body like a tube.

Cohen: Yeah.

Barker: The other one is like a shoebox. It's considerably bigger. It can fit a lot more, it can travel further because it's got the extra gas on it, so it's a heavy hauler, but this thing is light and agile and fast, and it's everything you need when you're out in the field. All good things come from the CH-46.

Cohen: So, what good things were transported in the CH-46? What were the quantities, just to get a sense of capacity?

Barker: The main content was us. We could hitch a ride. We could say, "We can't walk that far in that amount of time. We need a lift." The CH-46 could fit our whole platoon if some guys at on the floor. You sat along the edges, on sling seats, the windows stayed closed because they were permanent, but all the side doors with the crew chief and the gunners, and there's a little door that goes into the pilot's compartment up there. You sit in those sling seats; you can push those seats up if you need to drive a jeep or a mule on board. They also come with food in a net sling hanging on a strap, and the strap goes through a square hole called the hell hole--it's two-foot by two-foot--and attaches to the spine of the helicopter overhead. And the crew chief gets down there, and somebody on the ground unhooks the shackles and brings the net back empty and dumps everything as he rises up. So they were the source of food, they were the source of water, they were the source of medicine. They were medevacs, they were transportation, and most--the most positive thing about them was that as soon as you got up a couple hundred feet in the air, the

temperature changed, and now you're in an air-conditioned vehicle flying through the air at sixty, seventy miles an hour and wind is blowing through all the openings. Unfortunately, you then see all the bullet holes in the ceiling with the sunlight. You start wondering what all these spots of light on the floor are. You realize it's coming from that hole, and that hole is going up pointing towards the sun. They had green tape like duct tape--they called it hundred-mile-an-hour tape--tear of a piece and stick it over the hole. That's all the solution they needed, unless it had punctured a hydraulic line or an electrical cable or something. Then they had some serious repair to do. I accidentally took a picture with the camera sitting on my lap looking out a window, and I thought, well, I kinda like the picture. It's not one you'll see every day.

Cohen: Good shot. No.

Barker: And they had a drawbridge on the back that they could lower down. The crew chief would go to the front where he had a switch, and he would drop the drawbridge down, and everybody could run off or run on. You could carry on bodies in body bags or guys in stretchers. And, or you could pile off whatever ammunition, or sometimes they would make deliveries. You know, they'd stop at this firebase, stop at this unit out in the middle of nowhere, stop at these guys by the bridge and drop off stuff each time. So they were the source of everything good to us. And when they gave you a lift your whole platoon would be up in the air, and all of a sudden it's cool, dry air. It's air conditioning. And you've just been sweating for a week in the super humid, hot weather. And it makes you realize how thin the atmosphere is. And there were times I'd be sweltering under a eucalyptus tree or something and looking up and thinking, I just need to get up there 200 feet. I'll be fine, you know. How am I gonna do this? Hot air balloon, what? Just anything to get above, and also gave you a chance to look at the landscape, and that is the Túy Loan River, where one of my bigger firefights happened with the counterintelligence team, and rice paddies all around it. This is number eighty-two or ninety-two. Yeah, picture number eighty-two. The guy in charge of each helicopter was the crew chief. One of them is seen here looking down, and he's the one who controls everything that happens when it hits the ground. He's really the boss of the helicopter. Often pilots and copilots could change, but the crew chief, that's his baby. And so he can get pretty upset if you track mud into his helicopter, you know, or put a dent in it. There's the drawbridge going downloading stuff on. In the back there's a thing called a water buffalo, not to be misunderstood as the con trau animal. The water buffalo is, I forget, how many gallons, something immense, with double tires on both sides and a trailer hitch in the front, and that was the source of drinking water if you were gonna be permanent somewhere. It could be easily hooked up with a strap and carried off with the next helicopter. I just thought that was a nice picture of a crew chief. He's over his 50-caliber. And this was a kid who was helping me on payday. He was my protection. He had an M-16, I had a 45, and we had 40,000 dollars, and we were saying, "You think we can make it to Mexico before they discover we're gone?"

[Laughter]

Barker: We could arrange something with the crew chief on this helicopter. There's the crew chief looking really unhappy. I can't remember what we had done to his helicopter, but I don't think it was mud. I think we were putting dents in it. And this is why they refer to the take off as a dust off, why most landing zones have a rubber mat or some kind of flooring to prevent that big dust.

[1:19:30-1:22.47 – Cut - Interruption]

Barker: The last chapter is called "Kilo Three Actual."

Cohen: I'm sorry, what is it called?

Barker: "Kilo Three Actual." The 3rd platoon of Kilo Company is on the radio call sign is kilo-3, and what that gets you is the platoon radio operator, and he verbally communicates with the platoon commander, but if you want the actual platoon commander on the radio because you've got something secret to say or something private, something you don't want getting out, then you ask for the actual, meaning I don't just want kilo-3, I want the kilo-3 actual, the real guy. So I get on there, and usually he'll say something about, you know--we had things called whiz wheels that would allow us to encode numbers. And if we wanted to give our location we had to put it in code. And we had to burn the interchangeable pages of the whiz wheels. They were clear plastic things with, like, a telephone dial. You had to burn pages at the end of a day, and every once in a while I'd get a call from the security officer, the intelligence officer in the rear, and go to the combat operations center, ask for kilo-3. He'd get my radioman, and he'd say, "Give me the actual." And he'd get on the line and say, "Did you burn your code sheets for such and such a date, 'cause we've got a breach. It appears they were able to decode something, and we're thinking maybe you lost them and that they found them," or something like that, you know. So usually when they were asking for me I was in trouble. Something I'd forgotten to do or, just--and I was so under-slept most of the time in the field, not only was it uncomfortable always trying to get those sticks and rocks out from under you to get to sleep, but I'd keep waking up in the middle of the night with this image of an Asian guy with an AK-47 with a bayonet standing over me, you know. And I always kept the pistol nearby so I could just pick it up and shoot. And between the anxiety and dozens of things you had to think of and keep track of and juggle, and I've never been good at eight-tracking, and the discomfort, I just didn't get a lot of sleep. So I'd be like a zombie when I'd get on the phone sometimes to talk to the--I never got a call from the battalion commander, but I did get calls from his executive officer or somebody who said, "The battalion commander wants you to know this or do this," or something. Like for instance we changed battalion commanders, so I got a call saying, "You're gonna get a visit from special people," and I'd say, "Are these special people at a six level?" Because the commander of the battalion is called 3-1-6. Six is the name of a captain or--and I was a lowly lieutenant, so I was just an actual. I don't

know. Anyway, there's this whole radio code, and it was an indication that the new battalion commander--you put two and two together and figure a new battalion commander's coming out to visit. They don't want the guys listening in on the radios to know that because now they've got a special target. Hey, we should down his helicopter. We've killed off a colonel. So the helicopter lands, and a bunch of guys rush off, and he's a new colonel, and fortunately, he was smart enough to hide all his rank insignia. But he walked up to me and said, "Who's the actual, here?" And I said, "I am, sir." And he said, "What's this you got on your keychain—I mean, on your dog tag chain?" I said, "It's a peace symbol," made out of a hand grenade ring with two cotter pins. You know, my radioman Apollonia used to do this with the needle nose pliers that came with the radio, and he'd sell them for a dollar a pop. And he said, "It goes to the Apollonia educational fund." And so all of us at least in the command group of four or five guys for the platoon--platoon sergeant, me, the radioman, the two corpsmen, and I'm trying to think, sometimes the attachments like the forward observers--we all had peace signs on, and my sister had just sent me a package the day before that had been a month or so getting to me, and this is in March after Mardi Gras, in February. So it took that long for this whole package, this big package of Mardi Gras beads. So all these purple and gold and green and multicolored beads, you know, not what you wear when you want to be in combat, but nonetheless the whole CP group was wearing bright colored beads.

[Laughter]

Barker: And the new battalion commander says, "What's with the peace sign?" I said, "Uh, we're fighting for peace, aren't we, Sir?" He said, "Okay, you can explain that, but what's with the love beads?" And they were Mardi Gras beads. And he said, "Yeah, how many sniper scopes do you think are pointed at your love beads right now?"

[Laughter]

Barker: It was embarrassing. I don't think he was too happy when he left. Maybe that's why I got bumped up to executive officer of H&S Company. This guy is perverting his platoon, you know.

Cohen: Was it right after the visit that you were bumped up?

Barker: No, it was actually a couple of weeks, and it turns out the real reason--I thought it was because they were trying to rotate the young lieutenants into combat, let them see some shooting, they get to wear the combat action ribbon, rotate them out; now they can have a career, 'cause you're not gonna go anywhere in the Marine Corps if you haven't seen combat. It's the good ol' boys club, to this day I'm sure. And it was that the commanding officer of H&S company had met me over lunch one day, we just had a conversation, and he thought, okay this is a smart guy, and he seems friendly enough that this is who I want to take the place of my XO whose about to leave. His XO rotated out, he went to the colonel and said, "I want Barker." And I

said, "So you're the one I can blame for this miserable condition. Now I'm commanding two clerk typists and I fly a desk. And I've got to remember how to type. And I'm in charge of the 81 Mortar Platoon as well as all the trucks and all of the recoilless rifles. And 81 Mortar Platoon was all the bad guys who were waiting for dishonorable discharges or a court date, and we put them all in there because the 81 mortar was too big to take out to the field. The mortars themselves are like five feet tall. So we had no use for them. They didn't have a far enough range to get over the mountains, and they were too heavy to carry out into the field, so we used it like a prison gang or something. They were dangerous. I slept in a different bed every night because I was expecting to hear a grenade come rolling across the floor under whatever cot I was in.

Cohen: Wow.

Barker: But eventually when we got back to the States we got them squared away. Everybody went their way, and then I became their actual platoon commander because I couldn't be executive officer anymore. I wasn't senior enough. But during the war they threw all those rules to the wind, you know. Pick who you want. Whoever you think can do the job. So here's a picture of me. It looks like I've got jungle rot on the cheek, but that's actually just a defect on the photograph. But I don't know who took this picture, but it indicates what a young person I was at the time. Here's enjoying a fine meal of canned goods. I actually liked C-rations and brought home a case of them when I was stationed later at Camp Pendleton. And now that case is in the National Museum of the Marine Corps with my name at the bottom. And one of my peace signs is also on display there.

Cohen: Is it also there? This is--oh, cool.

Barker: This is a field of elephant grass, these tall weeds. There's Apollonia, the radioman in the background. That's me looking at my pistol, that's one of the corpsmen, and this is a couple hours before a big firefight when we pushed our way up into these trees. That's where we ran into a line of them, and I tried to get the squad that was behind me in the column to swing like a gate and hit these guys from their right side. That's just the standard thing to do. It's not clever or anything. But it was chaos. I couldn't tell--and they were retreating as they fired, so the situation was constantly moving. And here is Sergeant McCauslin in the middle of these two guys. The black guy is one of the squad leaders. Here are my two other squad leaders. One's name was Tally, and I can't remember the other one, but I can figure it out from the little notebook I've got. These are my two medical corpsmen. In the army they'd call for a medic. In the Marine Corps they call for a corpsman. From the medical corps. I don't see what the difference is, but corpsman carry a 45. They're not offensive; they don't shoot at anybody. The 45 is just for self-defense. And they carry a big bag of medical supplies, and these guys are so well trained, they can deliver babies, they can deliver water buffalos, they can do C-sections. I think they can do open-heart surgery if need be. They patch up bullet holes, they treat for shock, they get air electrolytes into them.

Everybody carries a bag of saltwater or sugar water--saline or sucrose solution--so that we always got plenty of anti-shock treatment, and all of us learned to start an IV, find the vein in the elbow and get water into them, because shock was a big issue in some kinds of wounds. This one is Ganger--no, this one is Hull. This one is Ganger. Ganger is the senior guy because he had a year more experience than Hull. But they were the first things the enemy would shoot if they could figure out who the corpsmen were. That way the next guys they would shoot can't get any medical attention. And often they would shoot people to wound so that when a guy went down, exposed to everybody, the corpsman would try to get to him, and they'd often let the corpsman work until it was time to move the guy and then it would take at least two people to drag him, and that way they can get two more, and they'd have three down. It was just a—

Cohen: Oh, that's terrible—

Barker: --game of numbers, yeah. This is a bunker in some god-forsaken place that I don't remember, but you get to feeling like a rabbit after some time. One of my favorite pictures is, this is my company commander for Kilo Company. And the whole staff of Kilo Company came to visit us. The captain doesn't have his own troops. We are his troops. So he comes to visit his platoon on a rotating basis. When he got to 3rd platoon he was badly in need of a bath, and we had 500-pound bomb craters, the size of a house, filled with what looked like clear water. So there's the captain. Next to him is the company gunnery sergeant, and next to him is his executive officer, and next to him is me. And somebody had a bar of soap. So we scrubbed our heads, 'cause you get sores in your head after a while if you don't get regular cleanup, and there's the second picture. You can see a trooper on the edge of the crater, who gives you an idea of scale. These are big holes, and they're all eroding. They were much bigger when they first blew up. So when they drop 500-pound bombs, you can fit a small house in one without touching the edges. They are really impressive pieces of armament. And I just think this demonstrates the farmer's tan royally. All the forearms are bright red and brown and all the faces and necks are brown, everything else is lily white. And when we got out we discovered leeches up and down our legs. And that was exciting. All you had to do was hold a cigarette up to them, and they would release.

[Phone ringing]

Barker: Excuse me a minute. [Shuts off phone] Okay. And finally here's a picture of the only time I got to wear my dress blues after I got out of school. That's with my then girlfriend, later wife, Susan. And we're going to a Mardi Gras ball after getting back, and I have a picture with my mom in that position, as well. And I forget which Mardi Gras ball it was, but I'm from New Orleans, and so everybody was expected to be in costume, and when we got to the ball several people came up and said, "Your costume is so convincing."

[Laughter]

Barker: Thank you. It's a really good rental place. Okay, that's the photographs.

Cohen: Did you want to talk about the [notebook which Barker organized]?

Barker: Yes. This is the civilian modern version of this [comparing cell phone to notebook], and this is what I'm so proud of. I'd never seen the like of it from anybody else. And it made me wonder how other guys functioned in the field. But this was the platoon office. It had everything you needed. It's a three-ring binder. It's got a mirror in the back, which hopefully will deflect some shrapnel as it tries to pass through getting to you. It was ostensibly so I can shave, but you don't shave in the field. Everybody-- you shave when you get to the rear. Why risk another infection by nicking yourself? Plus, who you dressing up for? In half an hour you're gonna be sweaty and dirty and a mess all over again. Its main purpose was to keep track of the troops, so everyone in my platoon is listed in here by their rank, their name, in this case E4 Lawrence, P. E. Twenty-one years old. His service number is below that. His blood type--he was A-positive. His religious affiliation. In this case it was none. His rotation date was 28 July, his date of rank was 1 August. His rifle serial number was blah-blah-blah, and his parent was George Lawrence of Marysville, California. And, two years--oh, and he had two years of college.

Cohen: So—

Barker: Rare. Oh, there's Sergeant Aguilar. He was one of my squad leaders. Catholic, as you might guess. Wife was Paula Cortez in Harlingen, Texas. Rifle number, date of birth, etcetera. So that's useful for when people get wounded, and—ah, and here's Sergeant McCauslin, R.L. his wife's name was Peggy. She was living in Honolulu while he was overseas. A lot of wives stayed in Hawaii 'cause it was an easy shot from Vietnam to Hawaii. Any married man could have his wife come out for R&R, and he'd get a week in Honolulu with their wives. I had a week in Sydney, Australia, because they had an open seat on a plane. And my H&S company commander said, "Get on that plane." I said, "Well, look at the stack on my desk. I can't do this." I said, "We're gonna be shipping back to the states. I've got to get a loading plan for the planes for how we're gonna move the trucks to get them down to the ships for transport." And he said, "I'll cover for you. I'll lie if I have to, but you get on that R&R bird, and get a week away from this. You'll be able to function a lot better." And I had a ball. I learned so much about kangaroos. It was-- which turned out to be useful later when I started working in zoos. It probably saved my neck one night when a giant male, looking eye level with me, came in one night when I was painting his enclosure. And fortunately I was spray-painting a mural of an Australian outback, and I turned around, and there he was looking at me. They can rock back on their tail and hit you with their back feet and break everything in your torso, rupture all your organs and break all your ribs and kill you. And I'm thinking about this and I'm looking at this guy and thinking what to do. And I've got a spray gun full of olive

green. And I'm thinking, do I spray him? Boy, the keepers would really be mad. But it sure beats being killed.

Cohen: Yeah, it sure does.

Barker: And just then my compressor kicks on. It goes [sputtering sound] like that, and, man, he was up and gone. And I thought, "Thank you, compressor." Okay, elsewhere in here are plastic covered things like how to be a witness in what a provost marshal is gonna ask you, how to read a guy his rights, how to make an arrest. You are suspected of, blah, you have the right to remain silent. The Miranda Rights were just coming in at that point I think. And I only had to arrest half a dozen guys, and it was always for petty stuff. Oh, and there's my page. Barker, Catholic, blood type O-positive, college.

Cohen: So, if someone was hurt and helicoptered back to the base or to the ship, would you keep track of it in this book, like a change in their whereabouts?

Barker: I wish I could say yes, but unfortunately, when someone got on a medevac helicopter that was the last we ever heard of them. We don't know, couldn't find out if they survived, if they were gonna come back to us or-- In one case a trooper came back, and he had a job with the cooks because his leg had been injured, and it was clear it was not a deadly wound, you know, but he was on light duty for the rest of his time in the Marine Corps. In here also addresses of girlfriends and loved ones and relatives and things I meant to do when I got out, so I wouldn't forget to go to the Whole Earth catalog store in Menlo Park, California. And all this other plastic plasticized stuff. Some of this refers to places at Camp Pendleton. Oh, there's my list of how I was gonna get up to snuff on my uniforms by buying them from second-hand stores within the Marine Corps. And I got by for a couple thousand dollars and saved myself some real serious money compared to getting everything new, 'cause I was not a career guy, you know. Okay. In addition were map signals. How you designate--what kind of symbol you use to designate what kind of unit. And this hasn't changed much. And in recent times there were devices that you use for mapping. There were fold-up pages...let's see in this case, how to deliver a solute report, a spot report guide. These are all tactical reports. A wounded in action report, a tactical air request. You can see things are bureaucratic even out in the field. All these others are stuff like call for fire, and it's too bad I didn't pay attention to them. I blew my own hill away one night. We had some sniper fire. We couldn't tell exactly where it was coming from, so we put out fire in all directions, and it was a firework's show. It was really impressive how much tax dollars were burned up in a couple of seconds. But I called in our artillery, and I asked for a Willy Peter--white phosphorus--because it marks the place. You can't miss it at night. It's a blinding white light. And he was just short of the hill we needed him to hit, so I said--I adjusted the fire for him. I should have stuck to the normal routine, but I just said, "Add fifty meters and fire for effect." And give--so he calls back and says, "Okay, you've got five rounds of HE coming your way." And I'm hearing (whooshing sound]

through the air, and I'm thinking, "That's not a 105." And I said to Sergeant McCauslin, "Listen to that. It sounds like a freight train." And he said, "That's a 155. That's the big guns." And I said, "Oh, my god. That's not the army artillery shooting for us down at engineer pass. That's somewhere farther south." And he says, "Yeah, I don't know where they are." So I don't know what that adjustment means. If they add fifty meters where's it gonna hit? The answer came when it hit our hill and blew a big hole in the middle of the road and proceeded to land, I think, four rounds before we were able to stop them. They were in the air and we're going, "Shut it off. Shut it off!" And reverted to a little cussing, I'm afraid, got a little too excited yelling at them. And a little voice comes on the radio that says, "Bead window." And I said, "Who are you?" And I'm still cussing. And Sergeant McCauslin is saying, "Sir, that's the cussing monitor. He's at division level listening if anybody was inappropriately cussing on the radio."

Cohen: Oh, my god.

Barker: [Chuckling] I said, "You gotta be kidding."

Cohen: And thinking, too, this is—

Barker: One of the really useful cards was the five-paragraph order--I had to type this up myself because I couldn't find anything like it--the five paragraphs are the different things that troops need to know before you issue an order. You gotta do it in the right order, like, what are we gonna do, when are we gonna do it, what are the signals while we're doing it, what do we do if this happens, what do you need to know logistically, how do you need to prepare your men, what do you need to carry, etcetera. And you do it in the right order, and theoretically everybody is on board. In all military situations the KISS rule was predominant. "Keep it simple, stupid," became "keep it simple and stupid". That way Marines can handle it. Here are military payment certificates, which were beautiful. They came in all colors. They had bison, they had Mount Rushmore, they had the Statue of Liberty on them. This one is worth a nickel, and this one is worth fifty cents.

[Laughter]

Barker: That's a little presumptuous. These are what we used to find laying out in the field, and we can probably get close-ups of those later. It says basically in Vietnamese, "You get rice, you get medical attention, and you get a little bit of land if you throw your rifle over your shoulder with the muzzle pointed down, raise your hands, and surrender to the government of South Vietnam. And so I think that's what Henri saw, something like this. And I didn't know that they had counter propaganda that they were dropping, but this is what their stuff looked like. And this is a copy off of the Internet. It has awkward phrasing. "You'll be warmly welcomed. The Quang Nam Da Province National Front for Liberation. Take this paper, present it to the people, and ask them to lead you to the nearest front committees office or IAF unit." I don't

know what the--and the bottom of their Viet Cong flag it says, "For the happiness of American servicemen in South Vietnam."

[Laughter]

Barker: I just love massacred English, and they never had live translators that I can figure. So I think that's all the interesting stuff, but this allowed me to keep track of what was going on and use the map. I had a plasticized map, in other words the same—

Cohen: Oh, same size?

Barker: --shelf lining, with plastic on both sides so it could get rained on. So, you couldn't roll it. You had to fold it, and it had pre-plotted artillery targets. You could just say, "Target number so-and-so, and I'll adjust from there." And it had all kinds of information written on it. It had grease pencils in three colors that came with it, and you'd use a handkerchief or your sleeve or something to wipe off the stuff. And I had a great pair of binoculars I'd bought on Okinawa that were Zeiss, and they had mirrors in them, so almost like a periscope so that the tubes were up here, but they were much longer because of this bouncing thing it did. And you could spot something--you didn't have to hunt around like you do with most binoculars. You had a broad field of vision, and then you could just turn a wheel and zoom in on stuff. So, when I left the field my replacement came up, and I gave him the map, the grease pencils, and the binoculars. And I'm really sorry to have given up those binoculars, but boy they really made the job easier. I never did get a picture of myself with the binoculars 'cause that's gungy, you know.

Cohen: Oh, a little too much.

Barker: Okay.

Cohen: Well, thank you so much, and thank you for coming back and sharing the photos—

Barker: My pleasure.

Cohen: --and the map, and it gives us more of a tangible understanding. Thank you.

Barker: You're very welcome.