

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
Doug Bradley
Reporter, Army, Vietnam War.

2005

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Bradley, Doug, (b. 1947). Oral History Interview, 2005.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 45 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 45 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder)

Abstract:

Doug Bradley, a Madison, Wisconsin resident, discusses his service as a reporter in the Information Office (“IO”) of the Army during the Vietnam War. Bradley describes his teenage years in Pennsylvania and Ohio. He was the first person in his family to go to college, attending Bethany College (West Virginia) where he majored in English, played basketball, and worked on the school newspaper. Bradley mentions he developed a love of rock and roll in high school, and in college he was elected “social chairman” and brought groups like Smokey and the Miracles to campus. After he graduated in May 1969, Bradley explains he lost his deferment, even though he had been accepted into law school. He states he was scheduled to be drafted by November, but Nixon cancelled that draft and switched to the lottery system. Bradley had a low draft number and was called up in March 1970. Bradley tells how he took his savings and went to the Bahamas on his “last hurrah” before reporting to duty. On the return flight, he had a serendipitous meeting with a friendly soldier who advised him to take the tests seriously during training because they affected your placement in the military. Bradley touches upon his basic training at Fort Dix (New Jersey), stating he followed the soldier’s advice, scored well, and became an information specialist. Bradley reveals that he resisted recruitment from officers to go to Officer Candidate School because he learned lieutenants did not survive long in Vietnam. Because of his test scores, Bradley was reassigned to the Army Hometown News Center in Kansas City (Missouri). He states his duties there involved compiling taped or written interviews with servicemen and sending them to hometown radio stations and family members. Bradley comments that he liked this job but was deployed to Vietnam in autumn of 1970. He briefly covers his journey, flying on a commercial aircraft from San Francisco to Tan Son Nhut. Bradley was assigned to Army Headquarters in Long Binh (Vietnam) where he remained throughout his tour. Bradley shares his first impression of Vietnam, stating: “I expected to feel like I was someplace else, except for the people and the smells and the heat, it seemed like I was in some Southern town” in the U.S. Bradley describes the base at Long Binh which had 50,000 troops when he arrived. He contrasts the officers’ air conditioned quarters where he worked with the enlisted men’s “hooches.” Bradley explains he was a reporter and editor with a weekly newspaper called *The Army Reporter* and a monthly magazine called *Uptight*. Bradley depicts his commanding officer, Colonel Alfred Mock, a UW-Madison graduate, as a “broadminded, fair, principled guy [who] understood some of the passion and concern that there was around Vietnam from guys like me who were coming out of college.” Bradley describes in detail the process of printing the weekly paper: Sunday and Monday they would lay it out and paste it together to be shipped to the *Stars and Stripes* offices in Japan for printing. The paper would be sent to Japan on Thursday and copies would be received a week later, then Bradley and his department would distribute it to Army personnel throughout Vietnam, driving up Highway 13 to Bien Hoa. Bradley recalls the paper included news, advice, weather, obituaries, music reviews, and pinups. He suggests it was the second most popular Army paper after *Stars and Stripes* and

focused on the average soldier's experiences. He provides examples of features that appeared in *The Army Reporter*, contrasting it with *Stars and Stripes*. Bradley states he also had to pull perimeter guard duty at Ling Binh but he never went out on ambush patrol. He discusses Viet Cong rocket attacks and attempts to infiltrate the base in 1971 and mentions the South Vietnamese elections in August 1971 put everyone on high alert. Bradley frequently went to Saigon to get the news and deliver the rushes to the *Stars and Stripes* headquarters at the Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MATV). According to Bradley, Saigon "was like being in any kind of big city outside an Army base...there was women and bars and music and great food." He mentions soldiers going to brothels, drinking in bars, and using drugs but comments he did not engage in these activities. On his day off, Bradley would go to the movie theater and eat at French restaurants in Saigon. Bradley clarifies that he was assigned to the Command Information department; his duty was to stay on base, edit the stories, and layout the paper for printing. Later, when the Information office was reduced in size, Bradley did more outside reporting with the Public Information department. For example, he describes shadowing a South Vietnamese (ARVN) soldier through basic training and patrols for a story. Bradley also tells of an incident where U.S. Army and ARVN troops were supposed to work together to reclaim some abandoned equipment. When the Viet Cong fired, the South Vietnamese troops did not come to the Americans' aid, so the American soldiers fired on the South Vietnamese. Bradley reveals he did not write up this story in the newspaper; however, he felt it illustrated one of the great ironies of the Vietnam War. He adds: "a lot of the troops that I used to interview had a little more respect for 'Charlie' than they did for the ARVN." Bradley characterizes troop morale as low during Vietnamization; soldiers fought boredom, frustration, or dread, and "nobody wanted to be the last GI killed in Vietnam." Bradley addresses widespread drug and alcohol abuse and talks about the "chasm" that existed between "lifers" in their forties and draftees in their twenties: "We were fighting with our fathers back home, so we might as well fight with our commanding officers." In his unit, Bradley recalls frequent marijuana use, which he calls "just recreational" and "no big deal." He explains the Army tried to clamp down on marijuana use and suggests soldiers turned to snorting heroin because "there was no telltale odor." Bradley also discusses tensions between Army reporters and grunt troops who were jealous and resentful of the information specialists. Bradley reports he did some humanitarian work with orphanages in Ling Binh. He states he felt the U.S. Army's mission was to hand the war over to the South Vietnamese, but he suspected the South Vietnamese would eventually lose to the Viet Cong. Bradley expresses sympathy for the South Vietnamese but states he "didn't feel strongly enough that I thought theirs was a cause that I needed to die for." After the war, Bradley moved to Madison (Wisconsin) and worked at the Vet's House from 1974 to 1977. He states the Vet's House helped with job placements and motivational counseling, did prison outreach, and opened a halfway house. Bradley feels Madison civilians reacted positively and supportively to the Vet's House and most Vietnam Veterans. However, he did not feel welcome in mainstream veterans organizations like the American Legion or the VFW because the members thought "we weren't the right kind of soldiers" and blamed the Vietnam Veterans for losing the war. Bradley reflects on the legacy of Vietnam, sharing his view that: "the rhetoric we had [during the 2004 presidential election] is a reflection of the fact that this country never really came to grips with what Vietnam was and is." Finally, he comments that music was omnipresent in Vietnam whether on instruments and cassette tapes. Bradley reveals he is working with a UW Madison professor to write a book connecting the "Top 20" rock and roll songs of the Vietnam War to personal anecdotes from veterans, drawing broader conclusions about the war, race, and the 1960s generation. To sum up,

Bradley states: “I had probably one of *the* best military jobs you could have because you could use your brain, write stories, be a reporter, see things, have access to things a lot of people didn't.”

Biographical Sketch:

Bradley (b. 1947) was born in Philadelphia (Pennsylvania) and grew up in Youngstown (Ohio) and Pittsburgh (Pennsylvania). He graduated from Bethany College (West Virginia) in 1969 and was drafted into the Army in 1970. He served as a reporter with the Information Office during the Vietnam War, editing and writing for *The Army Reporter* and *Uptight* magazine. After the war, he moved to Madison (Wisconsin) and worked from 1974 to 1977 at the Vet's House, serving as president for one year. Bradley now works for the University of Wisconsin System as Director of Communications in the president's office. He is writing a book with a UW professor about the importance of rock and roll in the Vietnam War.

Interviewed by Jim Kurtz, 2005

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Interview Transcript:

- KURTZ: March 23rd, 2005. My name is Jim Kurtz and I'm interviewing Doug Bradley. Doug, where do you live now?
- BRADLEY: Jim, I live at 1013 Tramore Trail in Madison, Wisconsin.
- KURTZ: And where are you employed?
- BRADLEY: I work for the University of Wisconsin System. I'm in the president's office.
- KURTZ: Okay. And what's your responsibilities there?
- BRADLEY: Director of Communications, which has a lot to do with my experience in Vietnam.
- KURTZ: Okay. Where were you born, Doug?
- BRADLEY: Born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1947.
- KURTZ: And what date?
- BRADLEY: June 7th.
- KURTZ: June 7th, day after D-Day?
- BRADLEY: Yup.
- KURTZ: And did you grow up in the Philadelphia area?
- BRADLEY: I did. I lived there for about twelve years, and then my dad, who was a World War II veteran, was in sales and we spent brief periods of time in Youngstown, Ohio and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. And it was in Pittsburgh where I got acquainted with a nice little liberal arts college where I could play basketball. So I went to -- first generation of the family, my brother and I, to go to college. I went to college in West Virginia. My folks then moved back to Philadelphia and I've sort of been wandering ever since, although the last thirty years in Madison.
- KURTZ: Okay. And what was the college in West Virginia?
- BRADLEY: Bethany College. Small little liberal arts school. Nice little school.
- KURTZ: And what city?
- BRADLEY: Bethany, West Virginia.

KURTZ: Oh, that's a good reason.

BRADLEY: Yeah. It's close to Wheeling. It's sort of between Pittsburgh and Wheeling.

KURTZ: So what year did you get out of college? You played--

BRADLEY: I graduated from college in May of 1969. By June I'd lost my draft deferment, even though I was accepted to law school in the fall and by -- oh, by November I was -- by October I'd passed my physical and I was due to be called up, but then Nixon cancelled November and December draft calls. There was the first lottery. So I got-- I thought I was getting lucky but unfortunately my number, my birth date was pulled relatively soon.

KURTZ: Do you remember what your lottery number was?

BRADLEY: Fifty -- I believe fifty-three.

KURTZ: Fifty-three. And then so you got drafted then like in?

BRADLEY: March.

KURTZ: March of '70?

BRADLEY: March of 1970. Fort Dix.

KURT: Fort Dix.

BRADLEY: New Jersey.

KURTZ: Some people would say you dodged the bullet by missing law school. How do you feel about that?

BRADLEY: (laughs) That's very well put. Interestingly enough I didn't go back to law school. So I think it's just, you know, how you're -- you know, the arc of your life at a particular time and what a different person and life you would have had. Yeah, I think -- I have no regrets about not going back to law school, and Boston, you know, was where I was accepted. It had been a whole different experience than Fort Dix and then Kansas City and then Long Binh.

KURTZ: Okay. So when did you -- can you -- excuse me, Fort Dix, what happened there? When did you report?

BRADLEY: Well, I reported on March 2nd of 1970, and I got -- Jim, this is one of those serendipity things where you get lucky. I had -- I'd been down -- I figured, you

know, this might be the last hurrah. So I took my meager savings that I gathered from working construction that fall because I wasn't in law school and I went down to the Bahamas and so I figured I'd go down there and relax and have some fun, get some sun, and I met a young lady who was from Buffalo, New York and she was still in college. So I decided when I got back home after being in Nassau for about ten days, two weeks, 'cause it was just a matter of time when I was going in, that she and I kept correspondence and we called. So I went up to see her just before I went into the service. And those were the days when people flew military standby. So there was a young guy who got standby called and he came and sat next to me and I thought, geez, I don't want sit next to a guy who's in the service because I'm going to be with these guys the next couple years of my life. But he sat next to me and he was a really nice guy, gregarious. We started talking and he gave me some really terrific advice. He said "Look," he said, "They're gonna -- they're gonna intimidate you when you get into basic training, you know, you're gonna to be a little frightened and unsure of yourself. One thing you have to do for sure is they're gonna give you a battery of tests for the first couple of days. I mean, they're going to holler at you and shave your head and etc." But he said, "Make sure that those -- that you take those tests seriously because that's gonna have an impact on what your military occupational or specialty will be." And we had a nice chat and I took that advice. So I remember the day we had those tests, you know. Some guys, you know, slept. Some guys just went through and marked, you know, just randomly the answers. But I took them seriously and I came out with this incredibly high score for aptitude in writing and English 'cause I had been an English major in college and I wrote for the college newspaper, etc. And so then right when I had an interview with the young guy, he said they wanted to make me an information specialist so I needed to tell him what other background I had and I just -- I really fit the profile. So lucky for me that I sat next to that guy and got that advice because my MOS was 71Q20 and --

KURTZ: Which is a lot better than 11 Bravo. (laughs)

BRADLEY: Oh, absolutely. Don't I know it and in my platoon I was in basic at Fort Dix. I was one of two guys with a college education. And that day when I got called out of formation and was given a ten day leave and orders to report to the Army Hometown News Center, a lot of my friends were riding on a train that night to Fort Polk and other less, shall we say, exciting and hopeful destinations and those guys, some of those guys I've never seen again and they're not alive anymore. So it was very lucky for me.

KURTZ: What kind of training -- well, during basic training did you get treated any different when they knew that you were probably gonna be --

BRADLEY: Sure. They wanted me to become an officer, and so I got -- I got a pretty daily barrage of you're gonna be a grunt, you're gonna get shot, you're gonna get killed, so you ought to -- you ought to go to officer candidate school, you ought to be an officer. You're a college grad, you're a bright guy, you can, you know, you can have -- your chances will be improved, and I --

KURTZ: Did they tell ya that lieutenants probably are worse off than --

BRADLEY: Well, they didn't tell me that. I figured that out. (Kurtz laughs) I talked to some other people, of course, but they needed some numbers then, I mean, and so -- but no, I stuck with it and took my chances and again, like I said, I was lucky.

KURTZ: Okay. In this training at the Hometown News Center, what did they teach you?

BRADLEY: I didn't get trained anything. It was -- I got a ten day leave and I got assigned there and I was -- I was writing stories. I was putting together some of the information material there. What we were is we were the sort of conduit between Vietnam reports and the public. So we would get a couple guys there who are really good with tape, would get all the tape recordings of guys being interviewed in Vietnam and they would cut those tapes and then send them to radio stations in guys' home towns. I would do a similar kind of thing with print. People would send us interviews with guys, you know, if they were combat engineers or infantry men, what have you, cooks, you know, medics. Their interviews would be sent there and then I -- we would put those together and send those to their papers if they were in Columbus, Ohio, or you know, Muskegon, Michigan.

KURTZ: Okay. So how long were you doing this?

BRADLEY: Yeah. I got there in May and it was great duty because there was no Army base. Leavenworth and Fort Riley were like the closest ones. So I lived in an apartment. I didn't have guard duty, I wore a uniform eight hours a day. Shared -- you know, I mean, I was an E1, so I didn't have a lot of money, but I lived in an apartment in Kansas City with two other guys from the News Center. And this was -- this was probably one of the best assignments you could have in the Army. They wanted to keep me. They liked me. They liked the work I was doing. They were starting to go to some things with computers, and I kind of was getting up to speed on that. So, but when the old levy in Vietnam, you know, they reached the computer said "Okay, we need a 71Q20." So by July, I was notified that I was gonna have to get rid of -- leave the News Center and report to duty in Vietnam in November.

KURTZ: So you got your notification in July?

BRADLEY: July, I left at the end of October, I'm sorry, I left the end of September. Had a month
leave in October, and in November I was -- I was on my way to San Francisco.

KURTZ: Okay. So you flew commercial from San Francisco to Vietnam?

BRADLEY: Yep.

KURTZ: And did you land at Bien Hoa or --

BRADLEY: Yep. No, I'm sorry, we landed at Tan Son Nhut.

KURTZ: Tan Son Nhut. Okay.

BRADLEY: Yeah, and then went to Long Binh in fact for processing and sat a number of days. I sat a number of days in San Francisco at Travis and then I sat a couple days when I got there at Long Binh. And then got assigned to Army headquarters at Long Binh.

KURTZ: What was it like flying over the Pacific? Did you have any -- know anybody on the plane or --

BRADLEY: No, I didn't and it was -- I remember I sat with a couple guys that I made the mistake
of, a guy asked me if I was scared, who was going back for like his second or third tour and I wanted to sort of -- I figured the right thing to say was no and then he proceeded to tell me why I should be scared and scared me with some stories. And then I remember one point waking up in the -- after guys were nodding off and the plane was sort of silent and quiet and it just seemed depressing, you know. I mean, I was just -- and I was -- I was kind of overcome with dread.

KURTZ: When you landed in Tan Son Nhut, what time of the day was it?

BRADLEY: We landed in the morning.

KURTZ: And what was your impression when you came off the plane?

BRADLEY: It was -- it smelled, it was hot, it felt unwelcoming, and strangely kind of American. You know, I expected to feel like I was someplace else, except for the people and the smells and the heat, it seemed like I was in some Southern town.

KURTZ: Okay. How were you greeted when you hit the tarmac?

BRADLEY: Well, we were just -- we were sort of ordered around and told what to do and where

to go. Not much in the way of greeting. I just sort of felt like I was – you know it reminded me, of course, that I was still in the Army.

KURTZ: Okay. And then did they take you on a bus up to Tan Son Nhut -- I mean, up to Long Binh, excuse me?

BRADLEY: Yes.

KURTZ: Okay.

BRADLEY: They did.

KURTZ: And what was Long Binh like in 1970?

BRADLEY: Well, it was an interesting time because at that point Long Binh was the largest Army base in the world. We had, you know, geez, I think 35 up to 50,000 troops, and large numbers of Vietnamese who worked on the base. They were sort of the sweat labor, if you would. So it was a really, really large operation. And it was, you know, I mean, like I said, it just had a lot of different aspects to it. I worked at USARV Headquarters. We called it the air conditioned jungle because we worked with some of the brass and they had very nice digs and I'm not saying we didn't, but, you know, I would go from the air conditioning I worked in during the day back to my hooch at night, which was obviously not air conditioned, but it was --

KURTZ: Well, can you describe the hooch that you lived in?

BRADLEY: Yeah. It was, you know, you just – you would lay down on a slab of concrete and put up -- we had two floors. The IO unit, we were the information unit and then we had the comptrollers above us. So we would have, oh gosh, I think we have about fifty guys downstairs, fifty guys upstairs, and you would have little cubicles with dividers. You'd have two bunks and that you would sort of share a cubicle and, you know, you'd have -- what's the word I'm trying to think of, you'd have sort of a not even a closet. It was, you know, where you put your shirts and stuff, your clothes, a locker. You know, we had a locker and that was basically it. But we did have hooch maids and, you know, they would shine our shoes and starch our uniforms and do our laundry and I think we paid them a pitiful amount every month. But the hooch was really kind of a decent place because, given the work that I was involved in, we were involved in command information and public information.

KURTZ: What were your duties doing that command?

BRADLEY: Yeah. I worked for the Army newspaper then called *The Army Reporter*, which was

published weekly and also a magazine that was called *Uptight* trying to sound kind of groovy and cool. That was published monthly. My commanding officer was a guy named Alfred Mock, who had done his graduate work here at the University of Wisconsin. So, and he was very familiar with the riots and the protests. He was here during some of the Dow protests, so he was a really sort of broad-minded, fair principled guy.

KURTZ: What was his rank?

BRADLEY: Colonel.

KURTZ: Colonel?

BRADLEY: Yeah. And Colonel Mock told us basically, you know, he didn't care about our politics or what we thought about things, if we put out a good newspaper, we did our jobs, we didn't make him look bad, and we didn't get out of control. He didn't -- he didn't care about the other stuff. So he was a very cool guy to work with. Unfortunately he wasn't there the whole time I was there, but -- and he sort of understood some of the passion and concern that there was around Vietnam from guys like me who were coming out of college and going -- going there within a year of being out of college.

KURTZ: What was a typical duty day like for you there?

BRADLEY: Typical duty day was, you know, we'd get up, you know, 6, 6:30, by -- after a shower and a shave, maybe on my way to the office. We'd be -- we sort of be at our desk by 7:30. You know, we had a bigger staff when I got there and this was during -- this was when Vietnamization was starting to take hold and by the time I left there was a skeleton crew there. But we would, in putting together the newspaper the way the process went, we would have to ship it to *Stars and Stripes* in Japan for -- to be printed, and so we would basically put the paper together. So we would look at stories and of course, I worked Sunday, the only day I had off was Thursday. Then usually I was, except for guard duty days and so we would go in usually Sunday, Monday, we would go cull the stories that would be put together in the paper and usually we'd do an eight pager every week, sometimes we'd have larger editions. And so we'd look at the stories we wanted to cover about what units and what was happening in the war in Vietnam and we'd balance that with photography. We'd have a sort of an advice column about what you needed to do about hold baggage, you know, or about who knows what, and we'd have a pinup in there. I mean, this was -- this was a paper we wanted guys to read. We'd have something about the latest albums that were released. So it was really a newspaper, everything but the weather reports and the obituaries. And so we would -- you know, we would do this Sunday, Monday maybe a little into Tuesday. Then we would figure out how the paper was gonna be laid out. We'd go into Saigon and that was always fun because you wanted to be in Saigon where

the action was and you would spend anywhere from one to two to sometimes three days on having to typeset for the stories, having the new-- we would basically paste up the paper, which is what you have -- used to do in the old days before computers and by Thursday we would mail that off to Japan. So you can see the lag time...

KURTZ: Right.

BRADLEY: ...there would be between getting the story and having it printed. And usually while we were there, then the paper would-- the paper we had sent out the week before would come back with all the copies and then we would have to work on distribution.

KURTZ: Who was as your customers for this newspaper? Was it just Long Binh or--

BRADLEY: No. It was -- it was basically Army personnel throughout Vietnam and even in the Pacific theater. I mean, we had an incredible circulation, because other than the *Stars and Stripes*, we were like the other, it was like in Wisconsin, you know, you might read the *State Journal* or the *Journal Sentinel*, which would be the *Stars and Stripes*, but then you read your weekly paper too because that had information about things you wanted to know a little more about or people you knew or, you know, maybe some advice you wanted to get.

KURTZ: So *Stars and Stripes* is the one that carried the information about combat and casualties and that type of thing, is that correct?

BRADLEY: Right, and we would too, but not to that level.

KURTZ: Okay.

BRADLEY: I mean, basically a lot of ours was, you know, a lot of ours was the "winning hearts and minds" story. It was more feature stories about units that were either making incredible progress, building a bridge or road, or, you know, pacifying a village or doing work with an orphanage.

KURTZ: Okay, there's three things that came up with this that you said: a) Day's guard duty. What kind of guard duty did you pull?

BRADLEY: Well, guard duty, you know, big base and when I was there they were really worried about the elections were coming in August, they had sort of been rigged and so we had some insurgency during the periods I was there. The Viet Cong just reminding us who was in charge. And so you would go -- I mean, you would just go pick up your weapon and go out and sit on the perimeter. Sometimes if you went out, if you had the early shift, you'd go out, come back, go to sleep and go back out in the morning. If you got lucky, if you were seniority you were

more in country. You would just do the midnight to 6 a.m. and then go back and crash and then get back to work the next day.

KURTZ: So did you ever have to go out on ambush patrol or did you do just perimeter guard?

BRADLEY: Just perimeter guard.

KURTZ: Was the base probed when you were there? In other words, did sappers come in, try to come in?

BRADLEY: Yeah, a couple times. We had some attacks around the time when the U.S. invaded

Laos in early 1971, and then we had -- we had pretty substantial challenges. We were on high alert in July and August, primarily August when the South Vietnamese elections were taking place.

KURTZ: Were you ever rocketed or mortared when you were there?

BRADLEY: Yep, we were. During those periods of time and I think that was basically it. Yeah.

KURTZ: Okay. Then you said in Saigon that's where the action was, can you describe --

BRADLEY: Well, I mean, it was like being in any kind of big city outside an Army base. I mean, there was women and, you know, bars and music and great food. I mean, you know a friend and I -- you know, I mean, I always felt like the trajectory of my life in Vietnam shouldn't be any different from anything else as much as possible. So I wasn't gonna, you know, be a womanizer or, you know, seek prostitution or do drugs if I wasn't going to do that, you know, the rest of my life. So when some guys would go in and go to the brothels or go to the bars, or, you know, who knew what people were doing on their day off. My friend and I would go in and find, go to the -- probably go to the Tan Son Nhut theater and watch a good movie and then find a great French restaurant. You know, the French were there before we did and there were some incredibly great (laughs) French restaurants in Saigon and we'd go and have a great meal at a French restaurant. That was my idea of a day off.

KURTZ: So you didn't stay overnight in Saigon or anything like that?

BRADLEY: At times I did when -- and we stayed basically with a lot of the *Stars and Stripes* guys because, you know, we sort of had to stay at MACV, which is where the paper was put together. That was Military Assistance Command Vietnam.

KURTZ: Yeah.

BRADLEY: That was the other headquarters where Creighton and Abrams was, for example. And -- but sometimes because some of the guys from our office became *Stars and Stripes* reporters, that we'd go and stay with them because they'd have apartments rather than having to stay on base.

KURTZ: Did -- well, the other thing that kind of came up is on reporting. Did you go off, go out into the country to interview people, take pictures?

BRADLEY: Yeah. That happened more when I got there, as I said, we had to split between what they call command information and public information. And it was about half and half, maybe eight to ten guys in each unit and then other people filling in, you know. We had a couple commanding officers, I mean, E7s or Es, and then we would have, you know, a few other folks who sort of managed the unit. But for those of us who were doing the work, the public information guys and there were photographers as well, would go out in the field and do stories about, you know, a unit of combat engineers or, you know, they would go out and cover the war. I mean, some of those units had their own press guys, but we would go out and give it a little more coverage. I had command information. That was just -- that's where I was assigned, it's not that I had a choice, and my job was to stay back, put the newspaper together, put the magazine together, go into Saigon. I mean, I had all the production, writing and editing of the paper. Now, by the-- as time went on and people were sent home and not replaced, we had to do more and by the time I left we were doing both command information and public information and photography. So for example, one of the stories that they asked me to cover was I was -- I was asked to kind of shadow a South Vietnamese young man through his military experience, basic training, advanced infantry training and out into the field. And so at intervals I was covering this guy's story, and when I did that I obviously wasn't back in the office and I had the camera and this was -- this was my assignment. Another time I went out, they thought it would be interesting to do a story about the Navy in an Army paper. So I went out and spent four or five days on the *USS Ranger* doing a story about the Navy in the Gulf of Tonkin in Vietnam. So yeah, eventually those -- we didn't have the manpower to be able to do -- to have the luxury of having people in the office and out in the field. We did both.

KURTZ: When you were shadowing this ARVN did you live with them or was this --

BRADLEY: Yeah, I did. Of course, I didn't live with them. I was at the base. But I got to live sort of the way the brass lived or some of the upper level officers. So -- but I would go out and watch their training and do interviews as best I could with interpreters, and sort of cover, you know, what was -- what their experience was.

KURTZ: Was this in the Saigon area?

BRADLEY: Yes.

KURTZ: Where this training --

BRADLEY: Yep, yep.

KURTZ: Where this assignment was?

BRADLEY: Yep. Yeah.

KURTZ: Did you actually go out on patrol with this --

BRADLEY: Yep, we did a couple times and that's when I had sort of one of the more interesting

experiences of my tour and that was noticing the antipathy between ARVN and U.S. soldiers. There was, I can't remember exactly what the situation, all the dynamics of it. My recollection is that there was -- there was some equipment, armored personnel carriers and a few other things that we wanted -- that we had left behind because of a skirmish and wanted to go back and reclaim. And we were -- it was during the day and it didn't -- you know, it had been dangerous prior to that, but it didn't seem that there were any Viet Cong or NVA in the area and so a combination force of ARVN and U.S. Army troops were doing this maneuver and as they were moving out and they were approaching this with, you know, going at different, you know, one -- the ARVN would move out and we would cover that and then we would move up and they would -- it was sort of just they were doing this thing very methodically. Got to a point where they engaged some fire and the ARVN would not come, were not quickly coming to the aid of our soldiers. And so at one point I thought and of course, this never would get printed, but I thought one of the real ironies of watching this war is as we were ostensibly trying to preserve democracy in their country, so we thought, was to watch our guys turn around and shoot at them because they weren't coming up to take care of them. So it was, of course, that's a story that I didn't write when I got back, but it was, like I said, it was tragically ironic to watch this because our guys and a lot of the troops that I used to interview had a little more respect for "Charlie" as they used to call them, than they did for the ARVN.

KURTZ: How was that thing resolved? Did the officers get it under control?

BRADLEY: The officers got it under control, yep.

KURTZ: What was the morale like because you were there virtually at the end of the U.S. experience?

BRADLEY: Right. Nobody wanted to be the last GI killed in Vietnam. So I'd say morale was as good as you could make it. But, you know, it was -- I mean, it was a lot tougher for guys who were out in the field engaging the -- engaging combat. And, you know, I mean, different challenges for those of us in the rear, you know,

boredom, frustration, sort of, you know, some sense of something, you know, calamitous could happen. But I'd say it was a tense time because people thought we were getting out, we were leaving. They thought the Vietnamese were taking over the war. They thought Nixon had this plan to win the war and so nobody wanted to be the last casualty.

KURTZ: Was there racial or drug use at Long Binh?

BRADLEY: Sure, yeah, there was –

KURTZ: Problems?

BRADLEY: Fairly abundant, and I think, you know, you always have to couch this by saying, you know, you don't want people to get these stereotypes that everybody was doing drugs, but I think the, you know, the dichotomy and the sort of chasm that had existed between lifers and draftees, between guys, you know, in their late teens or early 20s and guys who were in their 40s and 50s, you know, we were fighting with our fathers back home, so we might as well fight with our commanding officers. And the way people let off steam was different, and so there was-- you know, there was quite a bit of -- in our unit there was just a lot of marijuana use, which, you know, I mean, was just recreational. No big deal. But when I was there what I started to see when I was out covering stories was that the Army had taken on a policy of really trying to clamp down on what was happening with especially marijuana. They thought it had something to do with morale and with, you know, our ability to be good soldiers. And so there was a lot of, and you know if somebody was smoking a joint around you, you'd know they were doing it. So they went -- there was really a program there to sort of stop this and unfortunately what happened was guys still needed a release and we saw a lot-- a high -- much higher percentage of guys snorting and smoking heroin because it was plentiful there. It was powerful. It gave no telltale odor and so I'd say that was probably one of the periods where that the abuse of narcotics especially was unfortunately on the increase.

KURTZ: Was there much drinking going on?

BRADLEY: Oh, yeah, I mean, that was -- that's, you know, that was another recreational tool that we had at our disposal and so I'd say a fairly substantial amount of drug and alcohol abuse.

KURTZ: I'm going to flip the tape.

[End of Tape 1, Side A]

[Approx. 2 min. gap at beginning of Tape 1, Side B]

KURTZ: -- when you went out in the field by the grunts that were out there?

BRADLEY: Well, it was, you know, they weren't -- some guys would sit and ask me "Why are you holding the pencil and the pen, asking the questions and I'm carrying the rifle and I'm at risk?" And I didn't have an answer for them. You know, I would just say, "You know, I mean, I got lucky. I mean, it's not fair," and I tried to remind them of that because sometimes it was fairly hostile. Of course, now that at those occasions when I would be on their territory, that was a little bit better. But I was still --

I wasn't one of them. And -- but it was -- I thought the tension was even more enhanced back in the rear when they'd come back to blow off steam, relax and have some fun and, you know, we were there and would be there after they left and

went back in the field and be there when they got back. So they didn't -- they didn't -- they thought we sort of had it a little too good and where they'd like to maybe get a little pissed and blow off a little steam or take it out on somebody, the FEMF's were the people that would sort of suffer that.

KURTZ: So you basically-- your entire tour you spent at Long Binh in the various jobs that we --

BRADLEY: Yeah. Long Binh and Saigon and then out periodically doing the stories, like in the

Gulf of Tonkin, like doing the story about basic training. You know R and R in Hawaii, leave to Australia, but that was basically --

KURTZ: So you -- you got an R and R to Hawaii. How did you get that? You weren't married at the time, were you?

BRADLEY: Nope. Yeah, it was just you could go there. It was one of the choices and I met my girlfriend there so --

KURTZ: Okay. Did you get to Australia too?

BRADLEY: Yep.

KURTZ: As leave -- so you could actually take leave and go?

BRADLEY: Yep, yep. So I had a week in Hawaii and a week in Australia. Hawaii was in about June and then-- 'cause I got there in November-- so Hawaii was about June and then I went to Australia in October.

KURTZ: Just before you went home then?

BRADLEY: Yeah.

- KURTZ: Okay. Did you know what the mission was when you were in Vietnam? Were you ever told what it was or what did you feel the mission was or --
- BRADLEY: Ah, yeah, I felt the mission was “turn the war over to the South Vietnamese and get the hell out of there” basically. I mean, we were-- and win the hearts and minds of the South Vietnamese people. You know, we -- you know, I went into the orphanages near Saigon. We would do a lot of -- what I would do sort of classic humanitarian outreach work. And -- but I think at that point it was fairly obvious, especially to those of us who had gotten through college and had a different experience, gotten drafted, seen what happened at Kent State and Cambodia and what was going on that we weren't going to take this to some consummate ultimate battle, that we were just finding a way that we were gonna get out of there and turn the war over to the South Vietnamese, and I think most of us who were there were pretty certain that *when* and *if* that happened, it is was just gonna be a matter of time before the South Vietnamese lost South Vietnam because they weren't capable of handling the North Vietnamese or the Viet Cong.
- KURTZ: Now, are you talking about that militarily or politically or --
- BRADLEY: Both. So --
- KURTZ: Both.
- BRADLEY: That was my observation.
- KURTZ: So what -- I so guess, do you have anything else you could share about your attitude towards the South Vietnamese people?
- BRADLEY: Well, it was kind of interesting. I had a great deal, I think, of empathy and sympathy for the South Vietnamese. A lot of guys I worked with and certainly a lot of guys, it was interesting to watch the fellows that would go into Saigon and sort of get the *Stars and Stripes* job and live full time. They found them to be annoying and bothersome and, you know, I mean, they just they sort of really bugged them. And then, you know, I never got to see enough of what the combat engagement was like, what that relationship was like. But for me, I think it was just a matter of, you know, I kind of felt sorry for them and I -- yeah, I felt bad about them, but I didn't feel strongly enough that I thought theirs was a cause that I needed to die for.
- KURTZ: Okay. So you said you don't have any real opinion about the ARVN in combat, is that -- did I hear you right there?

BRADLEY: Well, I mean my assessment was, from having done the reporting that I had done and
the little bit that I saw, was that they didn't -- I mean, they -- most of the guys that I had engaged seemed reluctant to be in the military and they had some, I thought, fairly substantial numbers of AWOL and desertions, and that they weren't real anxious to be engaged in this fight. And I didn't think -- they didn't seem prepared or equipped to do it. Now, that's just the blanket generalization from the little bit that I saw.

KURTZ: Did you have any contact with either the VC or NVA when you were there?

BRADLEY: No.

KURTZ: So --

BRADLEY: I mean, you know, I -- just from what I was, you know, sort of editing and writing, you know but --

KURTZ: Did you ever get to drive out of Long Binh up to any place other than Saigon, or did you drive to -- up to Highway 13?

BRADLEY: Sure. Yeah. I mean, we did around usually during the day because at night it would -- you know, even at that point where you think we sort of got control over that whole area, it was dangerous. But yeah, that's -- I mean, we would do that route, especially when we were distributing the papers, you know, that we got from *Stars and Stripes* and we'd take them to Bien Hoa and we'd go, we'd sort of go around the area there up and down the highway.

KURTZ: Okay. Did you ever get over to Tay Ninh?

BRADLEY: Ah, no.

KURTZ: Okay. I was just going to ask you about the Cao Dai? How would you assess your Vietnam experience?

BRADLEY: I'd say my Vietnam experience was sort of -- I mean, it's -- I guess two assessments.

One it was Vietnam, and anything could have happened when, you know, the base would be attacked or, you know, you'd be on high alert. It was sort of a rough reminder that, you know, you were in a difficult place. The other thing was, you know, I can sit here and complain about getting two years taken out of my life and maybe I could have been a successful lawyer and who knows what would have happened. But considering what other people were experiencing and what guys that I'd been in basic with and in college with who were less lucky than I, I was a fairly lucky guy. I had probably one of *the* best military jobs you could have because

you could use your brain, write stories, be a reporter, see things, have access to things a lot of people didn't. And so -- and I got to be at Long Binh working, I think a fairly secure environment. So I say all things considered, I could have been a lot worse off.

KURTZ: Do you feel the same way about it today as you did back then? I mean, is there any difference?

BRADLEY: Well, it's hard to say. I mean, I think, you know, if I was -- if I had the same choices to make now would I still make them? Knowing what I know, maybe not. I mean, I wasn't -- I wasn't politically strident. I sort of never have been. I was not in favor of the war, but when I looked at the options of jail and leaving the country and going in the Army, getting drafted, it seemed sort of lesser of three evils. And so -- but I mean, it totally changed my life. I mean, I was on -- I was -- my life was moving in a completely different direction and with this experience and what I saw, when I came back, I didn't want to go to law school, and I wanted to help other vets who I thought weren't as lucky as I was. And so when I got to Madison, you know, worked at Vet's House and tried to do some outreach to the VA and to the prisons and tried to do what we could to help guys who were less fortunate than we were.

KURTZ: So how long did you work with -- volunteer at Vet's House?

BRADLEY: Well, I was one of the first paid staff people --

KURTZ: Oh, okay.

BRADLEY: To work there and started there in July of '74 and left in about July of '77. So I was there for three years.

KURTZ: Three years and what type of work did you do?

BRADLEY: Job placement primarily, but I also was president for a year and so had some executive responsibilities too, because we were -- we had -- you know, we had a VA counseling contract for that part of the state. We had -- we did prison outreach. We did job placement. We did motivational counseling. We started a halfway house. So we were a fairly robust organization, just because we were Vietnam vets ourselves and could appreciate why maybe some vets didn't feel welcomed, you know, at the job service center or the VA Hospital.

KURTZ: How were you treated in Madison as a veteran and then pretty conspicuous working with Vet House?

BRADLEY: I thought, you know, for the most part it was fairly respectful. I always found in

Madison that there were people who had enough sort of compassion and understanding that they were, I thought, you know, as helpful and welcoming as possible. I won't say that across the board and there were still some people in "la-la" land around the movement who thought because we had been, you know, sort of hardened soldiers in Vietnam that we'd sort of be in the front ranks of the anti-war movement, which, you know, was nonsense. But I think all in all, you know, we made great strides. I thought we were able to work with the establishment. We got United Way support. We got Federal money through the CEDA Program. Jim Thomas, who was an African-American vet at that point who was on Paul Soglin's staff was helpful to us. So, you know, I think the perception might be that Madison would not have been as supportive and helpful, but I thought for a kind of small band of Vietnam vets and not a -- big ideas, but not a big budget, I think the fact that we were able to do the work we did and have the impact we did, it was -- meant that I think there was some support for what we were doing in Madison.

KURTZ: Did you ever participate with any mainline veteran organizations?

BRADLEY: No, not really. Our experience was when we got back and I mean, I can speak for my own, was that I didn't feel welcomed or comfortable in those environments. So my early engagements when I got back with the American Legion and the VFW was that we had lost the war, meaning Vietnam vets. That somehow we weren't the right kind of soldiers. We just -- you know, we didn't do it right. And so I thought in some quarters and not just those places, but other places in the public that we were part of the reason that things had gone as poorly as they had. So I was kind of wary of all institutions of -- you know, I mean, you name them, I mean, if anybody was establishment at that time I think I was a little leery of them because I'd just been in the biggest establishment that was the Army.

KURTZ: Okay. Do you have any impressions about what the politics of being a Vietnam veteran is, just talking about the last election, I mean, not asking you who's good or bad or, I mean, but will we ever get over this?

BRADLEY: Never. And I was -- that's what really struck me when I look back to, you know, the Clinton/Bush, the Senior Bush election where there was some, you know, hiccups around Clinton's alleged draft dodging. But how that was, you know, that was not as big an issue and yet to come to, you know, 2004 and have Vietnam be sort of front and center again in the campaign, was really kind of astounding and befuddling. But part of my perception is that, and it's not about right or wrong, it's not about good and evil, it's about -- it's about acceptance, it's about understanding, it's about forgiveness. I think I just sort of feel like this country never really came to grips with, you know, what happened, why it happened, who suffered, and who was never sort of welcomed back. And yeah, I think -- I think

this -- I think too that a lot of what we saw in 2004 were thirty or forty-year-old wounds that have never been healed and I think never will be healed. They sure weren't healed by the rhetoric we had this year and I think -- I think it's just a reflection of the fact that this country never really, I think, came to grips with what Vietnam was and is.

KURTZ: On a higher note, you're working on a personal project i.e., your music book. Could

you describe how this fits into context with what we're talking about?

BRADLEY: Well, I think, you know, we grew up at a time where music was one of those things that sort of identified us as a generation. I can remember when my brother brought 45s home and played them and how my parents used to hold their ears and sort of complain. I mean, rock and roll was something that sort of defined us as a generation, and this was a time when the music -- when music found ways to connect us. I mean, I think you can hear a song now from that era on the radio and not start -- not just sing along, but think about where you were when that song was popular. And so I thought that -- I've always been interested in music, my brother sang in some, you know, Philly street corner doo-wop groups when we were growing up. He was on American Bandstand. We sort of felt like we were at the mecca of being a teenager in America when we were growing up and we used to play songs at dances. We had the best record collection, like we were high school deejays. And then when I got into college I ended up getting elected social chairman with another friend and our job was to bring, you know, really top acts on to this small campus and, you know, so I not only got to meet Smokey and the Miracles, I got to play basketball with him, because we had him at the field house in my college. You know, Junior Walker and the All Stars. You know, the Contours and the Velvelettes, Little Anthony and the Imperials, the Association, I mean, you name it. So I've always been interested in music and I think music has been something that's helped to define and connect us as a generation, and in Vietnam I found that to be very evident and so --

KURTZ: How did you hear the music in Vietnam?

BRADLEY: Armed Forces Radio, tapes. You know, we used to have a lot of our own music and bands. So, I mean, it was like, I can remember trying -- music sort of being all, you know, omnipresent when you weren't at the office, at your desk, or out in the field. But, you know, when we'd go back to the hooch, we'd listen to music. We'd listen to our own music. Some guys would bring out guitars or we'd go to the club. So -- and so what attracted me to this, was, well, aren't there ways that these songs speak to us both now in 2005, but then in the '60's about who we were and what we thought and what we felt, what we experienced? So this professor and I, a professor from Madison whose done a lot of rock and roll writing and

anthologies, we sort of said well, what about a “top 20” from Vietnam, for the lack of a better term and what would those songs mean to guys, as soldiers, to veterans, you know, as post-soldiers to the nation, to the war. So that's what we started to put together and the premise of the book is to have really powerful personal stories and anecdotes by Vietnam vets about what that song meant to them, either when they were in Vietnam or when they were back from Vietnam and then also to track down the artist who recorded the song, maybe the people who wrote the lyrics and the words and see if we can't come out of some kind of new and interesting and unique kind of perspective on music, on the war, on veterans, on race, on whatever.

KURTZ: So it would be kind of a taking a history of the 60s and all those things you said and then bringing it up to date, people like you and I who lived through it?

BRADLEY: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

KURTZ: Have we covered your Vietnam experience here, Doug?

BRADLEY: Well, I think we have and, you know, it's as I think back on it, I mean, it's a year in your life. I mean, there I was frankly in a relatively “safe,” if you will, in quotes, environment, and you know, I'm not -- I've only got one guy I'm in touch with from that time, and even though Vietnam has been something that's kind of stayed with me, because how could it not, it's not -- it's not as visceral a relationship for me because luckily I wasn't in kill-or-be-killed situations. But I think for me it's become more a matter of, you know, how does Vietnam -- what's America's connection and, you know, what are the blinders that we still have on about Vietnam? So my experience was really kind of just a little blip, but I think the country's experience and this experience of others are things that are still a lot more real and still need to be addressed.

KURTZ: Well, I think then we can wind it up.

[End of Interview]