

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
Rev. Ray W. Stubbe
Navy Chaplain, Vietnam War
2005-2006

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Stubbe, Ray W., (b.1938). Oral History Interview, 2005-2006.

User Copy: 9 sound cassettes (ca. 539 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 9 sound cassettes (ca.539 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder)

Abstract:

Stubbe (b.1938), a Wauwatosa (Wisconsin) native, discusses his service as a Navy Chaplain during the Vietnam War with the 9th Marine Amphibious Brigade, 26th Marine Regiment, 3rd Marine Division. Stubbe recalls enlisting in the Navy Reserves before his senior year of high school and attending a two-week boot camp at Great Lakes Naval Training Center (Illinois). After graduating high school, he was assigned to active duty on the *USS Noa*, where he served on the deck force for two years before attending Yeoman "A" School at Bainbridge (Maryland) and becoming a Yeoman Third Class. In 1958, Stubbe left active duty to attend St. Olaf College (Minnesota) but continued to serve in the Reserves. Stubbe graduated in 1962 with a degree in Philosophy and then attended Northwestern Lutheran Theological Seminary in Minneapolis, graduating in 1965. While at the seminary, Stubbe describes attending Navy Chaplains School, which he calls "boot camp for ministers," in Newport (Rhode Island). Following the seminary, Stubbe went to the University of Chicago Theological School to get a Ph.D. in Ethics and Society; however, he left after one year because the Navy needed chaplains in Vietnam. Stubbe reveals seeing photos of POWs in *Life* [magazine] inspired him to join the war. He mentions his classmates did not support his decision to go to Vietnam, and he discusses his Lutheran faith and his study of the philosophy of war. Stubbe describes in detail Chaplains School in Camp Pendleton (California) where he was assigned to a Marine regiment. Contrary to custom, he chose to participate in infiltration courses and night exercises in order to understand what the Marines went through. Stubbe suggests this compromised his chances for promotion in the Chaplain Corps. In June 1967, Stubbe was stationed in Khe Sanh (Vietnam) with the 3rd Marine Battalion, 26th Regiment. He analyzes at length his relationship to the enlisted men; while he tried to be their friend, Stubbe avoided carousing with them. He calls being Chaplain a "lonely position." Stubbe explains he supported conscientious objectors because a Marine unprepared to fire on the enemy was a danger to the unit. Stubbe comments that the Department of Defense required the Chaplain to determine whether a conscientious objector had authentic, religious grounds for objecting. Stubbe tells a detailed story about Jonathan Nathaniel Spicer, a minister's son who objected and was later killed transporting wounded soldiers. Stubbe describes taking supply helicopters each morning to the Marine outposts on the hills around Khe Sahn to lead worship services. Stubbe thoroughly describes his time with a Special Forces Unit (a group of pro-American Vietnamese training with the U.S. Army) camped in Lang Vei near the Laotian border. This camp had been overrun in April 1967 during the Battle of the Hills when North Vietnamese spies infiltrated the camp, killing two commanding officers. As a result, when Stubbe visited the base, fences separated the Vietnamese allies from the American troops. Stubbe discusses strategic tensions between the Army Special Forces and Marines that caused problems during the

Battle of the Hills. He also describes going on a Marine patrol, which was unusual for a Chaplain. He depicts military life and lists common medical problems, such as: dehydration, cuts from bamboo, leeches, constant dampness, and “immersion foot.” Stubbe praises the natural beauty of Vietnam and provides some geological history about Khe Sanh and the D’Ai Lao Pass. Stubbe also describes the Bru, an indigenous mountain people who were ethnically distinct from the Vietnamese and loyal to the U.S. Stubbe spends most of his time speaking about the Siege of Khe Sanh which began in January, 1968. He covers the commanders’ overall strategy as well as the effects of the siege on individual Marines. Stubbe also analyzes battle tactics of the North Vietnamese. Stubbe states that during the Siege of Khe Sanh, known as Operation Scotland, his unit of 4,500 Marines took 2,500 casualties. The official death report was 205 Marines, but Stubbe estimates 475 were actually killed. He offers explanations for the discrepancy: the Marine Corps did not count Army deaths or wounded Marines who died after being evacuated from battle. During the siege, Stubbe was not allowed to hold regular church services, so he developed a ten-minute sermon with communion that he performed from bunker to bunker. He portrays the young troops as joking and displaying a “gallows humor” to keep up morale. Stubbe contends that men “did strange things in battle.” For example, a Marine risked his life to get a jar of maraschino cherries from the mess hall, which he gave Stubbe as a present. He also refers to a famous photograph [taken by Dick Swanson] of Stubbe giving services to Marines in which everyone had unsafely removed their helmets. Stubbe describes activities and life during the Siege: often the Marines did not have enough rations or water; they had no showers; and they wore their uniforms until they “rotted out.” After Khe Sanh, Stubbe was stationed in Quang Tri (Vietnam) for four months where he performed memorial services for fallen soldiers. In 1969, Stubbe went home on a thirty-day furlough. He reports his mother was shocked because he had lost a lot of weight and was talking and thrashing in his sleep. Stubbe’s bishop at home asked him how he could “spend his time with such immoral people” (i.e. the Marines). Stubbe was reassigned to the *USS Shreveport* in 1970. He reports spending a couple years in Norfolk (Virginia) where he trained with some Navy SEALs, eventually going to Jump School in Fort Benning (Georgia). Stubbe mentions he was transferred to Okinawa (Japan) in 1973, where he met Oliver North on the Marine Corps Birthday. Stubbe states that North was very personable and beloved by his men; years later, North interviewed Stubbe for his TV program, *War Stories*. After Okinawa, Stubbe spent six years at Great Lakes Naval Base (Illinois). He states he began to write about Khe Sanh more often, and in the 1980s, around the dedication of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, he began having nightmares. Stubbe explains he attended a Stress Unit (group therapy) to deal with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Stubbe spent three to four months as an inpatient on the Stress Unit at Great Lakes, then had about six months remaining before he could retire from the Navy. Stubbe describes himself as a “basket case” and explains that he took leave to visit the Vietnam Memorial in Washington D.C., which brought back painful memories and caused him to check into the Stress Unit again. Stubbe comments it was considered unusual for a Chaplain to be in the Stress Unit. While there, he formulated two goals: to form a group for Khe Sanh veterans and to publish his writings about Khe Sanh. Stubbe did reunite with forty Khe Sanh Veterans at a memorial parade in New York City and later at a reunion of the 3rd Marine Division Association in Florida. In 1988, Stubbe incorporated the Khe Sanh Veterans Association, Inc. in Wisconsin. Stubbe

discusses at length the publishing history of his book [*Valley of Decision*] about Khe Sanh. It wasn't publicized well by Houghton Mifflin Press but was eventually reprinted by the Naval Institute Press as a paperback. Stubbe also mentions self-publishing a book called *The Final Formation* that lists casualties of Khe Sanh and the position of their names on the Vietnam Memorial. Stubbe explains how he collected 100,000 pages of suggestions, memoirs, poems, letters, etc. about the Khe Sanh Siege from veterans and their families. With this information, Stubbe self-published a book detailing the Siege day-by-day and providing background information on individual Marines. Finally, Stubbe spends much of the interview discussing people. He characterizes Colonel David Edward Lownds, the commander at Khe Sanh, as unassuming and soft-spoken and praises his sense of humor and ability to make tough decisions. Stubbe also repeatedly mentions Harper Bohr and Col. James Bascom Wilkinson. He spends much time describing Major Mirza Baig, a Pakistani-American who served as the Target Intelligent Officer at Khe Sanh. Stubbe characterizes Baig as a "genius" who singlehandedly figured out how to read a top-secret electric sensor defense system. Stubbe also frequently mentions Eugene Poilane, a French botanist who founded a coffee and fruit plantation in Khe Sanh. According to Stubbe, Poilane imported Vietnamese workers because they were considered better workers than the Bru. Stubbe met his son, Felix Poilane, who was born and died in Khe Sanh. Stubbe corresponded with Felix's wife Madeleine for several years after the Vietnam War. Stubbe mentions other civilians living in Khe Sahn, including: Pastor Loc, an Episcopalian Vietnamese missionary, and Father Poncet, a Catholic priest who rode a motorbike. Stubbe speaks at length about John and Carolyn Miller who were Wycliffe Bible translators in Khe Sanh. These missionaries lived with indigenous groups who had no written languages, trying to transcribe their languages and translate the Bible. Stubbe was impressed by the Millers because they "listened before speaking;" they studied the Bru language before preaching. Stubbe reports the Millers left Vietnam in 1964, but John Miller returned to rescue his Vietnamese translator. Stubbe touches upon the progression of the anti-war movement and drug use which affected soldiers who served later in the war. He characterizes Vietnam as "multifaceted" and says each veteran had a different experience, although he generalizes that "all Vietnam vets seem to have this thing about guilt."

Biographical Sketch:

Ray W. Stubbe (b. 1938) was born and raised in Wauwatosa (Wisconsin). He is an alumnus of Washington High School, St. Olaf College, Northwestern Lutheran Theological Seminary, and the University of Chicago. Stubbe was ordained as a Lutheran minister in 1965 and served as a Navy Chaplain during the Vietnam War with the 9th Marine Amphibious Brigade, 26th Marine Regiment, 3rd Marine Division. Stubbe retired from the Navy in 1984 with the rank of Second Class Petty Officer. In 1988, Stubbe founded the Khe Sanh Veterans Association, Inc., and he remains an active member. He has authored several books about Khe Sanh including *Valley of Decision*, *Battalion of Kings*, and *The Final Formation*.

Interviewed by Jim Kurtz, 2005-2006.
Transcribed with explanatory notes by Ray W. Stubbe, 2008.
Format corrected by Katy Marty, 2008.
Abstract written by Darcy I. Gervasio, 2009.

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Note: Explanatory notes, inserted upon transcribing this tape, were inserted by Ray Stubbe in brackets.

Transcribed Interview of December 5, 2005:

Kurtz: My name is Jim Kurtz, and I'm interviewing Chaplain Ray Stubbe at his home in Wauwatosa, Wisconsin, and the bird you hear in the background is Fred, very social and Fred may or may not contradict Ray, but we'll have to see. Ray, when and where were you born?

Stubbe: I was born the 15th of August 1938 in Wauwatosa, Wisconsin—in fact just about half a block from here, from where I now live.

Kurtz: Did you grow up in Wauwatosa?

Stubbe: No. After that my parents moved out to 112th and North [Avenue], which doesn't exist anymore; it's the entrance to Highway 45 North at Mayfair Road. North Avenue from 92nd out there was at that time a dirt road, and Mayfair Road had only a little school, Fischer School, and everything else was wide-open space. I lived there until I was about 4, and then we moved to 60th and Meinecke in Milwaukee. My dad worked for a company [located at] about 33rd and North Avenue. He used to walk there. I used to walk to school. I went to HiMount, Steuben Junior High, and Washington High School.

Kurtz: Did you graduate from Washington?

Stubbe: I graduated from Washington High School in 1956.

Kurtz: Did you have to walk all the way up and down the hill in the snow?

Stubbe: It wasn't all that hilly, but it was snowy—in fact the snow of '47 I remember: it all came down about three-foot in one night and had great fun. The whole city was paralyzed for a week.

Kurtz: What year did you graduate from high school?

Stubbe: 1956.

Kurtz: 1956, and that was in the middle of the Cold War.

Stubbe: Well things were—I remember [General Douglas] MacArthur being fired when I was in Steuben. He came back here to Milwaukee and they had a big parade.

Kurtz: Do you remember anything about the parade, or just remember it happening?

Stubbe: I just remember it happening. I remember his speech on the radio: "Old soldiers never die; they just fade away." He had a deep—and that kind of ora-

torical voice that Senator Everett Dirksen and Roosevelt, Churchill—people talked in that kind of grandiose style. I remember the air raid shelters in the hallways for the nuclear--.

Kurtz: Was it a reality that a male graduating in 1956 from high school would be going into the military?

Stubbe: No, not especially from Washington. Washington was a very academic school at the time. The feeling was: from Washington you could almost go to any college in the United States without any problems. I graduated in the upper quarter or upper tenth of the class. Later on, when I went to [St. Olaf] College [in Northfield, Minnesota], I took an entrance exam (which is sort of like the GRE they now have), a Minnesota test, and I was in the 100th percentile of that, so Washington was a good school.

Kurtz: So what did you do after high school, Ray?

Stubbe: Well, the year before my senior year, the summer before, I decided to join the Naval Reserve. Actually it was as my senior year started. It was 28 September 1955, I enlisted in the Navy Reserve and went to Reserve meetings here in Milwaukee at a brand-new Reserve building— which is still there, but at that time it was brand-new—in fact, they were dedicating it and I looked at these “old” Captains—I was part of that little group where the Captains come in; they “pipe” the Captains aboard—“side boys” they call them. I was one of the side boys and I remember these “old, old, old” Navy Captains in their 30s and 40s, how ancient they are. I was 17. So I spent my senior year in high school in the Navy Reserve, which is very unusual for that school—and for me, academically, to be connected with the military.

Kurtz: What was the reason you joined the Navy Reserve?

Stubbe: I’m not really sure. I can’t think back [for the reason] at those times. I’m not really sure, because I could have gone to any college after high school.

Kurtz: Were any of your family military members?

Stubbe: No. Well, my uncle whom I’m very close to, was in the China-Burma-India Campaign in World War II, and he and I were very close.

Kurtz: Did that have any influence, do you think?

Stubbe: I don’t think so. And I had a great uncle, my grandma’s brother, died in World War I, his name was Nels.

Kurtz: What side—with a name like Stubbe?

- Stubbe: That was my mother's side—Anderson. He was at Fond du Lac, actually at a place called Hamilton, which was a little rock quarry area there, just south of—doesn't exist anymore. I think it was a time of confusion for me, quite frankly. I was all set to go into the sciences. I had been interviewed by a Case Institute of Technology [person], and I was thinking of the Colorado School of Mines. I was interested in geology and mineralogy and that kind of thing.
- Kurtz: Let the record show that around the house [it's evident that] he's still interested in some.
- Stubbe: O yes, rocks—I never gave up that interest in the mysteries and wonders of the earth.
- Kurtz: Were you committed to go on active duty, Ray, as a result of joining the Reserve?
- Stubbe: Yes, I had a two-year active duty [obligation] at that time. I think it was—my minister at the time had also asked me to consider the ministry, and that was so jolting for me—why did he do that? He was a really very powerful minister, well-known nationally, and I suppose to avoid the decisions, I thought, well, I'll get out of the box—we didn't use that term in those days.
- Kurtz: What was that minister's name?
- Stubbe: Austin Alvin Zinck, A.A. Zinck, Z-I-N-C-K. He was on national boards of our Lutheran group. He was from Nova Scotia. He had been President of a seminary and college up there before becoming our Pastor. He had a very powerful voice, and he was well-known for his scholarship. Not only was he President up there, but he also taught calculus, Latin, Greek, Hebrew, the Bible, and philosophy, and everything else. He was a very powerful person. A humorous aside: I was in Confirmation [classes] one time and—he was a big guy too—he was born in Nova Scotia of sea-faring people, and he said [*speaks in low, loud, serious voice*], “Ray, do you ‘air’?” And I thought he meant, did I fart? And I said, “No, Pastor Zinck, No, I don't ‘air’!” And he looked at me and said, “Yes, you do!” OK, yes, I do! He meant “err,” but I always pronounced that “er” [as in “father”]; he pronounced it “air.”
- Kurtz: So, when you graduated from high school, you reported to the Navy. Where did you go there?
- Stubbe: Yes, well actually I was able to do a two-week—I'm not really proud of this, but it's just what happened. I did a two-week Active Duty for Training at [Naval Training Center] Great Lakes [Illinois], went through that and finished that in the summer of '56, and then I got my orders to go on active duty [to report] on the 31st of October of '56, and they said that since you already went

through the two-week boot camp and you're already Seaman Apprentice [pay grade E-2], you don't need to go through boot camp again. It was marvelous! So that's how that happened. Then I went to a Receiving Station in Brooklyn [New York], for about two, three weeks, and then I reported aboard the USS NOA, a destroyer, hull number 841, in Norfolk [Virginia] in, I believe it was, the 10th of December of '56, bitter cold, assigned to the deck force, 2nd Division, swabbing decks, chipping paint, and remained on the NOA about two years. After about three months on the Deck Force they were looking for someone for Ship's Office, someone who could type, and I had a very good clerical score, 67 or something like that, and a high GCT score—the Navy ones are lower than the Marines. So they brought me into the Ship's Office and they sent me to a Yeoman "A" School at Bainbridge [Maryland], and I made YN3, Yeoman Third Class, and eventually, before I finished my active duty, I was a Second Class Petty Officer [pay grade], E5.

Kurtz: So when you got out of the Navy that was 1958

Stubbe: '58, yes. And I was in the middle of the Mediterranean at the time because there was a crisis at Lebanon—even then! In fact, that's where I got my first ribbon, an Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal, for operations off of Lebanon in '58, and they wanted me to—but I had already been accepted by St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota, and they had an "early release program." Normally, I would have stayed in until October of '58, but they let me out in—I can't remember—August or September—it was right before school was to start. And I got right out of the Mediterranean and they sent me back and I got separated, but I still had reserve obligation, and went to St. Olaf College.

Kurtz: So did you graduate from St. Olaf?

Stubbe: Yes, in '62. And while I was at St. Olaf, I continued to go [to Navy Reserve meetings on Navy Island] to Minneapolis on Reserve meetings. I took the bus up there. I graduated with a philosophy major and was all set to go to Seminary at that point.

Kurtz: So you made a decision at St. Olaf to go to Seminary?

Stubbe: And the first year [at St. Olaf] I took courses that normally juniors take: I took Greek. I also took advanced chemistry—they had a normal chemistry course for those that just needed science credits, but I took the advanced one. It was a pretty heavy academic schedule, and I was over my head, but I was over my head. There was one experiment in chemistry where we got an "unknown" and we had to do the research to try to determine—they told us it was about ten different elements that it could be. We had to do the research on what kind of test to do. So they gave me this little test tube of unknown. It happened to be a uranium [compound], and the way to test for that was to put sulphuric acid with it and it would change colors. And so, stupidly—I mean,

very stupidly, because I had done chemistry when I was in grade school—I was really into that. But I poured the solution into the sulphuric acid rather than vice versa, and it exploded. Fortunately, I was wearing glasses, but it could have blinded me. And I realized at the time I was being a little lax, and that was probably not my thing to do, so I stopped taking all the chemistry courses.

Kurtz: So what seminary did you go to?

Stubbe: I went to a little seminary called Northwestern Lutheran Theological Seminary. It was on 100 East 22nd Street, Minneapolis. We were in the old Pillsbury Mansion buildings about a block away from the Minneapolis Art Institute, a very nice location. There were only about a hundred of us, less than a hundred of us for the three years, about thirty to a class. I graduated from there in '65, and about a year after I graduated they merged with Luther Seminary in St. Paul, which is a large seminary, about five, six hundred students on Como Avenue.

Kurtz: So how many were there in your class?

Stubbe: About thirty or so. I was the second in academic rank in my class. And they were very disturbed that I was going on active duty later on. They thought I should have become a professor or something.

Kurtz: How did you know you were going on active duty?

Stubbe: OK, what happened there was, while I was in seminary, I joined a thing called a Reserve Chaplain Company, commissioned as an Ensign. The Navy had a—maybe still do—but anyway at that time they had a program for those becoming doctors, lawyers, or ministers, that they could become commissioned as an Ensign, but they weren't in their field; they were an unrestricted line officer, but you weren't like an 1105 [designator for Line Officer, Naval Reserve], which was a Line Officer. In my case, I was a 1945. Those numbers refer to codes that the Navy has for officers. So I joined a Chaplain Reserve Company. I think it was 9-6—Ninth Naval District, 6th Chaplain Company [which] met in Minneapolis, and I was the only Ensign. There were, like, four Navy Captains, from World War II, and I think there was a Major [should be Lieutenant Commander]. Because of that I was able to go to the Navy Chaplains School at Newport, Rhode Island, one summer for two months.

Kurtz: You did that while you were at seminary?

Stubbe: Yes. At that time—we're talking '65—I graduated in '65. Going on active duty came later on, but I was in this Chaplain Company and remained as an Ensign there. And after I graduated, I became ordained on the 6th of June of '65, went to start a church in a suburb of Milwaukee called Oak Creek, and I

started a church called All Saints Lutheran Church, which was a matter of canvassing a 16 square-mile area, everyone who was in there, saying “We’re going to start church services; are you interested?” I have some interesting stories from that, too, but they don’t pertain to this story. Anyway, I got it organized on Easter Sunday of ’66. I don’t know the date of that, but it was in April of ’66. At that point I still yearned for the academic interests, so I applied for and was accepted by the graduate school of the University of Chicago, which was at that time—probably still is—a very prestigious—I think it was one of the three top theological graduate schools in the United States, and just to be accepted was quite an honor for me. And I went into a Ph.D. program for “Ethics and Society.” I was only there for a year because at that time—this was ’66—they were asking for chaplains. Well, there were two reasons: they were asking for chaplains and I thought, well, having been enlisted, I felt a kinship there. I felt a need—I guess you could call it a “calling.” I had an inner sense that that’s where I should be. I saw articles in *Life* magazine. I saw pictures of POWs, and it really affected me. That was the positive thing. The negative thing was that the University of Chicago—I was on the GI Bill at the time, so financially it was OK, but the Chicago theological school had this thing that they wanted you to be there maybe seven years before you got your Ph.D., and especially in “Ethics and Society” they wanted you to be proficient in economics, political science, sociology. You had to pass at their college level tests in all of those disciplines. So it was matter of: I’d be there maybe ten years or more. It would be forever. Chicago had a good reputation because they demanded a lot before they gave you their credentials. So I was there a year, and then I volunteered to go on active duty.

Kurtz: This would be in 1967?

Stubbe: ’67, early. The Navy Chaplain Corps wanted me to come to Washington, which I did, and I was interviewed by the Chief of Chaplains himself and probably one other person in the room, and they said: OK, would you waive your 30 day waiting period to go on active duty? I said: Yes. So within a week I got my orders to go to Camp Pendleton [California] which I did in June of ’67. And they had a three-week orientation thing [course] for chaplains. Prior to that they put the Chaplains in with the Field Medical Service School where the Corpsmen and Doctors would pick up things on first aid and how to treat casualties in the field and all that kind of thing. And they figured out that Chaplains did not need to know all the technical medical things, so they devised a course for just Chaplains. And we had an about-to-be retired Sergeant Major. I don’t remember his name. He would put us under his wing. At the time, I was the only one [the only Chaplain going through the course at that time]. I was the only one in the “school.” So I just went with the Sergeant-Major, and we’d go to the different ranges or places. We had courses on etiquette, customs of Vietnam—like you didn’t touch [pat] the head of a child.

Kurtz: Do basically this was a Vietnam orientation?

Stubbe: Exactly, yeah. It was a Staging Battalion, but the chaplain part, I was the only one in. And they'd go to courses like where they'd fire the M79, and you'd get a chance to fire the M79. And they had an infiltration course where the infantry training people would come up from boot camp and they'd go under barbed wire and they'd fire over them. And I figured, well, if I'm going to be with these people, I need to go through that too. So that was the beginning of the end as far as I was concerned for promotion in the Chaplain Corps. They just said that was not a thing they would have liked me to do. But I felt I need to learn what these people are going through. So I did that. And I wasn't an athletic person. In high school I didn't have any sports. I was what they now call a "nerd;" I was an academic person—and going to the University of Chicago and all that kind of stuff. But nevertheless, I still felt that's what I needed to do, so I went through the infiltration course and the night exercises where you'd be captured as a POW and had to escape and had to be recaptured. And I remember one night we were out and there were just three of us, two Marines and myself, and the Marine in charge, a Corporal, said: OK, we got to move, and we didn't want to move because we thought if we move we're going to be spotted and that kind of thing. And he said: Well, if you don't move, you're going to be captured. And that's the kind of thing I was learning: I was learning. I was learning, in a battle situation that they would have to move under fire, under the enemy, and yet feel safe. And there were some cases where it actually happened, where that actually did happen: where the Marines stayed put and another Marine would say, You got to move, and they'd say: No, we're going to be rescued, and they were all killed. So anyway I was going through all that kind of stuff, and then I immediately went to Vietnam.

Kurtz: Before we get you to Vietnam, I got a couple of questions. Obviously you're a kind of person who follows stuff. Were you aware of what was going on in Vietnam? Starting with Dien Bien Phu, did that make any impression on you?

Stubbe: No. I wasn't even aware of the French thing at all. I think the only thing that really gripped me was some pictures of POWs in the *Life* magazine. They were in purplish, reddish or pink uniform. That really got to me. And O, I must say, another summer while I was still in seminary—one summer I spent in the Navy Chaplains School and the other summer I spent on Temporary Active Duty at the Naval Air Station at Alameda, California, and they had a squadron, VAW-13, which flew these A-1 Sky raiders, electronic—with chaff to jam radars. And they used to take me up flying with them. And the legend at the time was all about Dieter Dengler who had been captured in Laos and managed to escape. He was a German fellow and he tried to pass himself off as a German citizen. And these pilots were all—they had a detachment at Cubi Point, Philippines, and so they were talking about Vietnam a lot. Vietnam was a big subject at the time. So that was in my mind at the time.

Kurtz: I'm going to turn the tape over.

[Tape 1, Side B]

Stubbe: Included a letter that I wrote on behalf of Jon Geissmann, who was my roommate at the University of Chicago. What happened: as the siege started at Khe Sanh—just to jump ahead for a second here—we were all—I'll get into that later on—but I received a letter from his draft board. He was being drafted. So I wrote in long hand a letter on his behalf to recommend that he be given a deferment or something like that. So anyway, that's how that happened. I remember eating at the refectory—we didn't call it that then; we call it that in the seminary—at Chicago, it was in the Burton-Judson [quadrangle of dormitories] complex just south of the Midway Plaisance road. The dorms are quadrangles. We were eating lunch there one time when I remember I told the people I was eating lunch with, my fellow students, that I was going to Vietnam, and I remember one of them said to me, "How can you even think of doing that? You'll be the church's endorsement of a corrupt Saigon regime! How can you think of doing that?" And I remember at the time—there were so many things going on in my mind, I must say. One of the reasons—this thing about being with Marines, being in their life-- I guess part of that started—I had a two-week active duty for training down at Great Lakes as a Chaplain, and one of the people there said: Well, why don't you come into our recruit barracks some night and just talk with us? So I did. And it just dawned on me—we have a thing in Christianity called "Incarnation," a Latin thing that means "in the flesh;" it refers to God becoming [human] in Jesus. Called an "incarnation:" God becoming human, taking on human flesh. But that whole paradigm, I guess you could call it, really made a very deep impression on me. And then later on, when I saw the pictures of the POWs in the *Life* magazine. And then while I was at Chicago in Ethics and Society so I was reading all these people, even Martin Luther which I hadn't studied that much in seminary, oddly!

Kurtz: That's strange!

Stubbe: Well, I studied him, but not to the degree—and I was studying under a Methodist, Brian Gerrish, a professor, and we were studying what Luther thought about war, about being a Christian in society. He had this, what we call "The Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms," where God is over both the secular state and the church. The two are separate, but God pronounces that the state is God's servant too—in a secular way, to maintain order and justice, punish the evil and reward the good. And that kind of interaction—there was a war with the Turk; he wrote a thing called "May Christians Serve in the Military?" And I read these things for the first time in my life. And I was deeply interested, focused in the interface of religion and war. And oddly enough, none of my other Chaplain friends, through the years even, had never seemed interested in that. And for me, "Thou shalt not kill?" What does that mean? Can a Chris-

tian be a soldier—or a Marine. So I did a lot of research. And of course I realized that that commandment did not deal with killing; it dealt with murder. The Hebrews were involved in holy wars—obviously it wasn't "war," it was—I got into all this stuff. And I studied the early church history. I really got into it.

Kurtz: Did the Chaplain School have anything like that?

Stubbe: No, no. They were interested—the Chaplains School was mainly a transforming place, a transformative experience, a place where you transformed from one reality to another, like a "boot camp for ministers," so you know the different ranks, you know what a battalion is, you know what a regiment is, you know what's on a ship, we had damage control drills on a mock ship that the Officer Candidate School—a big, steel box that floated on water and you put out fires, it's sort of sinking. Not all Chaplains went with Marines, obviously; some went to the Navy. It was a familiarization with terms, with Code of Military Justice, how to salute, how to march, what the left foot is and what the right foot is—minus all the weaponry kind of things.

Kurtz: Were you at all counseled that being with the men was not good for your career?

Stubbe: No. I think it was sort of assumed. Most Chaplains are academic, like I was, but they didn't have that—I don't know—. I'm not judging because a lot of Chaplains were very close—very, very close to their men, and a lot of them got out of the Service. Maybe some that were close to their men were able to stay in, too. I'm not saying that in a negative way. I'm just saying that after all that education—college and seminary and everything else—most, like doctors and lawyers—I guess they expected more of a "professional [distance]," and I was more, like, a friend. In fact, during the siege [battle at Khe Sanh] I couldn't do [worship] services because we just couldn't, and maybe I'd just hug somebody or I'd just talk with them: "how are things going," that sort of thing. So I was trying to be a friend, and yet, I did maintain my Chaplain [existence]; I wasn't "one of the boys,"—I'll put it that way. Some Chaplains did that: their language became very coarse; they would drink a lot and that kind of thing, and they became just one of the people, and I think they lost all their authority that way, because you do have to be different, but you have to [also] be the same. Again, the paradigm of the Incarnation—(I don't want to be too religious for this [interview], but the thing of being fully human and fully divine at the same time is a real "mystery," not that I was that, I [certainly] wasn't fully divine; I was fully human—I know I was, but you have to maintain a distance and also a proximity). Being a Chaplain is a very difficult, a very fine edge, but a lot of Chaplains would be so either just paternalistically pronouncing down or maybe they'd be very friendly and have a little Bible study group, or whatever, a religious thing. But I felt you communicate more by your actions and by your life and by your concerns, than by what you say.

Those were the things I was learning in graduate school, and so when I went on active duty, that's the shape of how I became a Chaplain. I'm sort of unusual that way, I guess.

Kurtz: Well I've got a question about the difficulty then when you went to Vietnam, and that is: what were you told about dealing with people that came to you and said they were conscientious objectors or cowards, or they said, you know, the command that says "Thou shalt not kill."

Stubbe: I was very liberal—I'll put it that way, but probably with a sort of enlightened self-preservation. See, the situation at Khe Sanh was that we had at least three hill outposts that were manned by Marines. We had a combat base, and sometimes we would have a temporary little outposts. We had a Special Forces camp. We had little groups of Marines that lived in the villages with the mountain tribesmen that we had, and half and half would be Montagnards and half Marines. The Marines were to teach them how to defend their villages. We had those things. And my feeling was that if a fellow came in and said that he had any doubts at all if he would fire on the enemy, that that person should not be in that situation where there was any doubt at all. Not only—I mean, sometimes I would be staying overnight at these positions. I didn't want somebody—the lines were pretty thin; there would be somebody maybe every ten feet at night, which was why they could never fall asleep, whatever, but if there was any doubt at all that someone was going to fire on the enemy approaching—because we were isolated. We were very close to Laos and very close to the Demilitarized Zone, in mountains, and the grass was six-foot high and there was a lot of vegetation and it was very rough terrain. So the enemy could creep in very easily and all of a sudden be there—which they did, later on. So my feeling was "get rid of them" [those claiming to be conscientious objectors]. And so I was very supportive of all conscientious objectors. And I still have a file, if you want to get it later on; I kept a file of all these people. But the Marine Corps—[actually the] Department of Defense—made it very difficult for conscientious objectors. They had a long, hard process, almost Herculean in scope.

Kurtz: What was the view of Company Commanders and Battalion Commanders if you told them that this kid shouldn't be there?

Stubbe: Yeah. They were not quite as liberal. They were short of people, basically, and they needed everybody they could [keep]. So, I'm not sure what happened to all of these people, except for one. One, a very prominent conscientious objector that reported in on the early part of January, 1968. His name is Jonathan Nathaniel Spicer. And Jonathan came—this is maybe the middle of January he reported aboard. The Siege started the 21st of January; so he was there about a week, ten days before. He saw me. He came in—a very "boy-ish" kind of appearance, demeanor; he looked like he was 12, 13 years old. He told me (and I learned from talking with him) that he was a son of a Meth-

odist minister. He had never hunted. He had never been in sports. He had never been in a fight. His hero was Albert Schweitzer. He told me—I'll never forget; some of the things are engraved in my memory—he said: He didn't care what happened to him; he just didn't want to hurt anybody else. And I thought—well, for sure—I mean the other people that I supported, I supported; I just didn't know. The Chaplain's job was to determine the authenticity of an applicant and also to answer the questions on the religious development, because they had to have a religious basis. They couldn't just say they were opposed to wars, or to selective war. And in his case there was no doubt in my mind that this fellow was indeed a very genuine conscientious objector. And I said, OK, we'll start the process. In the meantime, he had to go to his unit, which was the supply—a rear kind of thing. He was in supply of one of our line companies—I think it was BRAVO Company of First Battalion, Twenty-Sixth Marines. And I said: Well, we'll start this off; you come back and see me and we'll work this out; we'll write this up and we'll take care of it. Then the Siege battle started, and I hadn't seen him after that. The base was attacked. And about a day after that, the "Top," the First Sergeant of (I'm sure it was) Bravo Company came to me and said: "Chaplain, YOU!—you have to do something about Spicer!" He said, "He won't take up his rifle and clean it and the guys are beating him up." And I can understand that. When things get tense, people—especially the Marines—they have to depend on each other, and if there's a "weak link"—it's just like a hen pecking, the birds pecking the weak bird—that was a cause of anxiety, and so they were beating him up. And I said, "Well, I have a solution. I deserve a Chaplain's Clerk, by requirements. Chaplains deserve a Clerk, and I don't have one. My clerk had just rotated back, just prior to the Siege—a good fellow—he ended back up in DESERT STORM because he stayed in the Reserve in the Army. But anyway. It's sort of ironic. He left. So I had no Clerk, and I said I deserve one. I said: I don't really need one; I'll be honest with you, because I was on the base. I don't need a jeep driver. I don't need someone to carry a rifle to protect me. Those are the two main things that the Chaplains Clerk does—he carries supplies, drives the Chaplain, and protects him. So I don't need him. But my bunker is in the C-Med area, and they always need stretcher bearers. So you can assign him to me, and he'll work for 3rd Platoon of Charlie Company, 3rd Med Battalion; we called them "Charlie Med," which is where I was. He can be a stretcher bearer. OK. That's fine, he said, "We'll get him out of our hair." So he reported to me. And I have to say to my shame, again, that was the last time I saw him, because I was all over the base all the time, and I didn't want him around me. I didn't want to be responsible for protecting him. Sometimes we just had to dive into a shallow ditch (or whatever) and there was probably only room for one person, or maybe there was no room, and I didn't want to be responsible for him getting killed. And I didn't pursue any more of his conscientious objection thing. And he was there in C Med, and I was all over the base until—and I left, and I still never saw him. And then I learned that he was helping to load casualties aboard a helicopter and a mortar exploded right as they were doing that. He took shrapnel

in the sac around his heart, the pericardium, the doctors that were there were basically interns, they were not qualified to do anything [to do open heart surgery, that is], but they knew if they didn't operate, he'd die. They were successful. They got the shrapnel out of his heart, sent him on to Japan. He was there two weeks, and then he died of infection.

Kurtz: O my!

Stubbe: And then—he was written up in an AP release, or UPI, one of—all the papers in the United States, and there was a woman, Jurate Kazickas, who is a well-known writer, and she was wounded up there, grievously, along with the Engineer Officer, Bill Gay, and she was evacuated as a matter of fact, and she left her boots. And the story tells of these boots, which were tiny, small size, and they just fit Spicer, and he asked if he could have them, and he did—until he died. I always felt guilty after that, that if I hadn't intervened, he might have been transferred to the rear or something, but he would still have been alive. And I worked that through, eventually in that I did what I thought was right; he did what he thought was right; and it was just the circumstances.

Kurtz: Well, war is very [*unintelligible*], as you well know.

Stubbe: O yeah. But you can't—but all Vietnam vets seem to have this thing about guilt. It's sort of an ill-defined guilt and just pin it on to whatever they can pin it on to, whether it's deserved or not. And I pinned the guilt on—it's sort of like when a man comes back home from work and he's angry, and he started fighting his wife. It's not that his wife is wrong, it's just that she's there. You have to have some object to put the emotions on, and most Vietnam vets will pin the guilt on something that's really not really not worthy of that guilt, but they still feel guilty.

Kurtz: One last question, and then we have to go to Vietnam, and that is—this Spicer said he didn't want to hurt anybody. The fact that he wasn't doing his job, meant that he was hurting his fellow Marines, which explains why they were beating him up. Now how did you deal with that, where—if you and I are here together and I've got some responsibility to protect you.

Stubbe: Well, he just worked as a stretcher bearer.

Kurtz: But before he came out of the lines—he said he didn't want to hurt anybody, well, if he—

Stubbe: Well, I just tell, when he came to me, he said that he had told the people in boot camp, in ITR [Infantry Training Regiment], in Staging [Battalion]—there were four or five different things; he told them all. He had been told by his Recruiter that he could be a dog handler and that he wouldn't have to go into combat. Well, the recruiters in those days—we know—would do anything to

get their quota, and so that's how they got him. And he soon realized that he was going to be a 0311 [MOS, Military Occupation Specialty], an Infantryman. So he told all these people, all the way through, and he told me that they told him, Wait until you get to your next duty station. They didn't want to have to deal with it. So here he is, at Khe Sanh, about ready to have war—this conscientious objector, who should have been handled before he got over there, but was passed-off; they just didn't want to handle it, or they thought that maybe he'd crack and conform. So there he is. He comes to Khe Sanh. And I must say—people told me later on that I came to know really well, who worked as stretcher bearers, like recon people—recon people, reconnaissance Marines were unable to do their reconnaissance patrols because of the situation, and they would be sent to C Med to act as stretcher bearers, or sent to the lines or sent to move supplies. They told me that Spicer became in charge of them eventually, because he was there all the time. He was the permanent stretcher bearer and these other people came in and out, and he became like a “tiger.” And what happened with Spicer was that when we had incoming, all the guys who would be carrying stretchers out to a waiting helicopter and we'd have incoming mortars because the [enemy] spotters on the hill would see the chopper, call in mortars. And all the other guys would run to ditches, trenches, and bunkers, and Spicer would stay out there with the guy—all the time! He'd lay down beside the stretcher and try to comfort the guy or even lay on top of him sometimes to give more assurance. And he did this all the time. So that when he did die, this article that I was mentioning—they were interviewing Colonel Lownds who was the regimental commander, senior officer present, and he said, well, that man deserves a Navy Cross for his bravery, which is one level under a Medal of Honor. And so he did. He received posthumously—his family received the Navy Cross. And I always thought it was very ironic that this conscientious objector, who never fired a shot got the Navy Cross.

Kurtz: Wow!

Stubbe: I think that's quite a story.

[End of tape; Tape 2, Side A]

Kurtz: As we're turning the tape over, Ray has told me that this is not the first time he's done it. Could you just tell me briefly relay a couple of these people who've been here.

Stubbe: There seemed to be a time—it all happened within a year or two. There was a fellow named Ron Steinman who was with the History Channel or ABC. He did a History Channel thing on Vietnam, and I was included in there along with several other Khe Sanh veterans. And then there was a fellow from the Weather Channel called me up and they were concerned with the effects of weather on war, and they did a section on Khe Sanh, and two people came up

from Chicago and interviewed me for that. All these things, by the way, had been repeated on History Channel or Weather Channel, so I'd get telephone calls. And then one time, believe it or not, Ollie North himself, for "War Stories" said we want to do a thing on Khe Sanh, and I said, well, I just don't travel that much. In fact, I told all these people—the reason they came here is that—I guess maybe it's an effect of Vietnam or whatever, but I just don't like to travel. In fact, I get kind of panicky with pressure on the chest, sweaty palms, headaches, if I get out of Milwaukee. So they all came to me; they came to this house. And one time Ollie North came. I said: The only way we're going to do this is if you come here. He said: OK, I'll come. I had known Ollie from 1973 when I was on Okinawa with 4th Marine Regiment at Camp Hansen, and he had the Northern Training Area. And just before I'd gone to Okinawa, I had finished Army Jump School—I'm sounding more and more like a gungy Chaplain—really, and I don't think of myself that way. What happened there—I'm kind of scattered here—but it will come together. I was on a Navy ship called the [USS] SHREVEPORT, LPD-12, and I had orders to go to Okinawa, but the Navy ran out—it was one of these budget things where the Navy ran out of PCS money, Permanent Change of Station money because Congress hadn't passed the Continuing Resolution which, because of that, they didn't have money to transfer people, so I ended up at the Naval Amphibious Base at Little Creek in Norfolk [Virginia] where the SHREVEPORT went off to the Med and I was due to go to Okinawa. So while I was there, they didn't have much work for me to do there, so at that time I translated the Greek New Testament into English; I went through the whole Greek New Testament—academic again. But I said: I need to get some physical exercise because I'm going to Okinawa with Marines again because I had been on the ship and was a little out of shape. So there was a SEAL Team there, SEAL Team Two. And I asked them: Can I do training with you, physical training. They said: Sure! So I did morning runs with them. Of course they were in such good shape and I was in such bad shape—the heights of the mountains and the depths of the ocean we're talking here. I'll never forget we were in a circle to do exercises and the head guy said: We'll start off light; we'll start off with fifty push-ups. And if I could do ten—I don't know! But the fellow who was next to me was a Chief Boatswain's Mate named Brumuller. He had one eye that looked off to the side. He had just come back from Bolivia where he had done some nefarious thing that SEALS do, and he looked at me and said, "Padre, which arm should I use? Left arm or right arm?" And I had never even heard of anyone doing one-arm push-ups and so I thought he was pulling my leg, so I said, "OK, use your left arm." He did fifty push-ups with his left arm! Put his right hand behind his back. He said: "You should go to Jump School. You'd really enjoy that. You enjoy working out with us SEALS. You would enjoy going to Fort Benning!" So they got me permissive orders and I went to Fort Benning and I got my Jump Wings. And I must say that at that time I was an academic person, not physical, and it took every bit of effort that I had to get through Jump School. Most of the guys, it was a breeze; it *is* fun for them, but for me it was serious.

So anyway, I had my silver Jump Wings and I went to Okinawa and there I was able to jump. They had a Special Forces group there called SAFASIA, which I think was “Special Action Force, Asia.” I guess I can say this now: they had nuclear weapons there at Camp Chinen and they had plans to invade mainland China. This was back in ’73. None of this has ever been in the news, I’m sure. Maybe it’s still classified. I’m sure it isn’t, but anything with nuclear weapons—people get a little anxious. So I jumped with them in a place in the middle of Okinawa called Yomitan Peninsula. And then I also jumped with Marine Air Delivery people, and I got my Gold [Navy-Marine Corps] Wings. And I liked to go to the Northern Training Area because they were teaching rappelling off cliffs and river crossing techniques and all that kind of thing, and that’s where I met Ollie North. He was the Officer in Charge, the OIC, of the Northern Training Area. And he really took care of his men. He got the Division Band up there for Marine Corps Birthday. One of his men, a fellow named Golightly, wanted to be baptized. [He was] Southern Baptist. I told him: I’m Lutheran, and you’ll have to be baptized again. He said: No, I want to be baptized, so we went in Shin Gawa River, I think it is, that ran through the Northern Training Area—very, very cold. And of course he wanted to be baptized by immersion, so we were in this river. And O, it was so very cold. So that was my remembrance of Ollie North. And I’d taken some pictures of him with a [Marine Corps] Birthday cake—this young Captain. So he called me; he said he’s coming over to do an interview. So he came, and I had a room at that time full of memorabilia from Khe Sanh which I’ve since donated to the Wisconsin Veterans Museum, and we were sitting up there surrounded by all these shrapnel and boots and uniforms and all that kind of stuff, and he was asking me various questions. And I remember I was looking off [into space], and all of a sudden I looked at him, and there was a tear coming down his eye. People remember him, I guess, because of the [Congressional] Hearings on Iran-Contra and all that kind of thing, but really Ollie is a very personable-- . He is a good Marine. He took care of his men. He was a “person-type” person, officer. I’m sure he was a “mission-type” officer too, but basically he was a very caring—my memory of Ollie is that he was caring, sensitive person who has very deep feelings, and that’s the way that I’ll always remember him.

Kurtz: Well, it’s time to go to Vietnam. We’ve talked about conscientious objectors and a little bit about a lot of things, but going to Vietnam. How did you go to Vietnam, Ray?

Stubbe: OK. I flew—as most of us did—some of us went by ship—I flew from Camp Pendleton—I don’t think we flew from Camp Pendleton—I’m not sure where we took off from. But anyway, I landed in DaNang, and my first impressions there were how hot and smelly and—of course, I’d been in many foreign countries before in the Navy, so it wasn’t that much of a shock. But it was hot and smelly. And I remember I wanted to drink a soda, and some of the guys there were saying, well, we can’t use money. We had to use “funny money,”

so they had Military Payment Certificate, MPC, for a nickel or a dime or a quarter, and someone had some, and they bought me a coke. And I remember also there were three Marines there who were from Khe Sanh. And, of course, I didn't know anything about Khe Sanh. I didn't know how it was spelled. I don't think I'd even heard the term, even though the Battle of the Hills had been in the news. It just didn't register. But they were sitting there, and they had just received Silver Stars, I guess it was. They were with the recon unit. And they were talking about how they—I sat with them—and they were talking about Hill 918. Hill 918 is a little closer to the Laotian border; it's between Hill 881 and the Laotian border. They were talking about how they were going up there and clean it out—the North Vietnamese who were creeping in from Laos. So that stuck in my mind—Khe Sanh and Hill 918, and how young and how enthused and how full of life these—and they were so anxious to get back. The other thing that happened at DaNang was that—I was only there for one day and they were separating us into bunches of people. Some were going to Khe Sanh, and some were going to Phu Bai and some were going to Dong Ha—there were three main groups, and I was in the group that was going to Phu Bai, and they were going to Khe Sanh. They gave us numbers and they would say, All those with numbers 1 through 60 going to Dong Ha, you can go, and they would go on a C-130 or whatever. And my number was such that I couldn't go. They ceased operations and sent us over to the Air Force area for supper. And then it was getting around midnight. I can't remember the date, but this would be in the middle of July, and they said: OK, there's another plane that's leaving for Phu Bai which you can take, or you can stay overnight and we'll get you out the next morning. Get some sleep. And I was just anxious to go on, to get out of a temporary thing. Little did I know it was so much better in DaNang. The bedding—it was an Air Force compound, and I was going to a Marine compound where there were no showers or anything, even in Phu Bai. So anyway I got on the last C-130 that left that night, and I'll never forget how claustrophobic I felt. I got on this C-130 and there weren't too many of us. And it was so hot, and the air conditioner started, and it looked like steam coming down from the outlets for the air conditioning. It was so humid that it was like steam. And then the ramp came up, and I felt so closed in even though it was a big plane, and landed in Phu Bai. What I didn't know was that within five minutes after taking off that DaNang Airbase was hit with a very heavy rocket attack. The way I found that out was that there was another fellow that I talked with while I was at DaNang named Harper Bohr, B-O-H-R, who was going to Khe Sanh as the Intelligence Officer, the S-2 of the Regiment. And he and I had a very nice conversation. He was a very nice gentleman who was also Lutheran, and we were talking about that. I talked with him for awhile, and then I was talking with these three Marines, and then I went to the Air Force compound. Anyway, eventually when I got to Khe Sanh, he told me about this rocket attack. He had stayed behind, because he probably knew better—that the Air Force had better—. But he said it was just terrible. He said they thought they were going to be killed. So I just escaped that by about five minutes.

So I landed at Phu Bai, and there I spent about a week with the Division Chaplain there, and they were deciding where to put me and giving me some orientation on Vietnam. And I remember the first night I arrived there I was so grubby and I said, Can I take a shower? And they said, No; there's no water. I thought: This is odd; this is like being on a Navy ship! So then I went to the "three-holer"—the outdoor facility that they had there, and there was a man sitting on one of the holes there with toilet paper wiping blood from his wounds; he had been hit by shrapnel and he was all bloody, and I thought, What am I getting into?! So I spent about a week there, at Phu Bai. I could probably look up some more about that, but those are the [lasting] impressions that I remember about Phu Bai.

Kurtz: What did they tell you about what your role was in Vietnam, or job?

Stubbe: They didn't say very much. They told me eventually at the end—a day or so before I left there—that I was going to Khe Sanh, but I was going there on a temporary basis, that I was really assigned to Third Shore Party Battalion, which was at a place called Gia Le [pronounced: JAH-LAY]. Shore Party is a supply-moving unit for the Marine Corps, usually on a beach—traditionally they stage things into categories of petroleum, medical supplies, ammunition, food, water—in different areas, and then they move them out to the different units. It's sort of a half-way thing of organizing supply movement. In Vietnam, Shore Party did the same thing, only they were on inland bases, and they would move supplies. Anyway, they have a different uniform—well, they have the same uniform as everyone else, except that they have red patches on the outer part of their knees, and a little square red patch on their collar, on their hat. The one on the knees is, like, two inches by one inch—to designate—they're the ones that can be there, to get all the people who aren't supposed to be there with the supplies [out]. So anyway I was assigned to them. And the reason they were sending me to Khe Sanh [was] because their chaplain—there was only one chaplain—well, there was a Chaplain of First Battalion, Twenty-Sixth Marines. We call that "one-twenty-six." His name was David Meschke, who had gone over with them, and I met him in Okinawa as a matter of fact. It's interesting that I had all these little contacts with Khe Sanh before I went there. He told me a little bit about Khe Sanh. So anyway, they said: We're sending you to Khe Sanh to fill Dave Meschke's place until we can get a new Chaplain there, but you're Third Shore Party Battalion Chaplain. And the reason for all that kind of confusion was that 26th Marine Regiment was a unit of a thing called "9th MAB"—Ninth Marine Amphibious Brigade, which had its headquarters on Okinawa. MACV had determined that there could be only so many Marines "in country" in Vietnam, so that's why the Marines had quite an establishment on Okinawa, like repair facilities. The Army had these in Vietnam, but the Marines could only have so many people, so they decided to have as many infantry as they could—and air—and they had what they called the "logistic tail," they had only like two or three men for every infantryman, whereas the Army had like eight or nine in their logistic

tail or support people for every infantryman because they could have more people in Vietnam. So anyway, they had a thing called “Ninth Marine Amphibious Brigade” and the Marines in Vietnam were under the Third Marine Amphibious Force. They had to change from 3rd MEF to 3rd MAF because they thought the [“Third Marine Expeditionary Force”] was too militaristic or something. And the 26th Marine Regiment was a 9th MAB unit; they were not part of 3rd Marine Division or 3rd MAF. They were, operationally under them, but administratively they were under 9th MAF. The battalions, however, were considered 3rd Marine Division. So, technically, I had my orders to Vietnam as a 3rd Marine Division Chaplain, but all the Chaplains that went to the 26th Marines, including the battalions which, even though they were 3rd Marine Division [units], they received their orders directly from the Chief of Naval Personnel to report to the 26th Marines because they were considered 9th MAB, a different unit. And they weren’t even ordered to 9th MAB; they were ordered to 26th Marines. See, 26th Marines was part of the old 5th Marine Division. And this was their first year in Vietnam, so there were some technical and historic and administrative things they hadn’t ironed out yet. And so I couldn’t be the 1/26 Chaplain; I had to be the 3rd Shore Party Chaplain. So anyway, I got to Khe Sanh, and I was there for about a week or so, and the Battalion Commander, whom I’d met—again, I met him in Staging Battalion [at Camp Pendleton] by the name of Jim Wilkinson, and he was going to Khe Sanh, although I didn’t know that at the time. He was my Battalion Commander, and a wonderful gentleman, like Harper Bohr. And he said: We have these company-sized units—a company is about 250 men—we have these company-sized units out in different places, Hill 861 and Hill 881 [South]—they’re named for how many meters above sea-level [they are], and he said: We haven’t had a Chaplain go out and see them for some time. He said: We’d like to have you go out. So I went out to Hill 881 [South]. I must say that the time I arrived at Khe Sanh we had Third Battalion, 26th Marines, there, and their Chaplain was Bede Wattigny, W-A-T-T-I-G-N-Y. And he had been drafted by his Order—they had a quota—there were so few Catholics [Catholic Chaplains], that the different Catholic orders had to send so many Chaplains—they were ordered to, and he didn’t want to be in the Service, and he didn’t want to be in Vietnam, and he was very anxious to get out and go home. He told me—the very first words I heard [from him] he said when I got there, “The Marine Corps is the worst thing that ever happened to me in my life!” So he was not about to go out in [outpost] places. So I went out to Hill 881-South, and the Commanding Officer there at the time [of Alfa Company, 1/26] was John Raymond. John Raymond was a very interesting fellow. He had—I went to his CP [Command Post] bunker there and he had little C-ration case cardboard [sleeves] on his walls where he had put different sayings. I’ll never forget one of the sayings was: “God and the soldier we adore/ in time of war and not before/ the battle ended and all things righted/ God’s forgotten, the soldier slighted.” And I remember that because it became so significant after Vietnam too. And he attributed it to Lord Marlborough, but I looked it up [since then] and I can’t remember who said it, but it’s in the Library of Con-

gress book of quotations. John Raymond got all his men who were available on the Landing Zone of Hill 881 [South] which is a bald top of the hill, and there was a wall made of cases of empty wooden 105 ammunition that were held in position by engineering stakes. And that's where the helicopters would land and so on. And so he got all the men who were available—who wasn't on patrol—the two platoons—a company has three platoons and a headquarters. There were a lot of people there, and they were all in line against this wall of wooden ammo boxes. And I remember looking at them, and they were all young. I guess the average age of the Vietnam enlisted person was 19. And they looked even younger than that. But they'd been on the hill for awhile. Their clothes were beginning to rot off. I remember one fellow—it really sort of shocked me. I saw him sitting there. They were all sitting. And his crotch was rotten out, and his male parts were hanging out. It's—wow, what have I gotten into?! Because I remember I had been in the University of Chicago, and I suddenly went to Pendleton for three weeks and Phu Bai for a week, and here I was in it. And this wasn't even war yet. But these guys that would be on these hills would be there for six weeks at a time—no showers or bath, no light at night. Some had sent home for candles and they were fortunate to have them. The squads would probably have Coleman lanterns, as did the Company CP [Command Post]. Everyone else, when the sun set, that was it. And of course one platoon a day would go out on sweeping patrols. The other two platoons would remain back to dig trenches and bunkers and move supplies and string the concertina and do that kind of thing. So eventually—my *modus operandi* here—eventually what would happen was that I would go out to a hill [outpost]—come out on a resupply chopper. And of course while they're moving supplies, I couldn't hold services then because there was so much noise from the chopper and there was so much commotion. So the chopper would go off and I'd stay overnight there. And then at the end of the afternoon when the patrol that was out patrolling—the platoon—would come back and the supplies had all been moved and it was quiet, then I could hold a [worship] service for everybody that wanted to [attend], but I couldn't do it during the day. During the day a platoon would be out patrolling. I mean, I could probably have done it during the day, done a service, got a resupply chopper and take me back to the base or something. And maybe I'd get ten people who were available, but this way I could get, maybe a hundred! So I'd stay overnight, stay in their bunkers, one bunker or another. And by that time they'd moved all the supplies, the platoon that was patrolling was back. And then the next morning I would get the resupply chopper to the next hill [outpost] and do the same thing. That's how I would do that. And that's why, I guess, the senior Chaplains back in Washington—why isn't he going back to the base? Why is he staying in these isolated places that are in danger of attack, and whatever else.

Kurtz: What did the Marines think about this?

Stubbe: O, the Marines, they just loved this. They thought this was the best thing going. And I felt—because the Chaplain is kind of a lonely position. I was very sensitive to the fact that I couldn't become one of the guys kind of thing, and I was older, too. I couldn't have been [one of the guys]; I just wasn't about it. But I could've adopted their language and everything else. So I want to be with people, but I knew I wasn't—. So it's a lonely position, so I wanted to be with—

[End of tape. Tape 2, Side B]

Kurtz: Watching the tape, which the people transcribing these things know is quite frequent. I was going to ask you the question: I would argue with you from my personal experience of being a Platoon Leader with a bunch of veterans is pretty lonely, too.

Stubbe: Yes, it definitely is. And of course there wasn't a bunch of veterans, but there were some that had second tours. And of course there's the Corporals and the Sergeants, Staff Sergeant—there aren't that many at that point. By that time there were a lot of casualties in Vietnam. There weren't many Staff Sergeants or Gunny Sergeants to go around, so the people that were older, say, the Company Commander on that side, and then maybe a very few on their second tour, and maybe a Staff Sergeant and a Gunnery Sergeant—there weren't many. And furthermore, some of the Second Lieutenants were Naval Academy grads, and some of them were Mustangs.

Kurtz: Tell the people what a "Mustang" is.

Stubbe: A "Mustang" is an officer who has been enlisted. In fact, the Company Commander of DELTA Company—his name was Johnson, when I first arrived there—was a Mustang. And all the troops loved him, because they knew that he knew what they knew. They couldn't put anything over him, but if there were something that was troubling to them—if they had a patrol—in fact we had some patrols that were kind of questionable, where he would stand up for his men and tell the Regiment: This is not possible. So there was, for new officers—I think the Marine troops really respected their officers—at least where I was, at that time. There wasn't this thing of "fragging" and there wasn't a haughty kind of thing. They drove their men pretty hard—the Company Commanders and the Platoon Commanders—but they were with them. I guess that's the thing: they were right with them and they seemed to understand and they were good officers. And I think the men who were there would say the same. In fact, I go to reunions now, and every once and awhile a former officer will come kind of with a cautionary hesitancy—what are my men going to think about me?—and I don't think there's one that I've seen at reunions and hugs and it's just really good to see.

Kurtz: Let's divide our chat here from the summer of '67 at Khe Sanh to the time the Siege started, and I have a series of things—I assume what you were doing was going from hill to hill, but did you ever go to the Special Forces Camp?

Stubbe: Yes, I did that too.

Kurtz: Could you describe what that camp was like?

Stubbe: O God. [*Laughs*]. Well, first of all, getting to it; it was almost on the Laotian border, and even there the Marines were hesitant to let me go. My Battalion Commander, by the way, was very open about letting me go wherever I wanted to go. He was very supportive, except that some times during this time you're talking about, some of our recon teams ran into trouble, and in fact some of them were shot and killed, and so I was spending a lot of time with the recon unit which was right in the middle of our base—try to comfort some of the guys and try to get to—"how are you doing?"—that kind of thing. And at one time my Battalion Commander told me, "Remember you're the 1/26 Chaplain, not the recon Chaplain." Just a gentle way of reminding me. Yeah, one time I remember I wanted to go out to the Special Forces camp at Lang Vei, and I remember our intelligence people (I guess), not the Battalion Commander, but other people in the command bunker there said, "What do you have? A death wish?" And of course I didn't know, but during the Hill Battles earlier in '67, in fact, specifically on May 4th—the Hill Battles started the 24th of April when Bravo Company, 1/9, went up Hill 861 and they got shot at, and that precipitated the battle. And then on the 30th of April the two MIKE Companies [3/3 and 3/9] went up Hill 881 [South] and they had about 50 people killed or 60 people killed, and the battle raged on. On the 4th of May, the Special Forces camp at Lang Vei was overrun and the Commanding Officer and the Executive Officer were both killed—I since learned. I didn't know this at the time. They [the Special Forces] had recruited three Vietnamese for their forces there who were actually North Vietnamese agents. These three knifed the sentries that were on duty, permitting a force to come into the camp and they killed Captain Crenshaw and Captain Stallings who were the CO and XO, both Black, Afro-American. but the rest of the camp withstood the attack. And I interviewed the First Sergeant—his name was Steptoe, and he's since died, and we talked about this. But anyway I didn't know any of that. They knew that that camp had been overrun—or partially overrun—and it was a dangerous place to be. So I went there. And my impression of the place was that it was just a pig-sty. It was totally "un-Marine!" I mean, the Marine base at Khe Sanh was muddy and dusty and dirty, but at least they picked up the trash and the garbage. But here were all these Vietnamese, and they were eating fish heads and rice and there was food all over the place, on the ground. There were rats. It was just a complete mess. It was just so messy. On the other hand, they had a plywood team house. They had white toilet seats. And they had a doctor—his name was Hunter—he was up there from Nha Trang, and he said, "Yeah, you Marines live with less than what

you should; you're all masochists, you all live with less and you try to justify your existence to the Congress and stay in business by using less than the Army," and he went on and on and on. I was getting very angry with him. Then that night I remember they were showing a movie, and I thought, My God! A movie! I can't believe this! But at the team house they had a white sheet and they were showing this movie.

Kurtz: The movie was inside the team house?

Stubbe: Inside the team house. And I remember: Gee, I'm going to see a movie! I can't believe it! I hadn't seen a movie in months. So I went in there, and the title of the movie came on, and it was: "You Can Never Go Home Again." It was probably from Wolf. And I remember I got so nervous. I walked out. I didn't see the movie. I walked out and sat on the picnic bench that they had there. And I stayed overnight in the same bunker that Crenshaw and Stallings had been killed in. I didn't know that at the time. It was a hexagonal—sort of like an old French kind of bunker there. Lang Vei had been—before the Special Forces went there—it had been an ARVN compound. The 2nd ARVN Division, I think, had a—. So anyway I stayed overnight in that very bunker where they were killed, and I didn't know it at the time. And there were rats squeaking around at night. And I remember I had a poncho liner which was a different kind—a yellowish kind that the Marines didn't have. I hadn't even seen a poncho liner up to that point. So I had church services. And I came back a couple of times and stayed in the same bunker. I still didn't know anything about the attack that had been there. And the Navy Seabees were building a new Lang Vei camp just a little further west towards Laos. And I remember Captain Willoughby, Frank Willoughby, who was the CO of the Special Forces there—he had been a Marine Staff Sergeant at one time, he told me. And he was taking me around, and he said: O, we got two thousand meters, two clicks, of gentle, sloping fire. He said: We're keeping only Americans in the inner perimeter, and then we have barbed wire, and then the Vietnamese in the outer perimeter. And I still didn't know why—but I heard later on about being overrun—but he didn't tell me why. He said, "We can take a regiment!" And the Seabees were building a several million dollar complex. And I held [worship] services on—the Army calls it the "TOC," a Tactical Operations Center; the Marines call it a "COC," Combat Operations Center—one of those things that are different between the Army and the Marine Corps—like "enclosure." The Army and Air Force spells it "inclosure," and the Marines, it's "enclosure." And the Army always has "hours," like "Thirteen hundred hours," whereas the Marines and the Navy just have "Thirteen Hundred." There are a lot of funny different little things that are different. So anyway the Seabees are building this TOC and there were these concrete beams that were across the top. And I remember sitting on one—there's a picture of me doing this; I only had Seabees for this [worship service]—were sitting on another one facing me, and I remember telling them: "You'd better not fall asleep during my sermon, or you'll fall back down into the bunker!"

They'd be "off the beam!" But anyway, I remember Willoughby telling me, "We can take a regiment." But it took just three or four tanks when they over-ran the place. They didn't anticipate tanks.

Kurtz: Did you have any interaction with the Vietnamese in the Special Forces camp?

Stubbe: No, none. But anyway, I got out there, and then I had to try to get a chopper to try to pick me back up because that was not one of their normal resupply things, and there was no road traffic to speak of. There was some, but very rare.

Kurtz: Why was there no road traffic?

Stubbe: Well, it's just that the Marines and the Special Forces didn't have anything to do [with each other]. Sometimes—there was one time I remember where the Marines sent a jeep out to Lang Vei—I guess to give some intelligence information or something. And they had little check points along the way that spelled the name of Colonel Lownds. They had check point "L," check point "O," check point "W," and I remember the Marine Captain at the time—we were bouncing along Route 9 which had a lot of pot holes and ruts. They called it a highway, but it was really a very bad dirt road, and this Marine Captain was going out to Lang Vei, and I went out just for the ride. It was late afternoon. And I think he had been drinking; he was "deep into the cups." He kept yelling, "Provincial Days!" "Provincial Days!" He was out of it. Maybe he was covering up his fear of going out to Lang Vei; I don't know. But I was completely oblivious; I had no fear at all. I'd been on patrols off the hills and everything else. So I was going out there. I just took a ride out and back with him. But other times I went out there, I went out by chopper—I think they were bringing things out to the Seabees, and then they'd go. And I was there. And then I had to try to call the next morning. I'd call SUNRISE ONE FOUR; I think that was the Regimental air officer net. The Regiment had a different—they were MORRAY, and later on became INTRIGUE, but for some unknown reason, the "air" was SUNRISE ONE FOUR. But anyway, they got a chopper just to pick me up and take me back.

Kurtz: In your mind, was that a problem with the Marines and the Special Forces didn't have much to do with each other?

Stubbe: O, it definitely was a problem. It was a problem for everybody; it was a problem for the Special Forces and a problem for the Marines. See, what happened was: the Special Forces were on Khe Sanh base in September of '66. Westmoreland thought that the North Vietnamese were really massing around that area and he wanted to beef up the area, so he put the First Battalion, Third Marine Regiment, Lieutenant Colonel Peter Wickwire—sent them into Khe Sanh base and upgraded the airstrip. At that time the Special Forces were

still—that was a Special Forces camp. And I talked with people who were there at the time and they tell me that there was a terrible friction that the Special Forces wouldn't let the Marines know when they were doing anything or what they were doing, because they were so "classified." And the Marines would see these indigenous patrols out in front of their lines; they didn't know who they were. And one time there was a fellow, Captain O'Dell, who was one of the Company Commanders there told me—O'Dell was an interesting person—he mentioned at one time there were these Vietnamese in front of the wire and the Marines went to the Special Forces and asked, Is this one of your patrols? And they said: No. And they said: Well, from henceforth, we're going to fire on all Vietnamese patrols that we don't know about. And the Special Forces said: We can't put up with that. So they just wouldn't get along with each other. Also, the Special Forces had concrete bunkers. Later on, the Marines used to call them "the old French bunkers," because they thought they were from the French days—they looked so old and dilapidated, but they were well-built, underground concrete bunkers. But they were built by the Special Forces. I think they occupied the base around 1964. Prior to that, from '62 to '64, they had been in Khe Sanh village at a little place just to the east called "The Old French Fort," [Thuong Van], which was a hilltop. So anyway, when the Marines came, they just couldn't get along with each other, so they said: We're going to move out to this ARVN base at Lang Vei, which they did. In December of '66 they moved out there. However, they sent a message that none of their bunkers could be damaged or destroyed because they fully intended to come back to Khe Sanh base; this was a temporary move for them, a temporary move that became permanent. So they went out there, and then became very independent. Their AO, Area of Operations, was mainly along the Laotian border, along the Xepon River and then a little bit to the north. They were supposed to patrol that. The Marines thought: Well, they're really not patrolling it. And the Marines got all their reports from the 5th Special Forces at Nha Trang rather than from A-101 which was the detachment at Lang Vei, and there was always like a two, three week time delay there, so they were getting history rather than intelligence. And the Special Forces regarded themselves as "special," and they were Army, and they were just different. And there was also a MACV Detachment in Khe Sanh Village of four Army people, MACV Detachment-4, which were advisors to the District Advisor there, and they also—there was a Captain, B. G. Clarke, C-L-A-R-K-E; he's still around. But the Army and the Marines just didn't get along, at all. So when these Special Forces built their [new] camp around November, December, '67—it was finished at a cost of well over a million dollars. In the meantime, when the Siege started, Khe Sanh Village fell, so they should have known. In fact, I've talked with people who were there at the time—Sergeant Craig—he's [since] died also. He wrote some books. He was a Sergeant First Class there. I think he was the Team Sergeant of Lang Vei when the siege started. He told me. He said, "We knew when Khe Sanh Village fell, there was no link between the base [and our camp]—five miles of nothing." But the people at Nha Trang and at DaNang, they had what they called their "C

Camp,” their support camp at DaNang, and they felt apparently that, like Willoughby said, “We can take a regiment.” But of course they couldn’t patrol or anything because of the enemy being around. They should have—Craig says, “We should have abandoned the place.” But they had just spent a million dollars and the C Camp had no place for them to go. Where would they go? So, for one reason or another—I think it’s more of a Special Forces fault than the Marines’—the Marines really didn’t control them. That’s another thing: the Marines didn’t control them; they were controlled by a different agency, by the C Camp. So this wasn’t a “unified command” so to speak, and that created a lot of problems when the tanks came. Well, before the tanks came, the Laotian Battalion just inside the other side of Laos, BV-33, at Ban Houei Sane, was overrun by tanks on Highway 9, and the aerial observers told Lang Vei that—that there’s tanks in the area. So it shouldn’t have been such a surprise that they had tanks. And then the refugees from BV-33 came to Lang Vei instead of going westward to Savannakhet, which is where they should have gone; they came eastward because it’s a shorter distance, to Lang Vei. And so the village of Lang Vei became greatly enlarged with all these—. Because BV-33 was not just a military base that *battalion volontaire* or whatever the French term is, BV anyway; they used the French designation—was sort of like a National Guard [unit]. They had been at Tchepone, and had been displaced when Tchepone was overrun in May of ’61, they went to Ban Houei Sane, and they were supplied from the Khe Sanh side by Air America flights. So that’s probably why they came to us. But they were not only military, but they had wives and children and chickens and pigs and everything else. The husbands would be in the military, but it was their whole family thing. So all these refugees came at Lang Vei. And because of that there was a Lieutenant Colonel that came up from the C Company from DaNang to be at Lang Vei because the Commander of BV-33, Lieutenant Colonel Soulang [Phetsompho] was there, so they wanted a field grade officer. So that’s why when Lang Vei was overrun there was an Army Lieutenant Colonel there. There’s a fellow in Wisconsin here who was the XO of Lang Vei; his name is Ken Willcox. I can tell you some stories about that.

Kurtz: Is he still around?

Stubbe: He’s still around. [*break in tape*]. What was his name now? His code name was CROSSBOW, but anyway, saw him wounded and just left him. It was “every man for himself” kind of thing. And he [Willcox] was not too happy about that.

Kurtz: Let’s hop to—a typical patrol that you went out with the Marines.

Stubbe: These were all either one platoon or what they called “company-minus,” two platoons. And they were really not dangerous. Even though it was a vulnerable area, we knew if there was enemy coming in. We had aerial observers, we had people sniffers, recon patrols further out, and everything else. I mean

there was always a danger, obviously. Any place in Vietnam was dangerous. So I would go out with these fairly large patrols. And we would usually leave early in the morning—one platoon or sometimes two platoons, and we would go out and stay out maybe six to eight hours.

Kurtz: What kind of mission—were you in a circle?

Stubbe: They would follow a route. I guess they would look for—if a recon team thought they found grass patted down or evidence like a footprint in a trail.

Kurtz: So the recon teams triggered the patrol's objectives?

Stubbe: Usually, or, there were other things that were happening, like an aerial observer would see something, or the signals intelligence people—well, they didn't become active until around September, October, I think. But there were other intelligence things happening there. Sometimes I think the infantry would go out just to go out. Every day they sent a platoon out. Even if they didn't have a reason to do it, they'd still scour the area. So it was an area search more than a point search.

Kurtz: How did the men feel about going on patrol every day?

Stubbe: Well, they were tired, they were haggard, they were sick a lot of them. It was around September that we started getting one of the two [annual] monsoons, and so there was a huge amount of rain, and it would be always in the 40s, because we were pretty high up, and you could never get dry and even growing up in Wisconsin and going to school in Minnesota for seven years, I can truthfully say I never felt colder than I did at Khe Sanh during that time. In fact, there was one time: I used to have a little plastic-covered Greek New Testament that I had in my shirt pocket. We had these big—the Marines call them “blouses,” you didn't tuck them in; they overhang [the belt line]. They had big pockets, and I had it in one of the pockets. And one of the people had an old ammo box that they were burning increments and C-4 to keep warm in their tent. And I was so cold that I got so close to that that the cover of my Greek New Testament melted, and it was all crinkled. I still have it. So I was very cold. And also the guys would get what they called “immersion foot,” only it would be all over their hands. This is like “dishwater hands,” if you got water on the skin too long and it never gets dry. So they tried to dry their boots at night. They developed a silicone grease that they could put on their feet to keep them lubricated. Also, the elephant grass which is very tall, was very sharp and full of bacteria. And the guys, for some odd reason—I don't know why—but they would have their sleeves rolled up to their elbows—this was before the monsoons—I'm talking in the July, August, time-frame; they would get these cuts on the elephant grass which would form large, watery blisters. And the Corpsman would give them bacitracin, or we had these little merthyolate glass bottles in a cardboard [sleeve]

[*Tape 3, Side A*]

Stubbe: Sometimes there'd be elephant grass, which would be about as tall as we were, and the blades would be, O, a good half-inch wide, and they'd be stiff and had a lot of bacteria on the edges so they cut into the arms of the Marines. Around July, August, September, before the monsoons came, the Marines always wore their shirt sleeves rolled up to their elbows. So they'd get these huge, blistering infections—watery—that would never seem to heal, even though the Corpsman would give them bacitracin ointment, and they'd use merthiolate. Sometimes our battalion doctor, the Battalion Surgeon—his name was Harvey DeMaagd—he had been with the battalion from the beginning. They used to have jokes about him, because he seemed to enjoy working with boils, to lance them, and he'd take these knives there, and he had this reputation about being this gruesome doctor. Everyone liked him. But anyway, some guys would get broken limbs because these hills were so steep and there were stream beds with huge, slippery rocks, and people would fall. Sometimes going up a hill—these are some of the things I learned by being with them—how they had to live. They'd use their rifles to pull each other up the hill. Sometimes even the leaders, the Platoon Commanders, the Company Commander if it were a battalion minus—two platoons—would go out and they'd get lost, literally. You couldn't climb trees. There were trees, but they were so high. It was impossible to view hill tops from which you could get a resection by the compass to find out where you were. So they would call in registration rounds from the artillery, which could fire an eight-digit grid coordinate which, I think, puts a round within a one-meter—either a ten meter or a one meter square. I'm not sure, right now. But anyway, they'd fire a white phosphorus, which would be very prominent with its spikes of white, very beautiful, like a Fourth of July fireworks only on the land, and then they could determine from where it landed where they were. They call these registration rounds. The artillery didn't like to fire those things because they were expensive, I guess, and Marines didn't like to spend, waste, the money. But that's what they would do. So the patrols were very physically exhausting. We'd get dehydrated very fast. Most everyone took two canteens full of water.

Kurtz: Did you ever fill the canteens while out on patrol?

Stubbe: Sometimes some guys would, in the streams, and they'd use the Halozone tablets.

Kurtz: Tasted like iodine?

Stubbe: Yeah. I never did that. The very first time I went to the Battalion Commander said I should go out to the hills—I went out to 881 [South] and I held this church service and was appalled at the clothing of these men. The text I used as the meditation was “The Prodigal Son,” Luke 15, because it talks about the young son going off in a far-off country and leading a very miser-

able life. And I talked about that. And I remember the Company Commander, Captain John Raymond, got me aside after that, and he said, You shouldn't really talk about how life is [for the troops] unless you really know what's it's like. He said: We have a patrol leaving; you can go on it if you want. That's another one of the reasons I went. So I went on that patrol and we went down the north slope of 881-South, the very slope the people assaulted up during the Hill Battles. I found out that moving was not a matter of walking, but falling. I sort of kept falling forward because there were so many vines and it was so slick and so steep, and I just kept falling forward, and my canteens were clanking and becoming detached actually from my web belt. I'd pick them up and put them back on. And they [the patrol] were moving at a pretty good clip. And we got down to a stream, a rushing stream, got all wet, and went up another hill, and then they fired this registration round [actually, called in artillery to fire the registration round] because they didn't know where they were, I guess. And by that time I was thoroughly exhausted; it was about an hour into the patrol. I just felt I couldn't do one more step, but I knew I couldn't go back. There was no going back; there was no way to do that. So the only thing to do was to stay with them. They couldn't evacuate me, either, because they didn't want to bring in a helicopter; that would disclose their position. Furthermore, they just didn't want to have a medevac. So I just kept going, and about seven hours later—eight hours—by that time I was completely numb and completely out of water, and the Corpsman was giving me sips from his canteen. I only took a sip at a time. I learned the value of water—how precious and how wonderfully tasting water is. And we went through some bamboo thickets, where people had to hack with a machete. And on another patrol, off [Hill] 861, I came across some rather thick bamboo. It came in different sizes; some of it was almost two-inches in diameter. And one of the things I learned in [Camp] Pendleton before I went over, was that if you run out of water, you can always hack off a section of bamboo and there's water in the sections. So I thought, I'm going to try this. I really didn't need it. So I hacked off a section of bamboo above and below the notch so there was one whole section, and I carved a little hole in it and started drinking it. And I thought: Gee, this is evil-tasting water! This is just terrible. And I spit it out, and hacked it [the section] open. And here inside were all these white, maggot-like, like worms. I immediately thought: O, I'm going to die. This must be poison, and I swallowed one of them. Later on, I found out that those were probably the eggs of a bamboo viper snake.

Kurtz: Did you run across any snakes when you were out on patrols?

Stubbe: I never did. But there were cobras in the area. Every once and awhile a cobra would come into a bunker, and there were pythons—large pythons that recon patrols would—. One recon patrol—a fellow told me that they stopped and this one fellow sat on what he thought was a log and it started moving and he realized it was this python and he fainted—a recon Marine, all tough, rough. And they called in a medevac, and of course they denied it.

But that area was just full of wild life. I'm sure there were species that had not been identified yet. People talked about the odd birds. There was a Special Forces fellow [Jon Cavaini] eventually on Hill 950 [in 1971] that told me collected insects. There was such a variety. And there were monkeys, there were rock apes—.

Kurtz: Any tigers?

Stubbe: There were tigers, yes. There were tigers. I never saw one, but a fellow who's in recon [Lionel Guerra] just sent me a picture. On this patrol he snapped a picture of this tiger who's fifty feet away or something. There were elephants. The tigers were eating up some of the children from the Mongagnard tribe. Yeah, we had it all there. It was a beautiful, beautiful area. It was like a Garden of Eden before the siege. But there were these nefarious things: there were the bacteria, the sores, the leeches. These [leeches] were like about one-inch long and they'd attach one end to some herbal material, a vine or a brush or something and then they'd try to get on your skin, usually on your wrists, your neck, or even on—the Marines, unlike the Army, would blouse their trousers above their boots; the Army would usually put their trousers in their boots, I think if I remember right.

Kurtz: Yeah, that's correct.

Stubbe: And—.

Kurtz: That's because we were smarter!

Stubbe: Yeah. Well, the Marines bloused [their trousers], but there were still socks, but sometimes on that bare skin, the leeches would get there. They loved bare skin. In fact, this Harper Bohr I mentioned at the beginning, this real wonderful intelligence officer—one time he was considering getting out and going into the ministry, but he went on a patrol from 861 to 881. Sometimes when they'd change companies, instead of going by helicopter, they would walk out, and I accompanied some of those, walking from the base to 881-South. That was quite a—but by that time I was in pretty good shape. But the young guys weren't. I mean, I was in better shape than the 19 year-olds, even though I was, like 29.

Kurtz: Were you ever—did the North Vietnamese ever bother you when you went out?

Stubbe: No. I was going to say, when this Captain Bohr went out on one of these walking things [from the base to 881-South], he came back and said: Chaplain, I hate to say this but the leech went up the end of my penis. And that happened some times. And that was very dangerous, because they could crawl up. A lot of the Marines, if they got them on their arms, would smash

them. And then, the head of the leech, of course, would be under the skin and form another infection, and then Doctor Demaagd would come out with his probes and try to drain the boil, but the only way you were supposed to take off leeches was with a match, a cigarette lighter or with the insect repellent—squirt it on, they'd swell up and drop off. So it was very difficult living for those who stayed on the hills: they couldn't take showers, their skin—one time—we used to get a thing called a "SP Pack." Because these people were out there, they couldn't go to the PX and so they had these, about two-foot cube box that candy, cigarettes, pipe tobacco, chewing tobacco, ballpoint pens, writing pads, soap and all this kind of stuff. They'd get a SP pack on the hill maybe every once a week or something to supply the 250 Marines. And one time the Company Commander—in fact, it was John Raymond—came to me with a sandbag full of these little bars of Dial soap. And he said, "Chaplain, take these out to the missionaries in town; we can't use these."

Kurtz: In town?

Stubbe: Khe Sanh village

Kurtz: O, the Khe Sanh village missionaries, OK.

Stubbe: We had what they called the Wycliffe Bible Translators. They were a husband and wife, American, John and Carolyn Miller, M-I-L-L-E-R., of the Wycliffe Bible Translators.

Kurtz: And what were they translating?

Stubbe: They were translating the New Testament. But they were also translating—they were making readers. See, the Bru were illiterate; they had no written language. So what these people would do—and this was global; they'd go to the Philippines, Africa, whatever, they were all over the place. And they would stay with a tribe that had no written language and spend, maybe a good year, just living with them and listening and recording all the sounds because different languages have different sounds that we in English don't have. We know some of the European vowels like the German and the French, but sometimes there's clicking sounds, sometimes there's a guttural stop.

Kurtz: Tonal, like Vietnamese is tonal.

Stubbe: Vietnamese is tonal, yes, but the Montagnards are non-tonal; they're like us. But in any event, they would live in the same conditions [as the tribe people], and they had no salary either; they depended on donations, which always amazed me.

Kurtz: So how did you—this is a good transition from the Marines to

Stubbe: Yes, I'll talk about the indigenous people in a minute. They [the Millers] had arrived there about the same time the Special Forces people did, in '62, the Bible translators. They lived in the Bru village. Bru is the mountain tribe that is in Khe Sanh. They weren't in Khe Sanh village itself at this point; they were in the Bru villages. And then eventually they did get a house in Khe Sanh village. Khe Sanh village—I have to segue back here a little bit—Khe Sanh village was mainly Vietnamese. There were 1200 Vietnamese living in Khe Sanh village, and there were some 12,000 mountain tribesmen that lived in little villages around here. Now Khe Sanh village was formed originally back around 1918 there was a Frenchman named Poilane, and his first name was Eugene. He was in the First World War, and he was down in Saigon, and he retired without going back to France at what eventually became Khe Sanh; at that time it was nothing. And he was interested in botany, and he started a coffee plantation up there. He also had an experimental garden where he tried to see if different fruit trees would survive in that climate. And he worked for the French government in Saigon to collect botanical specimens. And he would go off by himself, even to what became the border with China and send specimens back down to Saigon. Anyway, to maintain his coffee plantation, the Bru were not suitable workers at the time, he thought, so he started importing Vietnamese from the east, and that's how the Vietnamese got there, and that's how Khe Sanh village started: these were the workers on his coffee plantation. And he, "Papa" Poilane, was killed in 1964, just a little east of Khe Sanh by the VC or whatever. I could go into that if you'd like, but that's not significant [here]. He had many children. In fact he had—here I'm talking off the top of my head, I might not be accurate—but I seem to remember he had something like five children after he was 62 or something like that. He married a French woman, Bordedeque, and one of his sons was named Felix. And Felix was born while he was collecting these botanical specimens; his wife gave birth by herself to Felix. So Felix was born in Khe Sanh—is the significant thing here. He was born there and died there. Felix was the one I knew because Eugene had already been killed. And Felix went back to France and got his wife, brought her back there to Khe Sanh, I think around '64, '65, something like that.

Kurtz: How did they live?

Stubbe: They built a nice, big house. It might have been the old guy that built it; I don't know. In fact, I'm sure it was the old guy that built it. So they had a big concrete house that had red bougainvillea outside. Felix had a little pet deer outside that he had in a barbed wire enclosure. And there was also a Vietnamese Episcopalian minister who was sent up there as a missionary to the Bru and he had a chapel in Khe Sanh village. And there were also some French nuns there who had a little coffee plantation that was originally part of Eugene's coffee plantation. So there were the Millers and the Poilanes. Her name was Madeleine, and they had two little boys. She moved back to France. She's at Creteil, C-R-E-T-E-I-L, France, right now. She's fully re-

tired now. Her two sons, Jean-Marie and the other one—one teaches mathematics, and I don't know what the other one does. But they survived.

Kurtz: Was there any impact on Khe Sanh during the French wars?

Stubbe: Yes, Madeleine tells me that—or wrote me—that—I take that back, they must have arrived in '55, when the French were still there. They took refuge at a place near Lang Vei, at a place called Lao Bao, which is an old French prison. It later on became a Vietnamese prison—or, prior—it was a Vietnamese prison in 1830s and then a French prison later on, in the 1930s it was a French prison because Giap and his brother were prisoners there. But anyway, the French took refuge there at Lao Bao, and when the Viet Minh came through. And apparently—I haven't been able to track it down—but apparently there was a big French battle right around there, at that spot, but I just haven't been able to

Kurtz: During the French?

Stubbe: After Dien Bien Phu, after they were withdrawing, apparently there was a big battle there and they lost a lot of people. So Madeleine and Felix and “papa” Eugene, and who knows what brothers and sisters were still there, up to about '64, and then he was killed, and she stayed, and by that time the Millers were there, and the French nuns were there, and then Father Poncet, P-O-N-C-E-T—he was killed during the battle at Hue City, and Pastor Loc was the Episcopalian missionary. Father Poncet became very haggard [during the monsoon in late '67]. I remember giving him a case of C-rations one time. He had a motorcycle and the Catholic chaplain during the siege, Walt Driscoll—Father Poncet left his motorcycle up there and Walt Driscoll used that motorcycle to get to the outlying battalion areas during the siege. There are pictures of him in the news clippings.

Kurtz: Did—what did these people think about the Americans being there?

Stubbe: Well—how can I say this—the only ones that I know of—Father Poncet—I gave him the C-rations. I never really got to talk with him. He had this thing—he couldn't talk English too well. They had these Americans with the Combined Action Company and the MACV Team, and he had a piece of cardboard; on one side he had all the common sins and on the other side he had all the common penances. So he had these Marines or soldiers come in and they had to point on one side to the sins they had committed and indicate how many times with their fingers, and he would turn it over and point to the penances they had to do and how many times with his fingers. He did come in one time in the bunker [mine] during the monsoon, and he was so weak. I gave him this case of C rations I had in the bunker because I was too lazy sometimes to walk to the mess hall [in all the rain], so sometimes I'd eat a C-ration, and I just gave it all to him because he needed them. He wanted some

communion hosts, and when I saw how haggard he was I gave it to him. He put it on his mechanical bike, not the motor bike. He did have the motor bike also. But I did talk one time with the Poilanes. I went and stopped by their house. They gave me a little crème de menthe in water, and they had two German visitors. I don't know who they were or what they were, but they were visiting. I remember talking with them briefly. They were talking about how hard it was to get the coffee beans out at that time. Captain Clarke in the village was not too happy with them. He thought they were VC and said they can't be there unless they're paying to the VC, and they really weren't. I'm convinced in my heart of hearts that they were just as much victims as we were. They had taken out their coffee with the Air America flights at one time that would stop at the base.

Kurtz: How did the Marines feel about the Air America taking?

Stubbe: Well, they didn't see it that much. It wasn't clandestine [but] there were so many things that happened at the airstrip—. Occasionally the "black bird" would come. The "black bird" was the command and control C-130 for the SOG team, and it was painted black, a dull black, with a bullhead [fish] thing off the nose that was the Fulton Sky Hook. It had all this odd communications gear, and you couldn't get near the thing. I remember taking a picture of it one time. And sometimes the whole airstrip would get filled with little planes. One time we had two A-1s who were with the Air Force rescue people, and they had run out of gas. So we had different things that happened on the airstrip, so it was not unusual to—so we'd see and say, "O, it's CIA, a blackbird, or all these Vietnamese planes or helicopters doing some mission, putting in a big force into Laos or something.

Kurtz: Before the siege—this is my last question—before the siege did any big shots like Westmoreland show up there?

Stubbe: Yes. They all came. I never met them. I knew they were coming and I always managed to get away from the base; I didn't want to see them. I remember one time General Krulak came and he got a picture with the other, the Catholic Chaplain there at the time [Chaplain McElroy of 3/26]. I was out at one of the outposts. General Bruno Hochmuth would come up every once and awhile; he was the Third Marine Division Commander. General Walt would come up. These were very rare occasions. There was one time about the 8th, early November, '67, and I was on Hill 881 and we got a notice something like: Three Code 5s and four Code 4s or whatever the hell—I remember it was something with "Codes." And that had to do with Generals and they said they'd be out in 15 minutes—One Five minutes. And indeed, there was a General Alfred Starbird who was from Washington, D.C., a four-star Army General who was from the Defense Communications Planning Group, DCPG, the ones who would be putting in all the sensors. And I remember he went with the Captain at the time, who was Bruce Greene, and they walked over to

the north side of the landing zone, and General Starbird was pointing north. And I'll never forget, they were both pointing towards the north, just the two of them. Then they walked back. Of course, with them came General Hochmuth and who else, probably General Metzger, the Brigadier, and maybe some Army General too; I don't know. Right after that was Marine Corps Birthday when Colonel Lownds came up and said "You all will soon be in the American history books." I remember that. So occasionally Generals would come.

Kurtz: Well, let's shut down for today.

[Tape 3, Side B, is blank]

[Tape 4, Side A]

Kurtz: Today is February 15th, 2006. My name is Jim Kurtz and I'm interviewing Ray Stubbe for the second time, not because we didn't [?] the first time but there was so much information. And today, for Ray, we're going to set the scene at Khe Sanh from the geographic and the physical standpoint, geological, talk about the hills which fits into the geography and all of that, and some of the actions that he's familiar with before the siege, then we're going to go through the siege and from there we will get Ray's feelings about it. So Ray, why don't you start and tell us about the physical setting around Khe Sanh.

Stubbe: OK. Khe Sanh: I guess the thing that sticks out in my mind most prominently is its beauty. Many people have described it as almost enchanted, a place of spiritual dimension and impact. And these were not particularly religious people that are saying these things. But you could not help but feel a kind of spirit of the place. It was so beautiful. It was breath-takingly beautiful. The soil was a deep reddish, red-brownish clay, and thousands of shades of green, blue skies with clouds, mountains, not snow-capped of course, but nevertheless sharply rising hills and mountains. There were animals in the area; it was almost like being in a zoo. Most of us didn't see them all the time, but our reconnaissance teams that would go out commonly encountered tigers, python snakes. Even our infantry patrols would encounter large deer-like creatures called "kouprey," which were almost like caribou. There were exotic birds. One fellow back in '71, an Army fellow named Jon Cavaiani, who received a Medal of Honor when his outpost on one of the hills was overrun in June of '71, had spent several months prior to that collecting insects of various types. The area—it was like a primeval forest, undisturbed, and just with sheer beauty. And it was also cooler, because we were above sea level. Khe Sanh Combat Base itself was over 400 meters high and it was sort of a level place, and everything else was higher. So it was a relief for those coming from the more populated areas in the east. Also we had a sense of isolation which, prior to the siege, was a good thing. We were isolated from inspections from Generals and those kinds of people who would come in and pester us. We felt

we were sort of off by ourselves. It was really a wonderful place to be. The area itself was mountainous because geologically it had formed from a large land mass that slammed into what is now Laos and much like India moving fast from South East Africa slammed into South East Asia and formed the Himalaya Mountains, this mass, the Kontum Massif, slammed into that part of Asia and lifted up mountains which were very rugged. It's called the Annamite Chain. And it was so rugged, in fact, that there's very few passes that allow people to east and west. And one of those just happened to be in the Khe Sanh area. It was called the D'Ai Lao Pass. There were two other major passes to the north, the Mu Gia and one other one [Ban Karai Pass]; they were quite a ways further up north. It was through this area that in the 1870s, French explorers like Dr. Jules Harmand, a physician in the French Army, had explored this area. And there was a Captain Malglaive who surveyed the area.

Kurtz: Did they survey it like Wisconsin was surveyed in a general survey?

Stubbe: Well, it was surveyed geologically.

Kurtz: But did they have the grid system with townships and stuff.

Stubbe: At that point, I don't think no. Their maps at that point do not show grids. I think that probably came in the World War II era.

Kurtz: OK.

Stubbe: But anyway—in fact one of the books I donated to the [Wisconsin Veterans Museum] library is a thing called *Mission Pavie* which describes Malglaive's explorations. But what they explored later became Route 9, which connects Savannakhet in western Laos all the way to Dong Ha in [eastern] Vietnam.

Kurtz: Was this road paved?

Stubbe: Well, no. It was more or less a dirt road, two lane. To call it a national highway—it was more like a country road to some private residence. There were ruts and so on. But there were a lot of rivers and sharply precipitous cliffs which came right up to the road, either sharply rising or sharply falling. And there were like 31 bridges between Khe Sanh Combat Base and the nearest support logistic base to the east which would be Ca Lu where Route 9 moves northward rather than its normal east-west. It goes up north for awhile and then it goes east again, past the Rock Pile, Razorback area, to Cam Lo. It was a very rugged area which our patrols in the area found it very difficult to move through, and also very densely vegetated with grass about six feet tall [and] razor-sharp edges filled with bacteria that caused sores on people's arms, bamboo thickets, raging streams. In fact, a couple of our people that I know of, drowned in [it, the Rao Quan River]. But it was a very pristinely beautiful area. There were local inhabitants called the Bru, B-R-U, sometimes

spelled B-R-O-U—spelling is a hard thing because they didn't have a written language. It's pronounced "BRO-U," with a rolling "R" there. These people—there were like 31 tribes in South Vietnam of Mountain tribesmen, each of which had a different language, [all] non-tonal as opposed to the Vietnamese which is tonal. By that, I mean, the meaning of a word depends on the tone of the voice. For example, in Vietnamese, "dau" can mean "head" or it can mean "pain." The Bru were very primitive people of a different racial stock than the Vietnamese. The Vietnamese had migrated from southern China maybe two thousand years prior, but the Bru people and the other tribesmen had come from Polynesia and were muscular, stocky. But the main thing that we remember is that they were so friendly and so naïve. For example I went with the Marine patrol into one of the Bru villages and left my camera—I was so fascinated by a couple of them making crossbows, which is what they used to hunt, and I left my camera on a tree stump, and I mentioned that to one of the Marines, and they said, "O Chaplain, you don't have to worry because these people haven't even learned to steal yet." And that's true. They were just very happy people. The shadow side of all of this was that they lived in deep fear all the time because religiously they were what we call "animists." They believed that the spirits of the departed controlled their lives, and if they didn't sacrifice to them, they would be afflicted with illnesses. So a lot of them, as poor as they were, would throw rice around to feed the spirits when they could have fed their children. And since they were, in fact, always in poor health—I think it was something like 60% or more of their children died because of malaria, which is prevalent in the area or intestinal parasites or whatever, they always felt that their ancestors were not happy with them, and so they sacrificed more. But basically they were very friendly people. When the siege started on January 21st [1968], we had three or four of our reconnaissance teams were out, and although we were surrounded by North Vietnamese, the Bru people kept them, moving them sort of like through safe houses until they got back to us. They were very loyal to us. And some of our Army people with the Studies and Observation Group, SOG, used them. The soldiers described how their sense was so uncanny of enemy presence. They could smell, they could detect, from sounds, whatever. They knew when other people were in the area. And they were just very loyal to our Army—.

Kurtz: Do you know what happened to them after we left?

Stubbe: Yes, indeed. Unfortunately—very tragically, like a Greek tragedy, there was a racial antipathy between the Vietnamese and the Mountain tribesmen, and for good reason. Early accounts show how the Vietnamese would avoid venturing into the hills starting at Ca Lu and that area going westward because they thought that the mountain tribesmen would poison them. And of course the Vietnamese had pushed these mountain tribesmen into the hills when they moved down from China, and the mountain tribesmen had a lingering historical, very negative impression, of Vietnamese. So when the siege started, the

man in charge of all of I Corps, General Xuan Lam, X-U-A-N and then capital L-A-M, a Lieutenant General, was the Vietnamese in charge of I Corps and when the siege started, he permitted the evacuation of approximately 1200 Vietnamese who occupied Khe Sanh village in the planes that were bringing us ammunition because our ammo dump was almost without ammunition; instead of flying the planes back empty, they loaded them up with these Vietnamese. But he said that the Bru, the mountain tribesmen, of which were about 12,000 of them could not leave, because, as he explained, there was no place in Vietnam for them. This is not by hearsay; this is by message traffic from the 26th Marines who realized that they had a problem on their hands that they couldn't evacuate the Bru because they were afraid of human shield kind of things—the North Vietnamese pushing them ahead, and since the SOG unit at Khe Sanh, which was part of our Combat Base, had Bru soldiers he didn't think that the Bru would fire on their own people. So they had to devise all sorts of strategies. For example, they would fire tear gas into them, to try to scatter them, if that happened, if the North Vietnamese pushed them ahead of their assault. Or, they would fire over their heads to try to scare them and scatter them. And then as a last resort, would have to fire into them. Fortunately, that never happened. But unfortunately, because they had to remain and because the North Vietnamese adopted the tactic of hugging us, creeping closer and closer through a trench network, a typical siege network, these Bru were caught in cross-fires, and when they finally did get evacuated in late March, the few that did—eventually ended up in a refugee village at a place called Mai Loc which is just south of Cam Lo on Route 558. I visited there a few times. There were approximately four to six thousand there. Now these included not only the Bru that we knew at Khe Sanh and the villages around Khe Sanh, but also Bru that had still been in the hills. So the 6,000 would not have been included in the original 12,000. So well over 6,000 Bru were killed. And by that time, Khe Sanh, with all the bombardment—I'll get to that later on—had become a moonscape and all the beauty was just erased. But now getting back to the tribes—this is significant. The setting of the place. I've talked about the mountains and the passes and Route 9. There were some strategic hills, just like at Dien Bien Phu which was surrounded by hill outposts that acted as early warning or observation to detect enemy encroaching, we had some hills, notably three. Just to the north of us there was a high hill range at the western end of which was a hill called Hill 950. Hills were called by numbers because of meters above sea-level, so Hill 950 was 950 meters above sea-level. Actually, it wasn't! We found that out because we tried to fire 105 artillery support to explode on the north slope of Hill 950 and found that it impacted on the [south] slope! It couldn't go over the crest of the hill. So back in September, October of '67, a group of engineers from the 2nd Topographic Company of Camp LeJeune arrived at Khe Sanh to do a survey, however they do that, I guess with radio beams, and they determined that Hill 950 was really Hill 963, so it was a little bit higher than 950! That's just a little humorous aside. The other hills were Hill 861, which was visible from the combat base, and Hill 881-South which was a little bit further west. These

hills, 861 and 881, were prominent in the news back in April, May of '67 when there was a tremendous battle there. At that time we only had one Marine company guarding Khe Sanh Combat Base, Bravo, 1/9, and they had sent out a patrol out to the base of Hill 861 to determine if indeed there were enemy in the area that had been reported by other people, namely Army SOG people training, Marine recon teams, and so on. They ran into an ambush and that triggered off what they called the Battle of the Hills. That was on, I believe, the 24th of April of '67, and they brought in a whole regiment, the Third Marine Regiment. The battle raged until about the 10th of May of '67, not all that long, but it was very costly—costly in the sense that we would assault hills and take tremendous casualties, like on the 30th of April we lost, I don't know, maybe 50, 60 killed—I don't remember the exact number.

Kurtz: It's in that book?

Stubbe: It's in that book, yes

Kurtz: And what was the name of the book?

Stubbe: *Battalion of Kings*, and it's on the 30th of April that the main assault of Hill 881—and so what would happen is that they withdrew and they couldn't retrieve all the men who were killed. That was an anathema for the Marines: to leave dead people on the battlefield. But it became a common thing—maybe half a dozen times it happened at Khe Sanh through the succeeding months where we had to leave dead people—for a while at least. Then they dropped 2,000-pound bombs on Hill 881-South. And apparently there were caves underneath, like a hospital. And in succeeding months, Marines would dig trenches and bunkers and suddenly dig into an opening of a collapsed area where many North Vietnamese bodies were rotting, and the stench was unbearable. The caves, by the way, had formed because we had so much rain in the area. We had two big monsoons where we had, like, seven inches a day. Having lived in Wisconsin and gone to college and seminary in Minnesota where obviously the temperatures are cold in the winter, nevertheless I'd say I never felt colder than I did at Khe Sanh during the monsoons because you could never get dry and the temperatures would be around in the 40s because of the elevation. Anyway, these rains had formed numerous caves in that area.

Kurtz: Were they like the geological caves in Wisconsin?

Stubbe: Yeah, limestone caves. Because when this land mass crashed into what is now Laos, it lifted up sea beds which formed these limestone caves. And then there was another hill called 881-North which was, maybe 3,000 meters to the north. After the Battle of the Hills, 1st Battalion, 26th Marines, and an abbreviated staff of 26th Marines Regiment occupied Khe Sanh. We put a company of Marines, about 250 [men] on each of 861 and 881 [South] and maintained

that all the way until we left Khe Sanh in July of '68. So these were two major hills, and [hill] 950. We also occasionally had other outposts. There were some other significant hills. 471 is right at the junction of Route 9 and the road that leads to Khe Sanh Combat Base. And this was significant because this was one of the major objectives of the North Vietnamese who occupied it right from the beginning, because from it you can see Khe Sanh village, Lang Vei, and Khe Sanh Combat Base and 950 and 861, and we didn't occupy it at the beginning of the siege because we had a reconnaissance team out two days before the siege called NURSE, and it was just to the west of 471, and it was surrounded. And Colonel Lownds, who was the senior Commander of the area realized that that was an untenable, indefensible position, and sort of gave it to the enemy, and we just blasted it with air and artillery continuously. Then there was Khe Sanh village, which was about three miles south of Khe Sanh Combat Base. It was mainly Vietnamese.

Kurtz: Were there any French?

Stubbe: Yes, there were. It was originally developed because there was a French planter, Eugene Poilane, who had gone there around 1918. He had come to Saigon as part of World War I, and when it finished he settled in what became Khe Sanh area, and was a botanical fellow. He started a coffee plantation. He also was a botanical explorer and walked, believe it or not to what was the border with China and collected specimens and sent them back to Saigon. He was an amazing person. He had about nine kids, five of which were born in his 60s, one of which was Felix Poilane, who's mother gave birth to him at Khe Sanh alone because her husband, Eugene, was out collecting botanical specimens. He realized that the Bru weren't reliable or capable of doing the coffee plantation work, so he imported Vietnamese which was very odd that the Vietnamese would come into that area, but they did. And eventually there were about 1200 Vietnamese in Khe Sanh village. There was also a position about 500 meters to the east which we called "The Old French Fort."

[Tape 4, Side B]

Stubbe: Huong Hoa, which I believe is Vietnamese for "beautiful flower." "Khe Sanh," by the way, is Vietnamese. "Khe" is Vietnamese for "stream," and "san"—it should be pronounced "schan," because it's S-A-N-H, and "san," which would be X-A-N means "green." "Schan"—I'm not sure what that means right now. But the Marines mispronounced it as "Khe San" and everyone else pronounced it as "Khe San;" it should be pronounced as "Khe Schan." But "Khe Sanh" literally means "green stream."

Kurtz: Was there a green stream?

Stubbe: There was a green stream, and it was full of arsenic as a matter of fact. [According to] a geology report of the 1930s indicated it was full of arsenic,

probably because of the volcanic [activity]. But it became sort of a metaphor in my mind, anyway of the stream of green uniformed people—both North Vietnamese and Americans wore green uniforms and streamed into the area. By the way, I think I should mention that Khe Sanh sat on top of an extinct volcano. And that's why the soil was red. It was weathered—what we call “laterite” soil. The highest geographical point, quite a ways to the north, was a mountain called “Tiger Tooth,” or “Dong Voi Mep.” I think it was, like 1371—I may be wrong. It was part of this geological movement of land masses. It moved southward, and as it moved about 10,000 years ago there's an arc of five volcanoes that formed, one of which was Khe Sanh. Another one is Gio Linh, which people recognize.

Kurtz: Was Tiger Tooth a volcano too?

Stubbe: No, it was a big granite mountain that crashed into this area and caused these eruptions of these five volcanoes. The other one, close to the Lao border is called A Dua Ap. And there were two others with odd names that no one would recognize. This is sort of interesting because before the siege the Marines realized their water source was outside the combat base at the Rao Quan River to the north of us and that we were very vulnerable to loss of water if the North Vietnamese ever decided to either poison it or restrict our little pipeline that went out there to collect the water. So they thought of drilling wells. They weren't familiar with the fact that we sat on an extinct volcano! Obviously they couldn't have dug a well to find water underneath us; they'd find lava! So that is geologically significant. It was another metaphor—that the place was formed in violence—the clash of these land masses and then the volcano—that the place was born in violence. And I guess despite however beautiful the area was, people would still kind of feel: there's something not right about this place. In fact, the name on the tactical map lists the place as “Xom Cham,” “Xom” is the word for “village” and the Chams were violent, sea pirates that lived along the coastline to the east, which developed an artistic phase. There was a Cham Museum in DaNang which had these sculptures like from India, big sculptures. And possibly, when the Vietnamese conquered them, they moved further into the hills. Most of them moved southward. But it's possible there was a village of Chams on what became the Khe Sanh airstrip. At least it's indicated on the map as “Xom Cham,” which would also indicate that it was a place of violent people.

Kurtz: Why don't we talk about the Special Forces camp, Lang Vei.

Stubbe: OK. Lang Vei. Originally the Special Forces occupied Khe Sanh in 1962, the summer, because General Taylor from the Kennedy administration, early Johnson administration, had sent a team consisting General Taylor to scope out the situation, and he determined that Vietnam could not be held unless we plugged up what he called the “porous border.” By “porous” he meant that although there were these tremendous mountains of the Annamite Chain, there

were these passes, such as the one near Khe Sanh, the D’Ai Lao, that unless we could plug those up, the North Vietnamese would just come down Laos, which they did in the Ho Chi Minh Trail network later on—which was formed by a thing called “Group 558,” which is designated such because it was started in May of ’58, 5/58—just an interesting historical aside, trivia matter here.

Kurtz: But it wasn’t in Vietnam in ’58?

Stubbe: No, no. But Khe Sanh was one of the first legs that it went into. So, General Maxwell Taylor determined that the porous border had to be plugged or Vietnam could not be held. Because of that they sent Special Forces over, which were then part of the CIA, and the Special Forces arrived in Khe Sanh in the summer of ’62 and occupied the Old French Fort position. And around, I believe 1964—I may be wrong about that, but it’s in my *Battalion of Kings* book, a Vietnamese engineering outfit upgraded the old Khe Sanh—what eventually became Khe Sanh Combat Base, and placed pierced steel plate, PSP, matting, which is steel with big, maybe 2 ½, 3-inch holes, and then the Special Forces moved to that place and built several concrete bunkers which the Marines later on always referred to as old French bunkers, such as the 26th Marines’ operational center, the Command Operations Center they always said was an old French bunker but it really wasn’t; it was an old Special Forces bunker. And the Special Forces stayed there until October, November, ’66, when General Westmoreland thought that the North Vietnamese were gathering in considerable strength and might have an influx in that area, which they did later in ’72, but the Marines thought otherwise and didn’t want to go to Khe Sanh. But to comply with General Westmoreland’s wishes, they sent a battalion up to Khe Sanh in the last part of October of ’66, which was battalion 1/3, First Battalion, Third Marine Regiment. Lieutenant Colonel Peter Wickwire was the Commander at the time. The Special Forces and the Marines—it was like oil and water; they didn’t tell each other what they were doing. It came to a head in December of ’66 when the Marines said: Tell us what you’re doing, patrols, and they said, No, we can’t; we’re secret, top secret. And the Marines said, We saw a Vietnamese unit outside our wires and we didn’t fire on them because we thought they were yours, and the Special Forces said: No, they weren’t ours. And the Marines said: In the future, if we see any indigenous people in the area, we will fire on them. And the Special Forces said: Well, we can’t live under those circumstances. So they moved out to an old ARVN base called Lang Vei with the stipulation that the structures they had built on Khe Sanh Camp would be maintained and not be demolished by the Marines, because they fully intended to come back, to return to that area. They thought the Marines would only be there for a short while. But in fact, the Special Forces went out to Lang Vei and the ARVN which were there at the time displaced to the Old French Fort. I think it was the 2nd ARVN Regiment, if I’m not mistaken; it’s in *Battalion of Kings* also. The Army built up the place. It was a Detachment A-101 in ’66 and starting of ’67. And a major thing happened in early ’67 in March, the village of Lang

Vei was accidentally struck by Air Force planes which bombed and created mass casualties. The explanation—I won't go into—why that happened is explained in the *Battalion of Kings* book in that section on that date. Several of our Marine recon teams also experienced major contacts in late January and February of '67. The accidental bombing of Lang Vei village became the occasion for the sending of a MACV Advisory Team to Khe Sanh village. A fellow by the name of Major Whitenack arrived with three other Army personnel. There was a Sergeant First Class Perry, a Sergeant First Class Humphrey, and I can't recall the fourth person. Perry was the medic, and they operated in Khe Sanh village at the District Headquarters, there. Also about that time there was a small American 2-man group called the Joint Technical Advisory Detachment, which was part of some Military Intelligence Group—512 or something like that. They would use “turned-around” North Vietnamese to do very deep, long-range reconnaissance of the area. Then about the same time also there was a Marine unit called Combined Action Company OSCAR which formed, and their headquarters also was in Khe Sanh village. They consisted of 47 (I guess) Marines arranged into three platoons, CAPs, Combined Action Platoons, two of which were at Khe Sanh village, one at the western edge, one at the District Headquarters, and the Third Platoon was just outside Khe Sanh Combat Base. The Special Forces at Lang Vei during the Battle of the Hills on the 4th of May were overrun, probably as a diversionary force to draw attention away from the battles in the hills. The Commanding Officer and the Executive Officer [were killed]. What happened was: the North Vietnamese had sent three or four agents posing as Vietnamese recruits for their indigenous force, and on the 4th of May had bayoneted or killed by knife the sentries guarding the perimeter of Lang Vei and then permitted an invasion force to overrun the place. There were several American survivors, including Bill Steptoe, who survived who since has died, but who described for me the whole scenario, also in the *Battalion of Kings* book. The Special Forces remained at Lang Vei. In fact they upgraded—they realized that area of Lang Vei was probably not as defensible as it should be, and so established a new Camp Lang Vei about 2,000 meters further west. And I remember visiting the place while they were constructing it in November of '67, and the Commanding Officer at the time—his name was Frank Willoughby described for me, proudly, how there was going to be an inner perimeter in which no Vietnamese were allowed, just Americans, to prevent a repetition of that 4th of May incident.

- Kurtz: Did you have any thoughts about that: we were there to help the Vietnamese and we couldn't let them in our—.
- Stubbe: Yes, we were there to help them, and this became an issue, quite frankly, a big issue later on, too. But no. I think it was just a matter—we just—even the Army people who worked with them. Special Forces, of course, is a 12-man team, typically to develop a regimental-size indigenous force. The camp really belonged to the Vietnamese; it was not an American—Lang Vei was

not an American Special Forces camp. Some people mistake it was. It was a Vietnamese camp, and the Americans were there as advisors. So they developed this new camp Lang Vei, and they spent over a million dollars developing this new camp. Captain Willoughby, in addition to the inner perimeter and outer perimeter, had cleared a huge field of fire, sloping over a click—over a thousand meters, and he proudly said, “We can take over a regiment assaulting us.” He had no qualms about the fact that it was a completely defensible position. Of course, they didn’t think of tanks, which is what happened. So they developed that place and they kept the old Lang Vei. It was just there. It was further east. So the area at the opening of the siege: we had Lang Vei, the new Lang Vei, we had an old Lang Vei. They were reinforced with a Mobile Support Group. We had Khe Sanh village. We had Hill 881-South, Hill 861, Hill 950, of course Khe Sanh Combat Base itself. We had the Marine Combined Action Company OSCAR, which was mainly in Khe Sanh village but had one platoon just outside the main gate of the Khe Sanh Combat Base. As the siege started, we also had not only 26th Marine Regiment—. Now I have to say, 26th Marine Regiment staff was only half of a staff because MACV had a ceiling on how many Marines could be in Vietnam. So we had a unit called 9th Marine Amphibious Brigade, 9th MAB, in Okinawa, and 26th Marine Regiment was in Okinawa—at least half of it was. And then 26th Marine Regiment (Forward) was at Khe Sanh. And the Commanding Officer of 26th Marine Regiment was at Khe Sanh with the Executive Officer. But he had no Sergeant Major. The Sergeant Major was on Okinawa. And indeed half of the staff was on Okinawa as the Siege began. We also, as the Siege began, had the 1st Battalion, 26th Marines which had been there since the end of the Battle of the Hills. They arrived in May of ’67. And then around early June of ’67 there were some major contacts, Hill 950 was almost overrun and there were some other major contacts, so they brought in 3rd Battalion, 26th Marines, which arrived in early June of ’67, and were there until about August, maybe September, ’67, when they left to go to Con Thien as part of Operation KINGFISHER, leaving only 1st Battalion, 26th Marines. At that time I was the only Chaplain there; the 3/26 Chaplain, John McElroy, had left, and then they brought in a Chaplain to replace him who was there at Khe Sanh, part of Sub Unit 5 of 3rd Marine Division [Walt Driscoll]. So starting in September, when the monsoons came, 1st Battalion, 26th Marines, was the only battalion, the only infantry unit, there. And then signals intelligence started to pick up indications that the North Vietnamese were moving in again. And I remember I was on Hill 881-South on Marine Corps Birthday, 10 November of ’67 and Colonel Lownds landed and got us all together, and I’ll never forget his words; it will stick with me forever. He said, “You all soon will be in the American history books.” Not too many people commented on that or caught it, but I certainly did. I wrote it in my diary. And indeed, signals intelligence—he didn’t say that, obviously; that was Top Secret—had determined that we would be a target. So it became [a problem of] how do we reinforce without letting the North Vietnamese know we’re reinforcing. Colonel Lownds mentioned that in his Debrief at FMFPAC.

So they brought 3/26 back to Khe Sanh in mid-December of '67 and as the Siege opened, 3/26 companies defended Hill 881-South—INDIA Company was up there, and then Hill 861 was defended by KILO Company. These two companies relieved 1/26 companies which then went back to the Combat Base to man the perimeter itself.

Kurtz: So there were two battalions at the start of—?

Stubbe: Well, actually one more battalion arrived about the 16th of January. The siege started on the 21st. On the 16th or 17th of January, 2/26, arrived. So it was the first time since Iwo Jima in World War II that the 26th Marine Regiment was together with all battalions in combat, minus half of its staff.

Kurtz: Was that good or bad, not having the other half of the staff?

Stubbe: Well, it was very bad, actually because we didn't have all the operations people, the intelligence people, logistics people that we should have had. But 3rd Marine Division, General Tompkins—his full name is Rathvon McClure Tompkins—sent up an augmentation of 3rd Marine Division officers to augment the abbreviated 26th Marines staff. In fact, they sent up just the right people. They sent up really top notch people who I can comment on later.

Kurtz: Was that the Third Marine Division?

Stubbe: Third Marine Division, yes. They became known as Sub Unit Three, these people that came up. As a Chaplain I have to say—these are matters of faith, I guess—in other words, I'm seeing things that I cannot prove, but which to me are very evident. The fact that just the right people arrived there, and they were such a small group of people, surrounded by 40,000 North Vietnamese, to me—and the fact that we took so few casualties throughout the siege—I mean, they were significant—more significant than the official amount. Still, we took less than we probably should have.

Kurtz: So there were two Chaplains there?

Stubbe: At that time each battalion had a Chaplain. Now 3/26, the headquarters was—

[End of Tape 4, beginning of Side A of Tape 5]

Kurtz: When the tape ran out, you were talking about the west side defenses of the combat base.

Stubbe: Yes. I was talking, basically, about the Chaplains and the units. 3/26 Headquarters was—and 2/26 Headquarters, both of them were on the western edge of the perimeter which was known as the “Red Sector.” In that area was also the 1st Provisional 155 millimeter howitzers, and I guess that was about it.

The rest of 3/26: LIMA Company was also with them, protecting their battalion headquarters, I guess. And INDIA Company, Bill Dabney [Commanding], who is the brother-in-law of “Chesty” Puller, was on Hill 881-South. And Captain Jasper was on Hill 861 with KILO Company. And on the 20th of January, the day before the siege began, Bill Dabney had sent India Company northwards to Hill 881-North, suspecting that there were enemy there and ran into a huge contact there in which he lost two of his platoon commanders, both of which received Navy Crosses for their heroism—Lieutenant Brindley and Lieutenant Thomas, and that’s discussed fully in the *Battalion of Kings* book. While this was happening, a North Vietnamese Lieutenant, named Tonc, T-O-N-C, who was with the 14th Anti-Aircraft Artillery Company, surrendered on the base and disclosed the entire battle plan of the North Vietnamese for Khe Sanh Combat Base. And also at the same time, John Miller, the Wycliffe Bible Translator in Khe Sanh Village, who had left in early January because he was told by Colonel Lownds that the North Vietnamese were coming, and he said, “Well, I have a conference to attend in Saigon anyway, so he went with his wife and family—they sent their kids there. But he came back up [to Khe Sanh Combat Base] on the 20th of January to get his Bru helper who helped with the translation, to rescue him, and Colonel Lownds was very angry with him for doing that. But he managed to get back to Saigon with his Bru helper. And Lieutenant Tonc was disclosing what the North Vietnamese planned to do. Basically what they planned to do was hit the western edge of the combat base so that the Marines would focus there, but this was a diversion, and the main force would come up from the Khe Sanh village area, Route 9, and overrun the base. That was their main battle plan. So Colonel Lownds told Captain Dabney to cease his assault of Hill 881-North and couldn’t disclose over the radio why, and the Marines were very unhappy because they had gained the momentum, and they felt they could take Hill 881-North. Nevertheless, they came back. But while they were doing this, Lieutenant Colonel Alderman, who was the Commanding Officer of 3/26, had sent two platoons of MIKE Company to Hill 881-South to man the perimeter while INDIA Company was in the assault. And when INDIA Company returned to 881-South, these two platoons of MIKE Company manned the perimeter of the western portion of Hill 881. Hill 881-South had a main position and then there was a little trail, and then there was a western section. We called it “the finger,” but it was more than a finger. It was half as large as the main part, and that’s where these two platoons of MIKE Company manned. And the other platoon was with LIMA Company on the Combat Base.

Kurtz: How many MIKE Company personnel were at Khe Sanh? [Kurtz may here be confusing a “MIKE Company” of Special Forces, which is a different organization]

Stubbe: It was the whole company.

Kurtz: OK, and what is a MIKE Company?

Stubbe: Yeah, a battalion is about 1200 Marines, a letter company is about 250 Marines.

Kurtz: This was MIKE Company of Marines?

Stubbe: O, yes, yes. I might say that unlike the Army, the Marines are very simple about how they designate units. Each battalion had four line companies, or infantry companies. And the 1st Battalion was always A, B, C, and D [Companies], ALFA, BRAVO, CHARLIE, and DELTA. The Second Battalion was always E, F, G, and H—ECHO, FOX, GOLF, and HOTEL. The Third battalion was always I, L, K, and M—they skipped JULIETTE—it was too feminine for the Marines. Now the 3rd Division had 3rd Marine Regiment, 4th Marine Regiment, and 9th Marine Regiment. That's where it gets more like the Army—odd numbers they picked out of nowhere. The 1st Marine Division had 1st Marines, 5th Marines, and 7th Marines. We always call them "Marines," and it's Marine Regiment. Each Marine Company is divided into platoons of about 50 or so [men], and then there's a Weapons Platoon of battalion which has 106 recoilless [rifles], 3.5-inch rockets, and .50 caliber machineguns, and these are distributed among the platoons. That's the organizational structure. So MIKE Company is a company of Marines, not like "MIKE FORCE" with Special Forces, which is—

Kurtz: OK, that's what I wanted to clarify, that you were not talking about the Mike Force people.

Stubbe: Correct. And then 2/26: the rear was in the western perimeter, but their main CP and all their companies were at a hill position guarding a valley approach from the northwest of Khe Sanh, and they were at a Hill 552, except for one company, ECHO Company, which moved out towards Hill 861—there was a little knob. From Hill 861 you couldn't look directly at 552, there was an obstruction of a little knob of a hill, and so ECHO Company occupied this little knob and it was designated Hill 861-ALFA, and that was ECHO Company, Captain Breeding was the CO. So that's sort of the situation at the time.

Kurtz: Were there any aircraft—.

Stubbe: O, I wanted to say also that we had very few underground bunkers and trenches built, and the reason for that is that we were just emerging from the monsoons which had struck us the beginning of September. They were supposed to last into January, but fortunately didn't. The monsoon rains had washed out any underground bunkers on the base and on the hills, and trenches, so everything was built above ground. And so when the siege started and we had another force—we had another company, maybe 250 of reporters that suddenly descended upon us—criticized the Marines for not

digging in, and very unjustly, because although we had tried to, we couldn't. And that was one of the situations that we really hadn't hardened our defenses.

Kurtz: Was this perimeter—did it include the whole airfield?

Stubbe: Yes. Well, actually it was even more. The northern part of the perimeter, north of the airstrip, known as the Blue Sector, was not as quite well developed, and there the trench was only, probably, three foot deep. I know, because I was all over the base, and that was one area where there were snipers from that hill range to the north and our water point was out of that area. So running in that area—sometimes in that area there was mortars and snipers and it didn't feel too safe. But they rapidly developed—. Also in that Blue Sector was an Army unit consisting of quad 50s and what we called "Dusters." Dusters were (for me) an odd unit: they fired Naval 40 millimeter ammunition, which were Navy guns which were on Navy ships as anti-aircraft, but it was interesting to me because it was Naval munitions and guns, mounted on Army vehicles, on a Marine Corps base. And they were mainly anti-aircraft because we were afraid the North Vietnamese would fly down MIGs. And they had been there since the Battle of the Hills. I think they arrived in May of '67. And the Quad-50s are four .50 caliber machineguns. They were in what we called the Blue Sector. The western area was LIMA Company, a platoon of MIKE Company, 1st Provisional 155s, and the CP of 3/26 and the rear of 2/26, was known as the Red Sector. Then moving southwards is the main entrance to the Combat Base, outside of which was CAP OSCAR-3, and then moving eastward was what we called FOB-3 perimeter, which was almost like a separate camp, manned by the Army FOB-3 plus the Marine CAC when it evacuated from Khe Sanh village when the battle opened. I say it's a separate perimeter because we had Marine guns pointed into—our perimeter continued, known as the Gray Sector and the Gray Alfa Sector moving eastward, manned by Bravo, 1/26, and then moving northwards around the end of the perimeter towards the end of the airstrip, continued Bravo. The 37th ARVN Ranger Battalion arrived the end of January, and they had another line just east of our Bravo, our Gray Sector, so we actually had like two perimeters. Again, it was distrust of the indigenous people that we had them separate. In fact, our perimeter could fire at them and could fire into FOB-3 because they had a huge amount—they had the Bru who had been in Khe Sanh Village, they had the Vietnamese CIDG, they had Cambodians and some of the Special Forces were very angry that we had guns pointed into their camp. But Colonel Lownds had determined, from the example of Lang Vei being overrun the 4th of May that you just can't trust local, indigenous people, so we had guns pointed into their camp. And then later on, on the 7th of February, when Lang Vei got overrun, along with their refugees, the Vietnamese, we had a huge amount of Laotians. I must backtrack—it's hard to know where to pick up these things and where to end with them. But on the 25th of January, a position known as Ban Houei Sane, which was just inside of

Laos, and which was the site of the Royal Laotian Battalion known as BV-33, [for] which 26th Marines had responsibility to provide artillery support—which we never were able to but we had that responsibility—anyway, they were overrun by tanks on the 25th of January, which should have indicated to Lang Vei that tanks are in the area. The Air Force reported it to them. And when they were overrun—they were not just military; they were sort of like a National Guard: they had their wives and children and pigs and everything else with them. So they moved eastward to Lang Vei—took refuge at Lang Vei. So when Lang Vei was overrun on the 7th of February we had all these Laotians that were suddenly outside our gate at Khe Sanh Combat Base, and the FOB-3 soldiers wanted to let them in to evacuate them, and Ambassador Sullivan, who was in Vientienne, Laos, was like a bird on a hot tin roof: he was just so excited, agitated, that there were Laotians inside South Vietnam, that all these huge amount of news reporters would find that out, because Laos is supposed to be neutral, and having an armed force there [in Vietnam] just was—. So he sent this message, which was an impossible directive: evacuate all these Laotians without letting the news media know they were there. How do you send in planes, with all these news media, with all these strange people with different uniforms? But they did effect that by evacuating them from FOB-3, which was a Top Secret base that news reporters were not allowed on, and sent them to DaNang and then from DaNang they went to Vietienne. There's some interesting stories about that whole thing, but that's all in *Battalion of Kings*. So anyway, Colonel Lownds had made the decision not to allow them on the Combat Base, to evacuate them, because he didn't know if there were any assassins, intelligence agents, whatever. Colonel Lownds made an awful lot of very painful decisions—as I look at it—I mean, he never told me. I talked with him many times—now he can't. I've met with him. I've talked with him, but he's very shy, he's very low key. He was then [during the siege] too. In fact, news reporters said, "This is like Dien Bien Phu," and he said, "Dien Bien Phu? What was that?" And they took it at face value that he was an oaf, that he was stupid, that we had incompetence there, when in fact he had thoroughly studied Dien Bien Phu. He even had a book [on that battle] near his cot in the bunker. But he was that kind of person. He was like Socrates: "Beauty? Well, tell me about beauty. I don't know anything about beauty—or truth." That's the way he was. But anyway, as I look back at it, he had to made some terribly painful decisions. One of which was not to reinforce Khe Sanh Village when it was being attacked and to evacuate the District Headquarters, the seat of government—the first seat of government to fall in South Vietnam, of tremendous propaganda value to the North Vietnamese. One of which was not to reinforce Lang Vei when it fell, which existing plans called for him to send one infantry company to them. He didn't do it. Another was not to admit refugee civilians onto the base for evacuation. Another was probably not to request reinforcements during the siege—which would have fallen right into the North Vietnamese plan of creating a situation in which they wanted reinforcements to come in so that they could kill the reinforcements.

Kurtz: Was that a good decision: not to bring reinforcements in?

Stubbe: O, very good, an excellent decision. In fact, I've had some of the North Vietnamese histories translated and they lament—they criticize themselves as to why their strategy of luring Americans failed. Some of our more liberal historians like my co-author, John Prados, in fact say, “O, we played into their hands: we did reinforce I Corps.” Well, we may have reinforced I Corps, but we didn't reinforce Khe Sanh Combat Base. The point was not to reinforce, but to send in reinforcements which would be annihilated, and that was their main plan. That is why they attacked Khe Sanh Village, that is why they attacked Lang Vei, that was why they attacked recon teams—we would send in reinforcements and then they would try to get the people who were reinforcing, kill them off. It was always one of their main strategies, to cripple and then not really kill—like a man is out there shot, they don't kill him, they just let him out wounded, hoping that people would go out there trying to rescue him. They knew our psyche, that we will try to rescue people, whereas they wouldn't. But the main thing was to get the reinforcements. They plainly talk about this in some of their histories, that their plan was to draw-in US forces so that they could annihilate them. And we didn't fall into that trap. And they lament later on, or they try to analyze why that didn't happen.

Kurtz: Was that a positive or a negative morale factor for the people who were at Khe Sanh, that there were not reinforcements coming in?

Stubbe: It was negative. Well, it was negative and it was positive. It was negative in the sense—as I was walking around, a lot of the men—it was a common thing—“when are they going to relieve us? When are they going to send in more people?” We felt so isolated, especially when we knew tanks were—we were against tanks, we were against 40,000 people. We didn't know about electronic sensors. We didn't know about COFRAM munitions. These were all Top Secret. We just didn't know about that. We didn't know about signals intelligence. They didn't tell us. But on the other hand, it was sort of a source of pride. Even some of the reporters would say, “Well, they decided not to reinforce Khe Sanh, but General Giap didn't realize there were Marines there!” That [sort of thing].

Kurtz: Did they get replacements for casualties?

Stubbe: Yes, and they all arrived by helicopter basically.

Kurtz: In your mind was there adequate people there to do the job on the ground?

Stubbe: Well, we held. I think that was the main thing. Our strategy—General Tompkins' strategy—was a “set piece” battle. We would hold. We would adopt the North Vietnamese tactic of drawing in North Vietnamese, hold them, sort of like flies to flypaper—that's my metaphor—and then saturate the area with

massive B-52 bombs and annihilate them. Westmoreland said: We will make a stand at Khe Sanh, rather than abandon it when we knew they were coming, because that way, all these forces that were coming wouldn't end up in the populated, eastern areas—Quang Tri, Dong Ha, which would be much more difficult to deal with, but we could put them in a relatively unpopulated area—Westmoreland called it “unpopulated”—he disregards the Bru—and hit them with these bombs. Now, in fact, we on the combat base thought we had it rough, and we did. There were people getting wounded. We evacuated 2500 wounded people, and Marines don't always evacuate people; if you get a broken arm, you don't get evacuated.

Kurtz: Out of how many Marines was there?

Stubbe: Well, there was probably less than 6,000, but that includes the hill outposts. On the base itself, maybe 4500.

Kurtz: So more than half the people there got evacuated?

Stubbe: Yeah, and got replaced. But we received—the base itself, the airstrip, not the hill outposts—was about half a mile wide and a mile and a half long, and we received an average of 300, 400 rounds a day of mainly rockets and artillery, a few mortars, a few recoilless rifles, and a high of 1300 rounds in one day. We were really plastered.

Kurtz: How effective were these rounds? What kind of casualties were you taking?

Stubbe: We evacuated 2500—that's in a statement by the head of the medical detachment [who] wrote an article about that and quoted that number. Officially there were 205 killed. By “officially” I mean in the 26th Marines Regiment After Action Report of the battle. And also in testimony before Congress, Colonel Lownds used that figure when they had a Sub-Committee that was trying to evaluate these sensors in November of 1971, and he quotes 205. However, if you count the official documents of the After Action Reports of the subordinate units. I'm talking about the battalions: 1/26, 2/26, 3/26, the artillery battalion 1/13, which had three batteries, Alfa, Bravo, and Charlie—that's the main units. And then we had all sorts of assorted units: we had a company of engineers, we had a company of recon, a company of Shore Party—who moved supplies, we had logistics people, we had medical people, we had air people, fuel people—we had all sorts of other people. If you count all of these casualties, as I have, by name, I come up with somewhere around 475 killed. Now even the official—getting back to the battalions—if you count all of them, you end up with about 260 or something like that. And the only way that I can explain discrepancy between the regiment and then if you could all the [subordinate] battalions, is that it's possible they might not have included 1/9—

[End of tape. Tape 5, Side B]

- Kurtz: You were saying they might not have counted the casualties from 1/9. Were they actually at Khe Sanh?
- Stubbe: Yes. They were in a position called “The Rock Quarry” which was a few hundred meters from the Red Sector, the western sector of Khe Sanh Combat Base, near FOB-3 in the Red Sector. We called it “the rock quarry” because that’s where we blasted rock which was used by the Seabees to refurbish the airstrip during the monsoons when portions of it washed out and they pulled up the air matting, put down this rock, and covered it with asphalt, and put down the air matting again. The rock acted as a drainage. Anyway, the rock quarry was manned by 1/9—which originally had intended to go to Hill 471, but because of the contact with that recon team NURSE, Colonel Lownds put them at the rock quarry, which was another approach to the base itself, which made good sense. And 1/9 lost sixty or so people killed, and so if you subtract that from the 260 or so, you arrive at about the 205 official. So military—at least in the Marine Corps, there’s a thing called ADCON and OPCON: ADCON refers to administrative control and OPCON is operational control, and it may be that although 1/9 was under operational control, they may have considered 1/9 as ADCON to 9th Marine Regiment, rather than 26th Marine Regiment, and therefore the casualties, they thought, would be carried by 9th Marine Regiment rather than 26th Marine Regiment. I don’t think—a more jaded or a more liberal historian might say, O, they’re trying to cover up, make the casualties less, make it seem like it was less a horrible thing for us than it was. I really don’t think so. I think it’s simply a matter of accounting. They wouldn’t count, for example, Marines that died after being evacuated but who had been wounded. They didn’t count, for example, when a plane crashed on the 6th of March and all 47 [aboard] were killed while it was landing. They didn’t count all the Army people—FOB-3 people—that got killed. And so on. It’s a matter of who they count, and the [date of] the end of an operation. Officially, SCOTLAND, which was the operation of the siege, ended the 31st of March, then it became Operation PEGASUS for 14 days, the first 14 days of April. For those of us who were still there, the battle was still raging, so for us who were there, to say that the Khe Sanh Siege ends was rather—.
- Kurtz: What was your typical duty day like during the siege?
- Stubbe: During the siege—the first day of the siege was a Sunday. It seemed like they always attacked on Sundays—several other times they were—.
- Kurtz: Didn’t they like your sermons, Ray?
- Stubbe: They didn’t like my sermons at all. They didn’t want me to talk. They tried to silence me!

Kurtz: They weren't successful.

Stubbe: They were not successful. But I must say, on that day I just sort of wandered the base. I didn't hold any services that I recall. I helped dig out people. I helped carry dead people. But then after that it got into a thing where because of that ridge line to the north of us which we assumed had numerous spotters, that the word came out at briefings that we couldn't assemble more than six, seven people in a group at any one time for any reason because they would call in mortars. They had the whole base pretty well plotted.

Kurtz: That was anywhere on the base you couldn't have—?

Stubbe: Yes. That involved moving of supplies, it involves moving of casualties, no matter what. I mean, they just didn't want any groupings. Which to some degree affects Vietnam veterans generally, even those who were not at Khe Sanh. I mean, a lot of times, Vietnam veterans do not like crowds, and I think it gets to that point that one mortar round can get so many people, or be attacked. You like to be dispersed. But anyway, so I couldn't hold normal church services; I'll put it that way. So I adopted this method of just hopping around from bunker to bunker, trench to trench, and sometimes in the open gathering five people, half a dozen, trying to prevent more from adding themselves to our group, saying: If there's more, I'll get to you later on. And I developed a very short worship service—probably the kind that everyone likes; it was probably less than ten minutes. I had an opening prayer of a sentence or two. I had a scripture lesson—if I recall at the time—I used the same one: it was Jesus calming the seas. And then I had a sermon which consisted of maybe one or two sentences, mainly about how we find ourselves in chaotic situations, destructive desperation, and uncertainties like the sea, and how God is nevertheless with us, and within this we can experience peace. That was my sermon. And then I would have a full communion service. I would have the blessing of the wine and wafers. I had a little chalice—a home visitation chalice that I would fill. Oddly enough, one time I would bless it, and I'm of the opinion I got to bless it all the time, and I was hoping they would take just a little sip, and I recall going to a recon unit, and the first one drank the whole thing. So I had to bless the whole bottle and then poured it. And then I had a short prayer and then the blessing. And that was it. And that was all within ten minutes. And then I'd stay with them and see how they were doing and listen to them.

Kurtz: I have a couple of questions about the service and then I want to go to what you were talking about. Did you change your message through the time of the siege?

Stubbe: Basically not, no, because it was all different people. It was so many different places. I had enough to do 15 or more of these a day, and I could do this for several weeks and not go back to the same place. But I would revisit places.

Sometimes I would just have a short prayer without communion and without scripture. And sometimes it was just really bad, I would just hug the people or just be there. Sometimes we just wouldn't say anything but we would just be there with each other and then I'd go off to another.

Kurtz: What would the infantrymen say to you?

Stubbe: Well, it was mainly a joking kind of thing. They'd say—we'd have a rocket that would explode 15 feet away, which is pretty close, and they'd say: Gee, those are poor gunners! They don't know how to hit anything! That kind of thing. Or one guy would talk about how they were in a trench and they had buried a 55-gallon drum to act as their urinal and covered it with screen. And they were on top of the trench one time and they had incoming and they all jumped into the trench. And this one was jumping into the trench and at the last minute he realized he was going to jump into that drum of urine, quickly spread his legs and landed with one planted on either end! Things like that. Or they would talk—like a supply fellow talked about how he took refuge in a culvert along the road, and it was wet, full of water, while his friend, driving a forklift took refuge between two pallets of 155 ammunition. They joked about that, and then the one who was in the culvert emerged and he was covered from head to crotch and then one leg—one half of him was all red and the other was all green. And then they were laughing about that. Or they'd talk of acts of heroism, what they did, just sort of matter-of-factly. Like a corpsman at C Med would talk about how he was in a trench with casualties and a helicopter landed, and this one Marine just ran out to the helicopter with the Corpsman with his evacuation tag describing his wounds and date and stuff running after him trying to attach this tag. And then the Corpsman ran back to the trench and he's all out of breath and he'd say, "My casualty outran me!" And the casualty had a wounded leg! Or a recon fellow told how the scout dog ran into the helicopter and ran right up the ramp and through the helicopter and right in between the two pilots and was there and his handler went in to try to get him, and the dog snarled and couldn't do anything, and the dog left with the pilots, and the recon Marine said: That dog was smarter than any of us! That kind of thing. It was sort of a—. Or, one would describe a heroism thing, like one Marine told me one time how a pallet was being air-dropped, a heavy pallet, and because of the noise of the plane this Marine couldn't hear the other Marine shouting to get out of the way, and he ran like a football tackle and got him out of the way and he himself got crushed and killed, saving the other fellow. One time I stayed overnight in the trench in the perimeter. We were told we were definitely going to be overrun, and my bunker was in the medical area, above ground, and it's safer to be underground, so there was a bunker near us in the CHARLIE Med area, which was the bunker that housed the 106 recoilless gun crew. And I stayed there, overnight. And I remember how nervous they all were. They had like two on and two off, manning the trench, and they all wanted to stay in the bunker, which at that time was an above-ground bunker, well, half above and somewhat be-

low, maybe three foot below and the rest was above. But they all seemed like they wanted to be in the bunker all the time. It was like their womb. It was warm. They had a little candle. They were making coffee, I remember, in their little C-ration cups heated with C-4 explosive, which by the way makes very good heating, and even the ones who were on watch would come in and go out, and not realizing—I kept telling them that the trench out there is safer than the bunker because the bunker makes a target, and if we get hit, the whole thing's going to collapse and we're all going to get killed, whereas the trench is much safer. But anyway they were all in there. I stayed overnight there, and they kept coming and going. And one of them had a little 45 record player, and they were playing the Credence Clearwater version of "I Heard it on the Grapevine," which is a real nervous kind of thing. They played it over and over again, and I didn't get any sleep. But what impressed me was how nervous and full of energy. They must have been fearful. They didn't say they were fearful or act like they were fearful, except that they kept coming into the bunker and going out—their actions betrayed their fear. And the reason I mention all of this is because two or three days later that particular bunker did take a direct hit and I think it was three people I had known there were all killed, one of which I saw in the trench reading a little Lutheran prayer book that I had distributed, literature. I came up from behind; he didn't know I was there. He was reading this prayer book, and I was just so impressed with this Marine reading this prayer book. One of the Marines—I helped—the C Med people and I rushed down there after it was hit, after the incoming let up, and I remember helping carry out one of the men who had no head. It was just strings coming out of where his neck was, and it was—very devastating. I had no feeling then. We were all numb. The men—The North Vietnamese in their histories talk about how demoralized we were. That was how they thought we were; they had no way of knowing, but they thought that all their incoming was making us very fearful and trembling and all that kind of stuff, which really wasn't [the case]. We're talking about 19, 20 year-olds who had this battlefield "gallows humor" that kept their sanity—that, and the fact—I think that most of us had already accepted the fact that we were going to die. No one said that. No one said that! But, as I look back at it, we acted that way. What I mean by that is that if someone were wounded out there, during incoming it was a common thing—just very common—for someone to run out during the incoming and drag him back to a trench or to a bunker, knowing full well that they could get killed or wounded in the process. But it wasn't even a consideration. I think once you pass this awareness, the conclusion, that you're going to die anyway, then you're free to do.

Kurtz: And almost you feel you might be better off if you died.

Stubbe: Yeah, almost—but we don't even think those things, we just—at that point we were just acting, we weren't thinking, we weren't talking about how we were feeling. But people would do odd things. For example, the area behind the mess hall that had all the food provisions was surrounded by barbed wire, all

above ground, of course—no place to run for cover. And one day a fellow named Jack Corbett, who was with 81s of 1/26, weapons group there—as I was walking around suddenly came to me with a jar, a glass jar that was probably 18 inches high, maybe six, seven inches wide, filled with maraschino cherries, clear glass. And he gave me this thing. And I said, What's this? And he said, "Well, it's for you." And I said: "Well, I can't eat all these cherries! It's ridiculous." And he said, "Well, give them out to the troops." Which I did. I saw him in a reunion in 1988, at Tampa, the first time we ever got together. They were honoring Khe Sanh, the 20th anniversary of the siege and General Westmoreland was the speaker, and Jack Corbett came up to me. He had a great big, bushy beard, and said, Do you remember me? I said: "No." He said: "Well, I'm Jack Corbett. You don't remember the name?" I said: "No. There were so many thousands!" And he said: "I'm the one that gave you that jar of maraschino cherries." I said: "I know you!" He said: "I'm the cherry man." I said: "I remember the incident perfectly." And he had gone into this area behind the mess hall where there was no place for cover and he got this for me. And I said: "Why did you do this?" And he said: "You looked so tired and haggard and I said I need to do something for the Chaplain." He risked his life—but he didn't think of risking his life—but we do strange things. When once you know you're going to die, you just do. And so he did. And I might say [that] I myself did exactly the same thing in the same area, went into the mess hall food supply area one time, to get an onion, because with my C-rations I wanted to have a little flavor with a raw onion. So I risked my life for an onion. I mean, I could have lost my life over an onion. But we did strange things. There's a famous picture of me holding church services in the northern, Blue Sector, of people bowed down [one with] "Chicago, Ill." In fact, I think the [Wisconsin Veterans] Museum is going to do a diorama of that in May or so. And it only struck me about five years ago—I looked at that picture. And there's a fellow named G. K. Chesterton, a Catholic fellow who wrote mysteries and literature about a century or so ago. He made a statement one time: Look at something long enough until it becomes strange to you, and then you're seeing it for the first time. I looked at that picture, and I "saw it for the first time!" I mean I'd seen it—that picture had been in many magazines and publications. It had been in *Life* magazine—Swanson's version of it, and the Marine version had been in many books and newspapers. Anyway, I saw it for the first time. I suddenly saw that I didn't have a helmet, and neither did any of the other guys. And the word—we were into the siege—it was the 28th of January or someplace around there—maybe a week into the siege, and about two weeks before the siege, the word had already gone out that no one could be walking around the combat base without a helmet on and their flak vest. So here I am, even into the siege, with all this incoming and walking around—running around, I should say—and there I am without a helmet. And it suddenly caught me that I was without a helmet, and I said: The only reason I was without a helmet was because in a church you take off your hat.

Kurtz: You had your helmet with you?

Stubbe: O, of course!

Kurtz: OK, so you weren't walking, so you weren't disobeying orders.

Stubbe: Exactly! But I was without my helmet. And then what really got me was: what if an incoming round had got one of those men, who probably took off their helmets because they saw me take off mine—and if they got a head wound or got killed, I mean the guilt that I would have had for the rest of my life over the loss of their life! Because all of them don't have helmets either! Which is—it's a snapshot in time of battle, the reality of battle, but yet it shows us without helmets, which is not the way it should be. There's something wrong there. It's very wrong. But it was the way it was. So we were without helmets. So there's another strange thing. There were many, many strange things that happened during the battle there. For example, our water point was outside the—.

Kurtz: Was it ever played with by the North Vietnamese?

Stubbe: No, no, and we wonder why—I mean, oral history tapes, debriefs of Colonel Lownds and his operations officer shortly after the siege when they were being debriefed by the Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, in Hawaii and other places, would claim that as a great mystery. I sort of think that maybe they didn't do that because (a) they didn't think of it, (b) they might have used the same water because downstream they used the same water, obviously. And I think those are the reasons they probably didn't do it. But in any event, the water point was outside our wires. We did send out a patrol out there to examine it right after the siege began and the patrol lost one man. But, again, there was a pump out there and it was pumped on to the base into a large rubber, like a silo, tanks. And because it was rubber, it was punctured many times by incoming, and so there were times we would go three, four days without water, which is very critical, because the human body can only go three or four days without water. And on Hill 950 they were without water for over ten days, and sent out a patrol to a little stream between 950 and 1015. Believe it or not, way on top of the mountain there were streams. There's an old geologic statement about Germany: if you want to get water, go up into the mountains. There was a spring up there, and they sent out a patrol, and the terrain there is so steep that you move around there by grabbing the top of one tree, chinny down the trunk, and then hit the top of the next tree, and chinny down that. That's how sharp the slopes are. And they went down there and there's a fellow named Corporal Birch who was killed while they were trying to do that. Fortunately the skies cleared and they were able to bring some water to 950. But we had actually considered mounting a platoon from Khe Sanh Combat Base to climb [to] Hill 950, with all that sharp—with water—just go get them water. But fortunately we didn't—3/26 S-4 had devised a method of using old 155 canisters, filling them with plastic bladders that was used in milk dispens-

ers throughout Vietnam—filling that with water, putting them in 155 canisters and dropping them on the hills. There were all sorts of ingenious—people were really—like I say, We had just the right people. We had so few people. We had a Target Intelligence Officer, Mirza Baig, a Pakistani fellow whose father had established the Pakistani embassies in Canada and America, and whose grandfather—an illustrious family. Mirza himself was educated in Britain at [their] best schools and was a genius, and with the 3rd Marine Division G-2, was sent up there to Khe Sanh to augment our S-2 (because we had that abbreviated staff) and within a week, by observing electronic sensors, signals intelligence, and knowing how the North Vietnamese moved—their tactics—he had studied them. He had also ordered from the CIA all the things about Dien Bien Phu, about the tactics and everything else. He was just an amazing person, Baig was; he was only a Marine Captain. But within 7 to 10 days he had already plotted the artillery headquarters of the North Vietnamese and destroyed them. One place had—I don't know—secondary explosions for many hours later. He knew how they moved and what they did. People like that saved us. He himself by the way—we had just been seeded with these electronic sensors that were supposed to go along the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos and they diverted them: we were getting readings from them that would just indicate readings, a contact, a noise, a seismic reading from a truck moving nearby. Then we would get messages from their headquarters, which was in Thailand, at NKP, and we just—

[End of tape. Tape 6, Side A]

- Kurtz: We ran out of tape. We were talking about sensors. So could you continue with that, Ray, please.
- Stubbe: These electronic sensors were—it was a very expensive project, I think over a billion dollars. And later on they [the Congress] had hearings on that and Colonel Lownds and some of those people testified about how effective they were at Khe Sanh. They were very effective. But this fellow, Mirza Baig—we used to call him “Harry Baig”—he had a Boy Scout pack. He was very unconventional. He was a Pakistani Muslim. The Marines used to kid him about eating pork, and he'd say: Allah give special dispensation! And he always talked about “Infidels,” and he had an odd accent, British trained. But anyway, without any manuals or anything else, on his own, he figured out how to read these electronic sensor reports, which had been going back to NKP, and then NKP would issue a message many hours later, and by that time, whoever was in the area was long since gone, and it was history. So he had them give us “real time” readings where we could read the sensors—at the bunkers he could get the readings. Now the sensors were of two types. There was a seismic type which would detect vibrations such as trucks moving, even troops moving. And then were the acoustic sensors which could actually pick up conversations. So he at first assumed that the sensors gave the location, like the seismic ones, of the target. In fact, these were the locations of the

sensors, not the target. Then, with his knowledge of the North Vietnamese moved, in columns, in squads, he was fully familiar with North Vietnamese tactics of movement, he could determine how groups were moving, where they were moving, where their rear was, and all that kind of thing. So he, on his own, developed the methods of interpreting all the results of these sensor reports. And in fact, there were several times, one of which was the 29th of February—it was leap year that year—we had a regimental-size North Vietnamese unit approaching Khe Sanh Combat Base according to their old plan doing their major assault from the east, from Khe Sanh Village, from Route 9, and that whole regiment was coming up, and our sensors picked that up and we fired COFRAM, Controlled Fragmentation.

Kurtz: That's a type of ammunition.

Stubbe: M444—it's a 105 (also in other forms too). It sends out ping-pong size mini-grenades which in turn explode. It's an area clearing device. And in fact, we decimated that whole regiment, except for maybe ten or twelve North Vietnamese which managed to get to the lines of the 37th ARVN Rangers and then were killed there. So that particular sensor reading saved us. And there were sensors around the hills which also gave advanced warnings at different times for them. At one time, when 881-South was probably going to be attacked on the 5th of February, 1968, and we sent out massive air-strikes which decimated that force. [*break in tape*] Picked up a large unit, maybe a regiment going to attack Hill 881-South and decimated them. The defenders of 881-South, Captain Dabney and his people were not even aware of this happening. This was on the 5th of February. Mirza Baig, testifying in this Congress Hearing in November of '71, he and Colonel Lownds and our Intelligence Officer, Jerry Hudson, were the three that testified on the effect of the sensors at Khe Sanh. He mentioned this, that to his self-criticism that part of the tactic that the North Vietnamese would also attack Hill 861, and at their jubilation in the command bunker at having gotten the movement sounds stopped coming toward 881-South, he hadn't to continue to think about 861, and in fact, Hill 861-Alfa, Captain Breeding, was attacked by a major assault, penetrating half of his position, almost overrunning it, but the Marines valiantly fought back and recaptured the position. The conclusion of that Battlefield Subcommittee—the report of that is in the collection that I donated to the [Wisconsin Veterans] Museum, concluded that these saved us. These were so effective. But it wasn't only the sensors that saved us, it was people like Captain Baig who could read and could interpret and use “real time.” People like that—we seemed to have just the right people there. Like I say, as a Chaplain—maybe because of my perspective, I look at the G-1, the Personnel of Division sending people: we had just the right people at Khe Sanh. We had the heroic—people who didn't crack. We had hardly no one cracked up. I did see maybe two or three, which means that there were probably a few others. But there were very few. But we had people who—we had surgeons, who weren't qualified to do open heart surgery, but who did. These were like resi-

dents, who did amazing surgical feats. We had four doctors there. We had Mirza Baig. We had Colonel Lownds. We had our battalion commander. We had Earle Breeding, who valiantly fought off that assault on 861-Alfa. We had Bill Dabney—we had all these people—and the troopers in the field—the people who would go out and rescue people who were wounded and who didn't crack up. We had just the right people, and we all made it out of there, and I can't help but feel the hand of God in this. I say that openly, unashamedly. Despite our 475 killed and 2500 wounded, with 40,000 surrounding us, in a sense it's a miracle that any of us made it back alive. That any of us! We very well could have—with tanks against us, with everything else—isolation, fog in the morning, resupply rather tenuous, we were in a very difficult position and yet we emerged from it.

Kurtz: Well, let's just talk about a couple more things, and then I think, as we said before, we want to go into some detail on the air operations, the resupply, living conditions, and all of that. What was your view of how replacements were treated?

Stubbe: OK. We saw quite a few replacements, some of which, very sadly, died as they were arriving. I personally didn't see this, but I heard many instances where Marines would tell me they went to the airstrip when a plane was hit or a position near them was hit or even if their position was hit, and a Marine with stateside utilities, perfectly green, unstained, maybe even stateside boots, not the jungle boots, was killed. And these are people that hadn't been there a day—or less—had just arrived or maybe were just arriving. But for those who did arrive—you talk with veterans now, Vietnam of all services I think, and they will talk about how wary they were of “newbies”—newly arriving people, because they really didn't know how to behave in the field, they weren't aware of booby traps or how to look for enemy. There was always apprehension of new people, that they weren't fully assimilated into the situation. But in our situation, which was a static battlefield situation, these people, new people, were immediately taken in, and oddly enough, for landing in sheer chaos, which must have been a psychically shocking thing—to land in all this devastation: no buildings, and incoming, and grubby people and smelly people, they fit right in. And basically what we were doing at the time, the daily activity of almost everyone, was filling sandbags, digging deeper trenches, digging bunkers that could not go underground now that the monsoons had let up, moving supplies, moving casualties—that was what most Marines did at this time. Senior Marines, Staff Sergeants and above, would be out, seeing how their people were, bring out all their supplies. We hardly got any mail, in or out. Like I say, water—we'd go without food maybe every three days—water every three days, food maybe one C-ration a day—we're supposed to get three, especially with all the stress and movement, we were burning up calories like you wouldn't believe. I might say I went from about 185 when I arrived and I think I was 137 when I left Khe Sanh.

Kurtz: And what are you today?

Stubbe: I'm back in the 180s.

Kurtz: How was the morale?

Stubbe: O, the morale, yes, OK, the morale was very, very good. As I mentioned before, a lot of the guys just joked around. They shared things. In addition to this heroic thing and joking thing, because we were so low on food and water, if someone were completely out of water, someone in the same bunker would give them their last drops of water. Or, we were so low on C-rations, they would share or give their last bits of C-ration. They would share their love letters from their girlfriends. All this sort of thing. That's the kind of way these people were, like one recon Marine told me, one time—recon had lost so many people there during the siege, many more than they did out in the field and the reason was that recon was sandwiched between the airstrip and the regimental command bunker which were the main bulls-eye target, so they took over 70% casualties of their unit, which was a little over a hundred men—about 70% killed or wounded. But I remember Kevin Macaulay, who was a radioman there, telling me that the men he knew there—he says, "We're all richer for having known them, and we're better people." His statement is so true.

Kurtz: What was your experience in dealing with the feelings of people who were wounded before they were evacuated?

Stubbe: Yeah, there again, most of the wounded I saw, like at C-Med, maintained a real humor about that. I remember a fellow named Slaugenhaupt, who was with the Shore Party unit there, and he was on a stretcher moaning and groaning, he kept saying, "O, I lost everything! I lost everything!" I came up to him and said, "O, what did you lose?" Because a lot of the guys, because of incoming mortars hitting bunkers would lose photographs of their girlfriend or family, or they'd lose their camera or record player—if they happened to have one—there were very few who did, or they would lose their clothes (which they had very few; what we had usually stayed on and rotted on us). So I thought maybe he'd lost his clothes or pictures or whatever else, and said, "Well, what did you lose?" Trying to talk to him—he didn't look that badly wounded. In fact I think it was him that I asked, "Well, where did they get you?" And he said, "O don't worry, Chaplain, they just got me in the ass!" So I said, "Well, what did you lose?" And he said, "Well, you know all those peanut butters and jellies that we get in our C-rations?" He said, "You know how we always save those things and don't eat them at the time, we put them aside?" He said, "I had a whole wooden ammo box full of C-ration peanut butters and jellies and the incoming round got all my peanut butters and jellies!" I said, "Well, what are you worrying about; you're leaving this place!" "O, I lost everything; I lost everything!" It was so funny; you couldn't help but laugh.

Sometimes it got serious. There was a fellow on a stretcher—I remember he asked me to say the 91st Psalm with him. And this is the first time I said the 91st Psalm that it had this particular meaning for me. The 91st Psalm—some people sing that now at Catholic funerals. It’s “On Eagle’s Wings.” It’s very familiar. If you go to a Catholic funeral you’ll probably hear it. But it’s “He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide under the shadow of the Almighty. He will cover you with his wings and under his wings you shall find shelter. You shall not fear for the arrow that flies by day and the pestilence that walketh in noon day. A thousand shall fall at your side and ten thousand at your right hand.” I started reading that—he asked me to read that to him, and it ends with “you shall not fear; I am with you.” A very positive statement. But I started to think about the “arrow that flies by day” and I thought wow, those are the rockets. And “A thousand shall fall at thy side:” those are our friendly casualties, and “ten thousand at thy right hand,” those are the enemy. And that Psalm took on—. And many years later I learned that that Psalm probably deals with the situation where the Babylonians.... [note: this is incorrect; the Psalm is number 46]. But anyway, he asked me to say the Psalm and hold his hand, so it was a very touching moment. There were some very tender times. But generally when people were wounded they had a humor about them. There was one that a fellow related to me—I didn’t see this myself, but I can believe it happened, where the Catholic Chaplain was giving Last Rites to a wounded fellow at C Med, and he sort of woke up, and said [*very loudly*], “Why are you doing this? I’m not going to die! Get away from me!” And with a few choice “f” words and other words, “I’m not dying!” and then he did. He just fell down and was dead. So there was that kind of determination. Determination, humor, youthfulness—those were the kind of things [I remember].

Kurtz: OK. Were there any people that you experienced that said, “Why am I here?”

Stubbe: No, no. I never did get that-p—. That kind of philosophical pondering—what do I want to say?—that human aspect of looking back, looking at yourself in that situation, a transcendent escape, a transcendent self-examination, looking at the situation and looking at oneself—which we all do—one of our human aspects of what we do—was not present. We were so much in the “now.” By the way, that can obviously be a very good thing, especially if you’re in a bad situation, but it can also be a very dampening thing if you’re in a good situation, like if you’re dancing with a girlfriend or you’re seeing something beautiful and you say, “O, is this beautiful,” or “O, is this a wonderful time,” you’re no longer in the situation; you’re looking at it from a distance. And that’s what I’m doing now, what most Vietnam vets do, we can look at things from a distance of time and it’s not probably as emotionally destructive or powerful. But at that time, I don’t remember people reflecting.

Kurtz: Did you or the people there have any idea about what the rest of the world view of what was happening at Khe Sanh?

Stubbe: No. We really didn't, because like I say, we didn't get too much mail coming in.

Kurtz: Did you get *Stars & Stripes* ever?

Stubbe: Yes, We got that and also a thing called *Sea Tiger* which is a III MAF—III MAF being the senior Marine headquarters, in DaNang. We received their newspaper.

Kurtz: Did you get Armed Forces radio?

Stubbe: Some people did. Some people who had radios. And there were also MARS calls, where people could call home.

Kurtz: MARS is telephone service with ham radios.

Stubbe: Yes, you had to say "over" all the time.

Kurtz: Did the North Vietnamese throw any propaganda at you—with loud speakers?

Stubbe: Yes they did. Oddly enough—not with loud speakers, but with mortar shells with leaflets. And there were two instances of that, both of which happened after I left. They were both in March. They were by mortar shells that exploded and distributed leaflets.

Kurtz: Did they have any impact on anybody.

Stubbe: No. They were a humorous thing. I have some of them—I donated them. One was with Bertram Russell quotations.

Kurtz: What were the living conditions like?

Stubbe: Well—a few people did have showers. I found this out many years later—had buried showers in the trenches. But I would say that 99% of us lived in the same uniform.

Kurtz: For the whole siege?

Stubbe: For the whole siege, yeah. They were torn. They were full of sweat and oily—oils from our foreheads and everything else, crotches rotting out, covered with blood—sometimes I think they made them green because red doesn't show up except as a dark spot. In some cases, men reported after having left that the cloth actually became part of their skin because of the skin growing into the cloth. I didn't experience or see that myself. But I do know that when I left and went to Quang Tri—and I took baths in a little aluminum mount-out box—which I donated to the [Wisconsin Veterans] Museum, and I

would say that for at least a month later on, when I would dry myself off with a towel, it looked like I was wiping another area of my body after defecation because the brown—was such a fine pigment that it would actually get inside the skin, and the skin maybe went over it—I don't know—but it kept rubbing off for weeks and weeks later on.

Kurtz: Where did you sleep? And how well did you sleep?

Stubbe: I slept in my bunker, in C Med, which was above ground, except for that one time that I was on the line—O, and there was another time when I slept in a below-ground bunker in C Med, but those were the only two times. And I think I just “zonked out.”

Kurtz: And how long were you able to sleep?

Stubbe: It's hard to say. I don't know. I think I slept most of the night. It's hard to say when I went to sleep or when I woke up. I think I slept pretty soundly. The sounds of the incoming—because they kept plastering us at night—didn't really wake me up or anything.

Kurtz: Well, I think we're kind of at the end of the rope right here. I'm assuming we can come back one more time to talk about a few things.

Stubbe: Sure.

Kurtz: We're just going to wind her down right now.

[Tape 6, Side B, is blank]

[Tape 7, Side A]

Kurtz: We are continuing with our interview with Chaplain Ray Stubbe. Ray, it's a beautiful day, a lot warmer than the last time, and where we'd like to go today [*Note: Interview was conducted on 26 April 2006*] is to discuss some of the memorable people that were involved in the siege in Vietnam, the Marines or anybody else and also maybe just talk a little bit about the civilians that you met in the village. So why don't you start, and if you say something that's interesting, I'll ask you about it, but I'm sure that everything's going to be interesting. So go ahead.

Stubbe: Well, actually, when I think about Vietnam, it's the people that I think about more than the place. It's for that reason probably, I haven't returned to Vietnam as many have, because the people aren't there. I see them at reunions. I talk with them over the phone, or write letters back and forth, but really the people who were there—. [*interrupted by a telephone call; break in tape*].

We were talking about people. Like I say—the people who were there—when I think of Khe Sanh, the first thing I think of are the people who were there. Obviously the second thing would be the beauty, the coolness, that was the Garden of Eden aspect. And then maybe the third thing are the events and so on. But mainly, it's the people. We didn't have all that many people there, but we had just the right people. I'm talking about doctors, corporals, Privates, Lance Corporals, who were courageous—people who would dash out during incoming to drag in a buddy or give their last drops of water or food—was a common thing. I was all over the base and I would see these all the time. Or, leaders who knew what was happening and had a good grasp and who took care of their men. So, we had just the right people. As a Chaplain, I would have to say: This is not an accident. I see that, but everyone else might say: Well, it just happened that way, but for me, we had just the right people there. And then there were certain individuals that just stick out.

Kurtz: Could you share your views on a few of those individuals?

Stubbe: Yes. Well, the good Colonel, David Edward Lownds, for example. I didn't really get to know him all that well because he was one level above my Commanding Officer. My immediate Commanding Officer was Lieutenant Colonel James B. Wilkinson, who had command of the 1st Battalion, 26th Marines, or 1/26. But I did see Colonel Lownds quite frequently because I did go to the regimental briefings in the evening when I was on the base. And he was always one of these people that was very unassuming. He was not one that flaunted military orders or control around. He was very soft-spoken, had a good sense of humor about him all the time. I remember at one briefing he mentioned he went down to Phu Bai, which was where the Third Marine Division was at the time. This was probably around August, September of '67. And he would always remark about his time there as "The wonderful land of Buy!" And he went on in his comments: "They even had sidewalks!" They had these wooden pallet board walks. And he said, "They has flushing toilets!" He couldn't get over that. It was just amazing. And he said: "And they have air-conditioning in their hootches, but they'll never get it as cold as we have it at Khe Sanh here." And he always had that sense of humor about him, always. He was interested in the local people, in the local Bru tribe. He dressed up as Santa Claus, I remember, to give out gifts to the kids. He remarked in a debriefing he gave at the end of his tour—I remember listening to that tape—and he'd say how he visited in the Bru villages and came across this young boy that had carved out a wooden replica of a Huey in the sky, and it was amazingly detailed and proportioned, and he made the comment how these kids that are almost in the stone age, if they had had the proper education what marvelous contributions they might have made to society. He had a real heart for people, and he would also be the kind of person that would take walks by himself off the base, all around the surrounding area, much to the dismay of the intelligence officer, the S-2, and also the Special Forces people

who knew that he could have been captured or whatever. But he had been an Intelligence Officer, S-2, earlier in his career of a regiment, I think it was the 4th Marines, back in the 1950s, and so he had a need to know personally the area and how long it would take to get from one place to another and where likely ambushes would be.

Kurtz: When did he stop taking walks?

Stubbe: I guess, maybe the monsoons came in and it became very difficult to get out, around November. I remember him coming up on Hill 881-South on Marine Corps Birthday [10 November 1967]. The hill was socked in with fog. It was a miserable time, a lot of rain. It was cold. And somehow his chopper made it through. But what I remember about it is that our Colonel, our battalion Colonel, Colonel Wilkinson had us at attention in a formation, and then Colonel Lownds came up and had everyone stand at ease and form an informal circle around him. And he said—this is November 10th, Marine Corps Birthday—and I remember he said at the time—and I put it in my diary so I know that this is accurate—he said, “You will all soon be in the American history books.” And I remember at the time I thought this was very ominous, because people had been warning in the past—we had elections, we had monsoons, we had geographically close to Laos—there were many things. People had warned that we were going to be attacked. And it was sort of like yelling “Wolf!” After awhile we started disregarding these warnings—those of us who had been there for awhile. But when he said that—“You will all soon be in the American history books”—I took that as a real indication that things were not going to be too good in the future. But he was always very sly. I remember during the initial part of the siege, we became besieged by “incoming” reporters, and they were all over the place. And Colonel Lownds had many things, obviously, on his mind to do, without giving time to talk with reporters. And he was always like Socrates. People would say, “Do you see this like Dien Bien Phu?” And he would say something—this is quoted in the news articles—he would say, “Tell me about that. I don’t know much about Dien Bien Phu.” And then—if you were to be in his bunker where he slept, you’d see Jules Roy book on Dien Bien Phu and a few other studies—the Third Marine Division had done a study on the similarities between Khe Sanh and Dien Bien Phu a whole year before, when they first sent up Marines. In September of ’66 they sent up battalion 1/3, 1st Battalion, 3rd Marines, with Lieutenant Colonel Peter Wickwire, and at that time they did a very detailed study, about 30, 40 pages long on comparison of Khe Sanh and Dien Bien Phu, long before MACV did their study. But he knew. But he just wouldn’t let it on that he knew. He was just very coy about those kind of things. He was also a kind of person that, prior to coming to Khe Sanh, he had been with some nuclear command in New Mexico, a Defense Nuclear facility or something.

Kurtz: Does that mean anything in your mind, because had been some talk about using nuclear at Khe Sanh.

Stubbe: Right. But what I was going to say was that when he first—just before the siege erupted—he told me this later on—they had stockpiled a kind of munitions there called COFRAM, C-O-F-R-A-M. I think I talked about that before, but just briefly, it's controlled fragmentation, or M444, or also known as "Firecracker." And these were classified Top Secret at the time, and were to be used—if they couldn't use nuclear weapons, as sort of a last measure weapon to destroy the hoards of Red Chinese like they had in Korea from overrunning places. It was an ultimate weapon. And what it was is basically bombs or artillery rounds that would send off little bomblets, ping pong size, which were like mini-grenades which would then explode over a larger area. It was an area device that would make a large area full of tens of thousands of pieces of shrapnel. It was first fired when the Special Forces camp at Lang Vei was being overrun by tanks. That was the first time it was ever fired in war. But anyway, Colonel Lownds was appraised of the fact they were stockpiling this COFRAM, and they wanted him to fill out something like 20 pages of documents for a security clearance for COFRAM. He said, Well, I just came from the Defense Nuclear facility and I have all these clearances, and they said, no, you need one for COFRAM also. And he said, I'm not about to fill out all these forms. I'm the Commanding Officer of this base and I will do as I see fit. They needed to stockpile them there and they needed it there, so they did. But he was that kind—he could be obstreperous, is what I'm getting at, with higher commands. And he was, by himself, the sole commander there. So he was a complex personality. He did a lot of things on his own. During the Siege, General Tompkins, the Third Marine Division Commander, came up almost daily, but I talked with Tompkins before he died, and Tompkins said he always let Colonel Lownds—Colonel Lownds was the commander there. He was just there to advise or to help or to bring assets that the Colonel probably couldn't get on his own, like B52s. So the good Colonel—and he had a handlebar moustache—that his wife forced him to shave off when he came home. And he himself—I saw his wife at a reunion, Jeanne—he only attended one of our reunions. That was at St. Louis. And his wife mentioned, while the Colonel was there during the siege that one of their children was at school, and their teacher—I think it was a daughter—this daughter's teacher sharply criticized, "Well, your father's one of these war mongers that kills children." And Jeanne didn't know about this until many, many years later on. So even the Colonel's family was not exempt from the harassment that a lot of other Marines had as far as family members. He was the kind of person who would be all over the base, checking on people. One of the Marines told me later on that he came into their area and saw that the Marine was wearing a shirt that had "Lownds" on it. This Marine told me, in fact, that he had gone to the regimental area where the Colonel had put out his laundry to dry, and had taken his shirt, because he needed it. Supplies for the Marines were just so scarce. And all the Colonel said was, "Well, I hope you

didn't take my socks as well. Good work, Marine," and walked off. That's just the way he was. He didn't create any problems. He was all in favor of the trooper. There were times—other Marines told me how he—during incoming come to the rescue of another Marine or help dig out or whatever and he just wouldn't run for cover himself. He was the kind of a person that was just one of the troops, so to speak.

Kurtz: Did he feel that he had enough men and equipment there? Did he ever express the need, the desire, to have more?

Stubbe: During the siege—I must say to my self-criticism that I didn't go into the command bunker during the siege at all. I did go to our battalion command bunker quite frequently. Maybe I might have gone in once. But everything was so busy, and they were so involved in radios and so many things happening, I just didn't feel that I could do anything. It wasn't a time to just chat with people, see how they were doing. That was just impossible to do, so I didn't go there. So I quite frankly don't know how he was during the siege. I'm speaking mainly before the siege or what others have told me.

Kurtz: So now did he have nightly briefings during the siege?

Stubbe: No. I'm sure he must have had briefings as things happened. But before the siege it was always the evening, and then our battalion briefing was in the morning. O, for example, just before the siege [at] one of the evening briefings, he said: Well, we've built up all our defenses. We have all our concertina out. We have fields of fire. We've got our supplies. He ticked off all the things about preparing our position for a battle. And he said: But now we need to concentrate on camouflage and deception. He said: So what I want you to do—. He had, at these evening briefings he had our battalion CO, but he had all the support companies, like supply, communications, recon, Seabees, medical, and all these different people. That's who attended these briefings, and I was there as the Chaplain—because I covered the whole base, not just my own battalion. And then, of course, his own staff officers. And then sometimes FOB-3, the Army Special Forces, would send a representative. The Air Force had a representative. At this particular briefing he said we have to concentrate on deception. So he said: "Everyone knows where the regimental bunker is by all the antennas. I want you to set up false antennas throughout the base and build false bunkers"—as if we didn't have enough work to do to build our own bunkers—because we had a ridge line to the north of us where we just knew that there were enemy spotters that could call in mortars and so on. And he said: "Everyone will know where the regiment is, so I want to create more targets." Interestingly, my own Colonel, Colonel Wilkinson, at the morning briefing the morning after—also had a sense of humor—and he said "Well, the good Colonel said"—(we always called him "the good Colonel")—the good Colonel said we should do all these things." He said: "That will mean that instead of the regiment receiving fifty incoming rounds, the

whole base will receive a thousand!” And that was to prove very prophetic, not because we erected all these—because we didn’t have that much time: this was maybe three or four days before the siege erupted—so we didn’t erect a lot of false antennas or false bunkers, but we did get the incoming, nevertheless. But anyway, the people in charge there had this sense of humor. Colonel Lownds was that way. He was very soft-spoken, humorous, had the trooper in mind, knew all the terrain from having personally—one time the S-4 who was there, [Lieutenant] Colonel Freddie McEwan, (later became the CO of 1/26 after [Lieutenant] Colonel Wilkinson left—told me that just the two of them were out on a walk, down Route 9, and wanted to cross the river, and the two of them just crossed the river, swam across the river. There was one time at Christmas, I remember, the S-2, Harper Bohr, was a Captain, I believe at the time, later made Major. He and I walked, just the two of us—we’re talking late December, after Christmas, late December of ’67, at which time some of our recon teams were making contact close to the base with people getting killed, and also he was the S-2 so he knew from radio intercepts that the enemy was creeping up. I didn’t know; he didn’t share that, but I learned later on. So he must have known all these things. But his wife had sent him some things to give to the kids in Khe Sanh village—he was going to give them to the missionary who was down there, John and Carolyn Miller—talk about two interesting people. So Harper Bohr and I walked down. It was a nice, sunny day, like it is now.

Kurtz: How far was this walk?

Stubbe: About three miles.

Kurtz: Three miles, and was it a road that you went?

Stubbe: No, no. We went through the Bru villages and up hill 471 which later became a huge battle scene, and then through another Bru village at the foot of Hill 471, called Brech, which is a Bru word for a thorny vine, and then walked into Khe Sanh village and visited the Millers, gave them the gifts, and then John Miller and the two of us walked back to the base. And Harper tells me to this day that the hairs on the back of his neck and the back of his spine just tingles when he thinks about how we could have been taken as POWs or whatever. He didn’t even—he wasn’t armed. John Miller was “tail end Charlie;” Harper was point, and I was in the center, and we just walked back through the hills to the base.

Kurtz: I assume you were not armed either?

Stubbe: Of course not, neither was John Miller. We had that sense, though—it was such a beautiful area, deceptively beautiful, like it was the Garden of Eden. And it was so peaceful. Peaceful, not only in the sense of a lack of turmoil and war—we had the sense of peace—our definition of peace is so shallow in

the American language: we only think of the lack of war, or maybe lack of sound.

Kurtz: Was there any aircraft above you at all?

Stubbe: No. But what I'm getting at with peace—has a sense in the Hebrew language of “shalom” has a sense of blessing, of the opportunity for life to grow, it's a sense of the presence of God, of blessing. And that's what—when I say that Khe Sanh was “peaceful” that's what I really mean. It's not only the sense of a lack of war, but also a sense of the positive thing of abundance of life, of growth, of everything being so good. So that's what I mean by “peace.” Anyway, there was this sense, and because of that we would do things like that. Anyway, maybe that's enough about Colonel Lownds, but I'll get to Harper Bohr. Harper Bohr and I met when we came in country, the same day. We were at DaNang the same time.

Kurtz: How do you spell his name?

Stubbe: B-O-H-R, Danish fellow. Interestingly enough, he and his successor, a fellow by the name of Jerry Hudson, who was the S-2 during the siege, and also Earle Breeding, who was the Commanding Officer of Company E of 2/26, and he was on Hill 861-Alfa during the siege—those three Captains had been enlisted Sergeants under then Major Lownds when he was the S-2, like I say, I think of 4th Marine Regiment in the early 1950s, and they were now at Khe Sanh with him. Earle Breeding tells me that when 2/26 arrived, and the officers all gathered in the bunker—they arrived on the 17th of January of '68, which was 4 days before the Siege, which erupted on the 21st. They were all in this bunker and Colonel Lownds was briefing them and the other officers were briefing them and then Colonel Lownds looked out and said, “And we will hold and we will win, won't we Captain Breeding?” And Breeding tells me that all the other officers of his battalion looked at him like “Who are you?” But Lownds had a good memory for that—something about Lownds again. But anyway, Harper Bohr was one of the S-2 Scouts of Major Lownds at the time. And Harper Bohr had also been with Second Force Recon Company and was really into the recon business. He was one of the few Marines that had the gold jump wings.

Kurtz: What are gold jump wings?

Stubbe: Gold jump wings—you get the silver jump wings for five jumps, like everyone does—all services. And the Marine Corps says that if you do five more jumps, you get the gold wings, and usually only those in Force Recon, as opposed to battalion recon, were able to go to Jump School to get—to get the extra five jumps later. (Anyway, I can get into Force Recon later on if you want). Anyway, Harper Bohr—I met him in DaNang. I think I mentioned this in one of my prior tapes, but I'll just briefly say it: it got to be late and I was

able to get out on a plane and get to Phu Bai and he decided to stay through the night and get the next Marine plane out—I took an Air Force plane. And then I met him in Khe Sanh about a week or so later when I arrived and I was surprised to see him there. He said that right after I left, within five minutes DaNang had taken this huge rocket attack which destroyed all sorts of planes, and he was telling how terrible it was, how exciting and how terrible and how frightening, and he said: You got out just in time. I endured that. He shared with me that at one time he was thinking of getting out of the Marine Corps and becoming a Lutheran minister. He was a very kind person, like Colonel Lownds and especially like my [Lieutenant] Colonel Wilkinson—just kindly people. Maybe I saw it that way. Maybe they reacted to me that way as a Chaplain; I am sure they were firm as Marines would be, when they needed to be firm. But Harper Bohr was a kindly person. Right before the Siege he left and became the Executive Officer of 3rd Recon Battalion at Quang Tri, and I got to see him down there later on and we had numerous chats.

Kurtz: Do you have an explanation why—obviously these are career Marines that you’re describing as having a kind side, but yet Marines are—

[End of tape; Tape 7, Side B]

Stubbe: We were talking about how Marines were kindly and yet Marines. I have the feeling—I mean I have no way of knowing; I’m just speculating off the top of my head. But I find—I’ve been boxing lately, and I haven’t had much to do with athletic people, athletes in the past, high school, college, I was one of these “nerds,” I wasn’t a “jock.” But I would say that athletes, generally speaking—there are some exceptions—are kind of mild people themselves, especially boxers. I’ve read this in fiction about boxers, have that tendency to be nice people. Maybe they’ve had some sense knocked into them; maybe they’ve had the evil knocked out of them. I don’t know. After a good workout—anyone who does a lot of running or bicycling or whatever will know that all these endorphins, the pleasurable chemicals in the brain, and you just feel kind of weak, like a wet blotter, and you take a shower and you’re just so relaxed and at peace. And I think Marines, having to go through such tough training and being tough, hand-to-hand combat, exercises and all that kind of thing—because of that also have that milder side of them come out because they don’t have to prove themselves anymore. They can just be who they are. And I remember remarking about it at the time, so it’s not just a reflection of an old codger who’s about to turn 68. But I really felt this at the time that people who have gone through so much have a disposition that is much more tolerant of other people, and certainly of others who have gone through the same thing. So that generally, Marines are characters; they really are. Like recon people: you’d find people that would do things that you would not think they would do—mimic playing a flute or just having a lot of fun. And their comrades, not just simply putting up with it, but they themselves also doing funny antics. So these people were—and mainly enlisted troops were this

way, too. And this helped them get through the siege—this sense of humor. I'd be in a bunker during a rocket attack—which is a very frightening thing—it's not only the explosions, but they make this screeching sound as they're flying in past you. It goes so fast and so loud. And these guys in the bunker would say: "Oh! These NVA are sure piss-poor aerial spotters to call in rounds—that one only landed ten feet away!" Which is pretty close! But they would just make jokes about it. Or they'd tell me about one guy jumping in a trench—and they were digging this trench deeper and deeper because they didn't want to be outside to take a piss, you know. They put a 55-gallon drum out there with screening over it to keep the flies out, and that was what they called their "piss tube" or "pisser." So while they're filling sandbags they have this incoming and everyone jumps in the trench, and this one guy tells me: O, I just jumped in. At the last second I saw that I was going to fall right into this drum of piss and I just spread my legs at the last moment and planted one on either side of it! That kind of thing. Or the Corpsman, right after the siege began—I think I've mentioned some of these things before, but I'll mention them again because they are so funny. This Corpsman—I'm still in the bunker, and [during the] initial attack, and the ammo dump is still cooking off, and we had this one casualty come in and a chopper had come in to take out casualties. And this one guy who had a wounded leg ran out to the chopper, and this Corpsman is running after him to put this medevac tag on him. And the Corpsman comes running back, panting, and says: "I couldn't get him! I couldn't get him! My casualty outran me!" He'd gotten in the chopper and couldn't put the tag on him and the chopper went off. The Doctor said: That's OK; they'll find out what's wrong with him when he lands. And here's the Marine with the wounded leg outrunning the Corpsman: he was motivated to get out of there! Or, the Marine on the stretcher coming into C Med moaning and groaning. His name was Slaugenhaupt. I'll never forget it.. He's moaning and groaning on the stretcher saying: "I lost everything! I lost everything!" And I said, "What did you lose?" I thought he'd lost his photographs that got burnt or maybe his clothing, or maybe he was fortunate enough to have a camera, or some of the guys were fortunate enough to have a 45 record players—very few, but some did, or a cassette player—people sent cassettes home—they weren't cassettes, they were reel-to-reel, 3-inch tape things. We called them "taped letters." The Post Office even had a special rate for these things. You could send them back and forth. The people who sent them out could send them free and the people sending them back—I think the rate was six cents. So anyway I said: "Is it any of this stuff?" He said, "No, No, Chaplain." In the C Rations we always had these little peanut butters and jellies, and he said: "I was saving all of these in a wooden ammo box and I had a huge stockpile of these things, and a round came in and it just destroyed all my goodies, all the things I saved up, all my treasures. O, I lost everything! I lost everything!" And he's moaning and groaning. He had sort of a smile on his face. Another one came in and I said, "What happened to you?" And he said: "Oh, I'm OK, Chaplain, they just got me in the ass!"

Things like that: this is the way they were. This is the way the ordinary Marines were. I'm suddenly moving from Harper Bohr to ordinary Marines.

Kurtz: O, that's fine.

Stubbe: That's the kind of people we had. Getting back to Bohr—one of the briefings we had just before the siege erupted, it was kind of foggy, and I remember him saying, "O, maybe it's tonight, because the conditions are just so good for an attack." So obviously he was thinking of that. Harper had a thing, just like Colonel Lownds did about the local people, the children. He was just a very thoughtful person. He was at every one of my worship services [on the base] that I had.

Kurtz: Did he have to go down for his job into the village? Is that how he got to know the Bru?

Stubbe: Perhaps. During the week, I was normally out on the hill, spend a night and then go out on a patrol with a platoon, then go to the next hill, and in the evening, hold a worship service. I did this with the three hills: 950, 861, 881-South, and then for awhile we had a bridge site to the east of the base from which we sent patrols eastward down Route 9, and then I'd also go down to the Special Forces camp at Lang Vei and stay overnight there. And I'd also stay overnight at the CAP compound just outside the base. CAP is Combined Action Platoon, which is one of the three platoons of CAC, Combined Action Company, OSCAR, which was the only CAC unit in Vietnam that had Montagnards and Marines. A CAP would be maybe 12 or 14 Marines and maybe about 30 local people, and they would live together and train together and form a self-defense unit for that Bru village. All the rest of the Marine CACs were Vietnamese and Marines. But there were three of them at Khe Sanh. One of them was right outside the Combat Base and there was one in the village [of Khe Sanh] itself and then there was one on the western edge of the village.

Kurtz: How big was the village?

Stubbe: The village—well there were about 1200 Vietnamese in the village. In fact, that's what the census showed. It wasn't that large, but it was large enough. I'd say maybe about two to three city blocks long and all the Vietnamese were in that village; they weren't any other place. Whereas the Montagnards were not in the village: they were in little hamlets surrounding. There were probably eight or nine thousand Bru tribesmen. I'd stay overnight at CAP OSCAR-3 on Sunday night. Normally I'd have church services Sunday three times on the base itself: one at the regimental mess hall, one at our battalion mess hall and one for the artillery people at the artillery headquarters on the western edge of the combat base, and then I'd go out to CAP OSCAR-3 for the eve-

ning. I'd hold services for them. There were only like ten, twelve men there. This was my R&R, so to speak, my weekly R&R after trudging the hills during the week. We'd play canasta there. I just enjoyed being out with the guys there. I still correspond with some of them. Getting back to the people—I've talked about Colonel Lownds, Harper Bohr. I also met [Lieutenant] Colonel Wilkinson—James Bascom Wilkinson—.

Kurtz: Was he related to the guy that was with Aaron Burr, that General Wilkinson that—?

Stubbe: He may be. He was from the South. I don't know. I met him at Camp Pendleton prior to going over, and he and I were in Staging [Battalion] together, although we didn't meet during the day. I think we only met once or twice, because I was separated from everyone else as a Chaplain and escorted around by a Sergeant Major who took me to different firing ranges and different places to learn about customs of the Vietnamese and everything like that.

Kurtz: Why were you segregated?

Stubbe: Well, they used to put Chaplains in with the Corpsmen as part of Field Medical Service School, but then they decided that was really oriented towards medical procedures and Chaplains really didn't need to know all of that. So I was one of the first ones—they were going to have a separate Chaplains Program where we would learn the customs of the Vietnamese and that sort of thing and get a little flavor of what the Marines did. In my particular case, I got more than a "flavor," because they would be doing, like, an exercise of a POW escaping and living on rice and that kind of thing. Or, they'd go through the infiltration course with barbed wire with live ammo going off over the head. And I went through that with them because I decided I needed to know what the Marines—how their life was. I just really knew that I had nothing to say to them unless I knew who they were, what they were facing, their fears, their joys, their whatever. So I decided I needed to do that and did. So anyway I met Colonel Wilkinson there, and he introduced himself, and then I saw him again at Khe Sanh when I arrived. He, again, was a real Southern gentlemen. In fact, some of the other officers now always refer to him as "Gentleman Jim." He was a kind of—at a particular time I was due to go out to a hill, to Hill 881, I believe—I was going to hold church services. And the Marine choppers were not flying. But someone came to my bunker and said: "Hurry up, hurry up, get out to the other side of the airstrip, because the chopper is going to 881-South." I had this big metal ammo box full of little hymnals, Bibles, wine and wafers and everything else to take out there, plus my own change of socks and that kind of thing, C rations, and I was by myself—I didn't have an enlisted clerk. So I ran out there. It was dusty and hot—not really hot, but hot enough. It was early morning. There were no clouds and the sun was beating down. And I ran across the airstrip, panting, really exhausted at that time. And I sat there for about four hours, and I was

just steaming. At the time went on I just became more and more angry. And no one had come, and it came time to eat lunch, and I just went over to eat lunch, and I went over to our little bunker where Colonel Wilkinson was at. It was a very small bunker: only he and the Sergeant Major could fit in there. But he was alone at the time. I walked down there. It was real small. I walked down there, just steaming, and I was about to vent my anger at having been told to be at this place. The Regiment had told me there was going to be an airplane—could he [Wilkinson] do something about getting me out to 881 and that kind of thing. Anyway I walked down the stairwell into there and upon seeing me, he said: “O Chaplain, isn’t it a beautiful day! How good to see you!” He was just so full of positive—ebullience, you know—just overflowing with goodness, and he defused all my anger. I’ve used that as an example at times: it didn’t stuff my anger, but it just got absorbed into something greater and positive. And so sure enough, I had my lunch. I didn’t get angry. I told him what happened in a matter-of-fact way, and sure enough, after lunch I got out to 881. But that’s the kind of person he was. And all during the siege, I know, he would be out with the troops, seeing how people were. He was just a very---. He later became the Executive Officer of Fourth Marine Regiment after the siege and was involved in some operations in the Khe Sanh area called ROBIN SOUTH and ROBIN NORTH in May and June of ’68, and then he got out. He had like 18, 19 years’ service, and he got out. And he told me at the time it was because his wife was having a series of heart attacks at the stress of him being over there. He got out of the Marine Corps without retiring—I’m sure he stayed in the Marine Reserve and retired. But that’s just the kind of person he was. He had real integrity. And the next time I saw him was right after Vietnam; I was assigned to the Recruit Depot at Parris Island [South Carolina], and he was at Hilton Head Island working for Merrill Lynch. Just being at Hilton Head Island says enough. He already was making good money. And we met and had a very enjoyable time together at lunch and then I kept track of him only through Christmas cards, basically. But he rose to become a national Vice President in Merrill Lynch, and then that was very stressful, and he eventually took a lesser job to become managing, I think, at Memphis, and then at Savannah. I think he became in charge of the Savannah—he was getting ready to retire. And then he retired back at Hilton Head. And his wife died and he remarried. And he’s just a mild, unassuming person. I remember one time one of our Khe Sanh vets who became a millionaire through construction, and a very angry personality—so I won’t mention his name—but he became like a burr, a thistle. And at that time our Khe Sanh vet group had—I’m talking about maybe ten years ago—had a fellow who had a mobile PX that went all over the country, a big truck, and sold all sorts of hats and T-shirts and everything else. I think he was just going through PTSD. He just needed to move around. He had a separate account. His books weren’t all that good. And he also became involved in helping, assisting our reunions. And of course when you have a reunion, you always get “comp” rooms, and he would give them out to needy vets who really couldn’t afford. Well, anyway, this fellow who became a millionaire just became in-

censed at the sloppy book work, and who paid for this van, and who paid for the materials, and where was the money going, and who were getting these comp rooms, and why wasn't the organization getting the money? And he was actually going to sue not only this fellow but everyone who was on the Board of Directors and this Colonel Wilkinson was on the Board of Directors at the time along with the City Attorney of San Diego and some other people. And myself, too. For incompetence. And he was going to bring suit in like thirty different states, because we were all in different states, and because he had the money to do it. And he was at one of our reunions and he had these big legal-size folders with everyone's name prominently on them. And he put these all on the table with everyone—really intimidating. Because he had private investigators research everyone's finances and everything else. And just to bring it to the end of the story, nobody got sued. He just sort of disappeared. Things were dropped. But he told me he was going to go after Colonel Wilkinson. We had a break from the Board of Directors, and he showed me this thing. My name was there too, on a folder. And he opened up Wilkinson's and said: "I'm going after him because he's only worth fifty thousand dollars. And I said, "O, you'd better be careful because he was the Vice President of Merrill Lynch and he owns property on Hilton Head." "Well no, he's only worth fifty thousand. That's what his property is worth. He has this huge mortgage." So a few years later I saw the good Colonel and I talked with him and I mentioned this. And he sort of, "Well, you know, I had this mortgage for income tax purposes—and worth?: How about a little over three million." Very quietly, unassumingly. But Wilkinson—he was a man of real integrity, a real Southern gentleman, really cared for his troops, really grieved because he lost his Sergeant Major there, who had been a survivor of Corregidor in World War II, would have served anywhere [for his twilight cruise], Sergeant Major Gaynor, and Gaynor was hit by a round and died enroute while he was being medevaced. Colonel Wilkinson took that very, very hard.

Kurtz: Why don't you tell us about the guy you wrote the little pamphlet about.

Stubbe: Yeah, Major Baig. I never knew him during the siege. I only learned of him afterwards, because of several things. One was that he had written a very detailed, like twelve-page, single-spaced report of his activities during the siege. This report was done in connection with a book that came out by the Marine Corps by Moyers Shore, called *The Battle of Khe Sanh*. It came out in 1969. There was a sense of immediacy at the time to get it out and General Westmoreland was about to become Chief of Staff of the Army, and who knows what else—there were political reasons, I'm sure. Cushman was going to become head of the CIA or something like that. Because that book came out when it did, there were still some things that were classified that couldn't be mentioned, like the electronic sensors, the term "Arc Light" for B-52 strikes, and so on. So none of that is in that book. And it's only about 120 pages. Moyers Shore, by the way, was killed shortly after that in a plane accident off of Hawaii. He was a pilot. And his father had been an intelligence officer

during World War II. In the process of writing that book, they had solicited comments from Westmoreland from General Davidson, his J-2, from General Anderson who was head of Marine Air, from Walt, from Cushman—you name it—all the Generals who were involved, General Tolson, who led Operation PEGASUS, an Army General, a whole bunch of Colonels, Lieutenant Colonels, Majors, and Captain Baig, Major Baig at the time, wrote this report. He was also mentioned frequently to me by other officers who knew him at the time. And so I decided—

Kurtz: And how did they mention this guy?

Stubbe: Very, very favorably. They mentioned him as—two things that stand out. One was that he was a genius, an absolute genius. His ability to hold many, many facts in his brain at the same time and come to rational conclusions amazed everyone. For example, there's a book that came out by Michael Archer called *A Patch of Ground* which is currently on sale which is based on his experiences as an enlisted communicator with the Regiment at Khe Sanh and also at the Khe Sanh village before the Siege. He knew Baig and he remarks in there how Baig was able, within the first week that he was there, to target and destroy major North Vietnamese ammo dumps and artillery headquarters

[End of tape. Beginning of Tape 8, Side A]

Stubbe: Targeting these North Vietnamese positions within a week of his arrival. And this just absolutely amazed this Michael Archer who wrote about this in his book. Baig was mentioned by other people. For example, we had two different Army Liaison officers there, liaison for the 175 tubes out at Camp Carroll. There was a Doug Meredith and Swearngen: one succeeded the other. And both of them as well as our S-2 at the time, Jerry Hudson, who was a Captain and—at least those three people remember Mirza Munir Baig vividly and in the highest terms as a brilliant mind, a brilliant tactician. He came to us through Third Marine Division as a way of augmenting the regimental staff. You have to remember the 26th Marine Regimental staff was only half of a regimental staff. For example, Colonel Lownds didn't have a Sergeant Major the whole time he was there. Was a 26th Marines Forward, which was at Khe Sanh and there was a 26th Marines rear which was at Okinawa, and 26th Marines regiment itself was a unit of 9th Marine Amphibious Brigade, 9th MAB—this is a little technical, but it's important. It doesn't get into the history books, but it explains a lot, whereas all the other Marines in Vietnam were part of Third Marine Amphibious Force, or III MAF, there were certain units, like our artillery unit, 1/13, First Battalion, 13th Marines, which was 9th MAB also. Occasionally before the Siege we would get inspectors from Okinawa who would arrive the end of one month and stay through the first of the next month to see how things were and do their inspections, but their timing was such that they could deduct two months on their income tax for “combat ex-

clusion.” I think for enlisted it was 100% of their pay; for officers it was up to five hundred a month that they could deduct, and also there were some other benefits, and also they would earn their Vietnam ribbon for having spent one minute in country.

Kurtz: Plus get their Combat Pay, too!

Stubbe: And Combat Pay—that’s it. They’d also get Combat Pay. So it was always amazing to me. They did this several times while I was there—the end of one month, the beginning of the next month. It was so obvious, but if they got to be there anyway, why not take advantage of—I don’t look at this very negatively; I think they’re just using their brains. But anyway, 26th Marines had a reduced staff when the siege began, and that’s why Mirza Munir Baig was sent down there to augment the intelligence staff along with a Major Robert Coolidge, who was the Special Intelligence Officer, who dealt with signals intelligence. Major Coolidge was only there a few days and then left, and Major Baig took over everything—well, I can’t say took over everything. What he became was the Target Intelligence Officer, TIO, which is not a normal billet for a regiment. He was just such an amazing person. I’m talking from what I learned later. For example, there was a Major George Quamo, who was at FOB-3, doing a thing called “Special Projects.” His Project was to develop a guerrilla force in Laos which would operate near the Red Chinese border, independently of everything, sort of an “Independent Regiment” like the British had, but it never got off, never got into its final stages. Major Quamo was frequently in Laos, and supplied Major Baig and Jerry Hudson with information about where different gathering, rally points, storage points, command headquarters, would be. He wouldn’t say directly, “This is where it’s at,” but he’d say, “If you strike this area, you will undoubtedly get productive results.” And this was very unusual for him to do because FOB-3 reported to its headquarters at DaNang and then to its headquarters in Saigon, and 26th Marines would then get a message back summarizing all the intelligence, but it would always be several days later which by that time was history, so Major Quamo took it on his own to put in a land line between his bunker to Major Baig so that he could get him all the intelligence that he was gathering. For example, he had translators that were on the North Vietnamese radio net and translated all that was happening on their radio nets, and would send that all to Major Baig. So Baig would find out who was talking to who, how often—do what they call a “pattern intelligence,” which is one of the things that signals intelligence people do, so you can determine the command structure and find out from where they are talking so you can get locations, and that kind of thing. I’m getting diverted here, but Baig had this ability to get all this information from people and encourage them to give him this information. Baig was also a person who had personal quirks. He was a Pakistani. He was kind of short. He had a Boy Scout pack that he had got through Sears & Roebuck. One of his uncles was very high in Sears Roebuck hierarchy. And I learned later on from an Army fellow whose last name was Cesar. He was out of MACV as a

Science Consultant. He was at Khe Sanh a few times and he told me. And then there's an Army Major named Ford who contacted me one time. He did a very good book, scholarly book on Tet. He might be out now. He was in DESERT STORM in Iraq. He had contacted me a long time ago. He used to work for the National Security Agency, and managed to get declassified about an inch of documents and mentions in his book, quotes a fellow named George Allen, who worked at the CIA as SAVA, Special Assistant Vietnam Affairs—very high in the CIA. He used to brief the President. And through Ford, I managed to contact this George Allen and had several conversations with him, which are on those tapes which I donated to the Wisconsin Veterans Museum (which you might want to look up—very interesting conversations) because George Allen tells of his Navy time on (I think) Tinian, where he had to mop up all these dead Japanese bodies, and he went through a terrible things himself. Normally you hear only of these people in terms of their office and what they do, like at the CIA—you don't get their backgrounds, which are very interesting sometimes, at least worthy of a good footnote. Anyway, he put me in touch with George Allen, and George Allen was the one who told me that Baig afterwards, came to the CIA to brief him and an Army Major—he couldn't remember the Major's name, or maybe he didn't want to remember it—just the three of them. And he said: Here was this Marine Major standing aplomb, just in his uniform, without any notes, and for about three or four hours held them [enraptured] with his analysis of the Battle of Khe Sanh. And he said: "I'm a briefer. I brief the President. I know what briefings are about." But Baig was just so professional and did things so well. And he said: "He's the one who asked me to send him all of what we had on Dien Bien Phu—the maps and the unit dispositions and how the North Vietnamese tactics were and everything while he was at Khe Sanh."

And immediately it's clicking in my mind: How is this Marine Captain—how does he know who to contact, or how could he contact someone in the CIA with all this chain of command in between? But George Allen thought he was such a terrific young officer who was destined to become a General. So that was my conversation with George Allen, which, like I say, whoever might use this in the future might want to look up those tapes, which are there. And also I transcribed them, so they are written out.

So anyway, Baig was somebody who had connections. His father had been the one to establish the Pakistani embassies in Washington, D.C., and Toronto. His grandfather had worked with Prime Minister Asquith and had gotten some commendations from the King of England, and his great-grandfather, I believe, was in command of a fort at a place called Bijapur in India, which was a hereditary thing, so it was in the family, and then the British, of course, took it over.

Mirza has a brother who later became one of the officers of the World Bank. I talked with him also, and there's a tape of a conversation with him. But the main thing about all this research about him was that I was able to contact his mother, maybe six or several years ago, and she was living in England in her 90s. And she sent me hand-written letters which were just absolutely amazing

about their family background and about what she remembered about the young Mirza and the war years in World War II, and they had a friend, DeWeldon, whose the one who did the Marine Corps Monument, the Iwo Jima Monument in D.C. And Mirza had to get special permission to get in the Marine Corps. He wanted to become a Marine. Even though he had already gone through Cambridge. He graduated from Cambridge, and then he went to the school of economics in Toronto, was it McGill? Just a very phenomenal education, very prominent education, academic credentials. But he wanted to get in the Marine Corps. But DeWeldon prevailed on the Presidential staff, or whatever to get him to enlist in the Marine Corps. So he enlisted in the Marine Corps and while was in boot camp they sent him off to OCS. So he had connections, he had these personal quirks—the Marines would kid him while he was in the bunker that he would be eating pork and beans or something like that. He was a Muslim. They'd say, "Muslims can't eat pork, can they?" And he's say, "Allah give special dispensation—to kill all the infidels!" And then he'd look over and say, "Of course, you're all infidels, too!" That kind of thing. He was just apparently just a jovial, witty, very happy person with a huge brain, mental capacity. Prior to coming to Khe Sanh, I found some of his papers in the Marine archives—I'm sure they're his papers because they talk about things that he was involved with. He had been at Dong Ha mapping out—he had some agents planted in North Vietnam that were giving him information about the North Vietnamese moving down towards Dong Ha. [These are in the 3rd Marine Division, Messages, Etc., file]. So he had a good grasp—I think it was Hudson who told me, or it might have been Swearengen or Meredith—one of those three told me that he had studied North Vietnamese tactics so much that he knew, like their route of march, how long it would take them to move from one point to another, how they would move, what kind of formations they would move in, and how they would place their people and their headquarters and how they would rotate. He had studied that so thoroughly so that when he got to Khe Sanh, with the reports that he got, he could determine where the targets were. He had one target that had secondary explosions for something—I can't remember off hand—like twenty hours. He also—at this time there were these things called electronic sensors, Project 792 for the Dye marker positions, and there was an operation MUD RIVER which was going into Laos to lay these sensors. And there was a General Alfred Starbird who was with the Defense Communications Program Group, DCPG, with the Department of Defense, who was in charge of that, who came out to Khe Sanh as a matter of fact. I saw him, a 4-star General, just before the Siege. And they diverted these sensors from Laos, from MUD RIVER, to be seeded around Khe Sanh. And unfortunately, the program was so new and so secret that no one knew how to read these things. They would send their readings—the planes that would go overhead and pick up the data—would beam that over to NKP in Thailand. Again, the reports would come back several days later, and of course the people are moving—it's so fluid. So the information was of no use. So Baig demanded that he would get the raw data himself. Well it started coming in, and he was getting this data from the sen-

sors. And at first he assumed that when he got a sensing, that that was where the target was, but then all he was doing was destroying the sensors. But then he realized that, no, the sensors are picking up—there were two kinds of sensors: one that picked up seismic things like trucks, tanks, artillery pieces, trucks, things that would be moving, and then there were sensors that would pick up voice conversations. So he assumed these were the targets. Then he realized these weren't the targets, that they were picking up from some distance. So he had to get patterns. He didn't know how they were seeded. He figured that all out, and then he figured out how he could get the intelligence out of the data, out of the information, how he could get useful information as to where the troops were, where the real targets were. And he figured that all out by himself, on his own, without any other staff people, Air Force people of whatever trying to tell him. He figured that all out himself. And from then on in, he was directing all the attacks. He was also the one that would—with the others—I don't want to short-change anyone else here—we had the Fire Support Coordination Center, which was also near the Regiment with a Lieutenant Colonel Hennelly, who in charge of that, and Baig was technically attached to that, although they're all part of the Regiment, but anyway they all determined—like Colonel Lownds says: 26th Marines determined over 90 percent of the B52 Arc Light strikes what the targets would be. These were not determined by MACV; the Regiment would send down MACV would approve it and then they would send them up. The reason I mention all these things is that people like Baig, Lownds, Hennelly, and others, are never sometimes mentioned in the history of the Battle of Khe Sanh, and yet they were the ones—and on the other side, too, Lieutenant General Hai, who had the Front Headquarters there—you hear of Giap and you hear of Westmoreland, but you don't hear of Hai and you don't hear of Lownds. You hear of Lownds sometimes, but you certainly don't hear of his staff members, and yet these are the ones who did all the thinking and all the planning and all the strategy and everything else. It really bothers me, quite frankly, that the real heroes aren't mentioned.

Kurtz: Well, let's—.

Stubbe: I can talk about the missionaries.

Kurtz: That's what I wanted to do. I'd like you to talk a little bit about the missionaries and the Frenchman as you said. OK, go ahead.

Stubbe: Well, when I got there, there was a Frenchman. His name was Felix Poilane. In France, there's a bread, which is very famous, called a "Poilane." The *Smithsonian* did an article about that maybe three or four years ago, no relation to the family, however. This is a slight background. The first one who settled at Khe Sanh was his father. His father's name was Eugene Poilane. He had been down at Saigon at the end of World War I, came up to what was to become Khe Sanh after 1918, and arrived there as a botanical explorer, and

on his own, he would walk all the way up to the Red Chinese border—it wasn't the Red Chinese border then—all over the area and collecting botanical specimens and sending them down to Saigon. There were several species that were named after him. He was assassinated in 1964 while traveling along Route 9 towards Quang Tri and Dong Ha. He was an amazing person. He had several wives in succession. He had like five children born to him after he was 60. Obviously⁷ [he was] a rugged person, with a huge white beard—I saw a picture of him one time. And because of him, Khe Sanh village came into being because he also, in addition to exploring, he planted various fruit trees and coffee trees, to see what could take hold and grow in the Khe Sanh area because that area with the laterite soil is exceedingly fertile. So he tried all kinds of fruit trees and there was, in fact, an experimental plantation just northwest of the Khe Sanh Combat Base that some Marines ventured into, but they didn't know what it was, but they knew it was something different. But he's the one who planted the original coffee—there's three different kinds of coffee beans that were grown up there, there was Robiston, and Cheri, and then another one that I can't remember. But anyway, he needed laborers, and the Bru people were not suitable because they were just so savage at the time, not violently savage, but just stupidly savage, I guess, and the language was completely different, and they lived by themselves up in the hills. So he imported Vietnamese, and it's because of that—these Vietnamese laborers are what eventually formed Khe Sanh village.

Kurtz: Was there any intermarriage between the Vietnamese and the Bru?

Stubbe: No, no. The Vietnamese and the Mountain tribesmen generally are just so racially—it's much worse than it is here, like the South a hundred years ago. They actually feared each other. The Vietnamese lived in the coastal areas, and they looked at the hills as a place where they would die, and probably did, because the Bru—or the other mountain tribesmen, would poison them. And on the other hand, the mountain tribesmen looked on the Vietnamese as being warriors—which they were: they were always involved in wars. So anyway, he formed this Khe Sanh village. Felix, his son, was born at Khe Sanh, and he was also, later, to die at Khe Sanh, on the base.

Kurtz: I'm going to turn the tape.

[End of Tape 8, Side A; beginning of Tape 8, Side B]

Kurtz: You mentioned that Felix was born in the Khe Sanh area and died on the base.

Stubbe: That's correct. He was born there. He was living there when the Viet Minh came through at the end of World War II, and his wife mentioned to me, Madeleine Poilane, that they took refuge at Lao Bao Prison at that time—or he did and was injured in his leg. He went back to France and that's where he married Madeleine and brought her back to Khe Sanh. O, I might mention too

that when Felix was born his father, Eugene, was out collecting [botanical] specimens, and so his mother gave birth to him alone. It was very primitive conditions there. Now Felix, when I got there in July '67, there was Felix, Madeleine, and they had two [children], a little boy and a little girl. The boy's name was Jean Marie, and I can't recall the girl's name. They had a yellow concrete structure that was on a roadway that led from the base to the village, which was actually their own road, and we used it as Marines. We had a separate road that ran parallel, but we never used that road; we only used the Poilane road. I visited them only once—because of the language thing; I didn't speak French. But the time I did visit them we had some pilots with us and he [Felix] had a pet deer in a little enclosure. I have a picture of that amongst the pictures I sent down there [to the Veterans Museum in Madison]. They invited me in, and at the time there were some German visitors. I don't know who they were or what they were, but they were visiting and they invited me in and I remember I had some crème de menthe in water; it was really diluted. You could barely tell there was crème de menthe in it. But it was so nice. They were gracious. I don't know much else about them, except that I kept in touch with Madeleine through the years, not just Christmas cards but correspondence, and she sent me a long, long essay about her time there and how life was and all that stuff. That's all in the records I sent over [to the Veterans Museum]. There was another Frenchman named Father Poncet, who was sent up there as a missionary to the Bru. And I remember him during the monsoons. He came on the base asking me if I had any wafers for the communion. At that time we had wafers in a can that you had to open like a tin can which was because of humidity and bugs. But the thing was he was on a bicycle and I remember he was just so emaciated, and he looked so weak and so malnourished, and I remember having a case of C rations in my bunker for convenience so I didn't have to walk down the muddy road to the mess hall in all the rain and the cold, but I could just eat in my bunker. I gave that to him because he just needed that. I remember one of the Marines from the CAC in the village there—he was Catholic and went when Father Poncet said Mass. For Confession, he had a piece of cardboard, and on one side he had all the common sins, and the guy would just point to each sin and indicate with his fingers how many times, and then he'd turn over the card and on the other side were all the penances, and Father Poncet would point to the penances and indicate with his fingers how many times. That's how they communicated that part of thing. There was also an Episcopalian Vietnamese missionary up there who had a little chapel built. His name was Pastor Loc. And I remember visiting him one time in the village and he had the little kids out there and they were singing "Jesus Loves Me, This I Know, for the Bible tells me so." They sang it in English, then they sang it in Bru, and then they sang it in Vietnamese. I told Pastor Loc, "I can understand English," and although I couldn't understand the Bru it was non-tonal. But I said "I can't understand why you have them sing that song in Vietnamese because in Vietnamese the words have meaning according to what tone they're said—seven different levels of tone, so singing tones according to a Western musical form gives meaningless

words. And he said, “O, well I have them do that because their music isn’t music!” So he was probably more stern. I don’t know his character at all, quite frankly. He was there. Pastor Loc, when the siege started, he went down to DaNang, and he had like a mental breakdown, but he’s still there probably—I heard about ten years ago that he was still there and OK. Father Poncet, however, went down to Hue City for refuge during the siege and was killed there by the North Vietnamese during one of the battles there. Felix came back on the 13th of April ’68 because he had heard that Khe Sanh—that the relief had taken place. The Army had come up on the 8th of April, I believe it was, and the people on the base were now scouring the area. They weren’t taking any incoming, so basically it was a safe place to be. So Felix decided to come back and see how his coffee trees and house had withstood the battle. Actually his house was completely demolished because it had become a headquarters or communications site for a North Vietnamese unit, and our artillery and air strikes completely demolished the place. And I’m sure that his coffee trees were basically demolished, although even today there are coffee trees there which have been nourished and brought back to life. I guess the airstrip itself has been turned into a coffee plantation right now as I speak. In any event he came back to look and the plane he was in, the tip of the wing crashed into a disabled vehicle or some concertina—I can’t remember—and sort of crashed while it was landing. Felix was the only person killed. There were some other injuries, but I guess Felix—I had heard he was decapitated, but that really can’t be because when Madeleine wrote me this long essay she mentioned that they brought the body down and there was this little tricklet of blood coming out of his head, so obviously he wasn’t decapitated. But in any event, he died on the base. And he was born there [at Khe Sanh] back in the 1920s.

Kurtz: What about the Millers?

Stubbe: The Millers had arrived there in 1962. the first time the Army Special Forces came there. [*The tape says 1963, but it should be 1962*]. And they originally—the Millers belonged to a group called the Wycliffe Bible Translators, which are a group that are determined to go to different tribal areas throughout the world which have no written language and give them a language, listen to the sounds—each language has peculiar sounds—and develop a written language for those sounds and words and then teach the young children to read, so they become literate for the first time, and also to translate the Bible in that native language. And so they’re in Africa, South America, and all over the place, and they had quite a few in Vietnam at the time. And the Millers were one of these people. They arrived at Khe Sanh and they—the Wycliffe people don’t give any salary; all these missionaries are dependent on individual donors. They also don’t remain in an area, like a missionary would, for more than ten years usually. They do what they’re supposed to do and then they move on to another place. All of which really impressed me very much. Here were people really involved in their work. They weren’t dependent on their

salary. They didn't develop their own church, their own kingdom. Also, they listened before speaking. So they initially located in a Bru village and they were there basically to just listen, to pick up the language, right from the beginning. And they lived in the primitive conditions, unlike other missionaries, too, which usually live in one place and then go to wherever they are doing their missionary work, and then go back and live in their home, which is close by, but is in another place. But these people live in the huts that everyone else lived in. They did leave briefly in 1964 when they told me there was some indication the North Vietnamese were moving into the area. The Special Forces, in fact, did have a major battle there where they killed off almost a whole regiment of North Vietnamese—one of the early battles of Khe Sanh that never gets talked about. Anyway, they left for awhile and then came back. And just before I got there there's this large concrete house just north of the village and to the south of this village called Breh and south of Hill 471, there was a concrete house there that belonged to the Poilanes, and I guess they gave it or rented it or whatever to the Millers and the Marines and the Special Forces and the Seabees all refurbished it without cost to the Millers—put in windows and that kind of thing. The Millers, by this time, had three children or so. And so that's where they operated out of. When I first got there, they weren't there for the first month or two. They were at a conference, I guess. And there were two ladies, Nancy Costello and Eugenia Johnston, and they were both from Australia. They were there to do illustrations for these primers for teaching children, like they'd show a pig or a flute or whatever, and they'd have the road underneath, and these young children would be in classes and learning how to speak and write their language. And they were there when I first got there. I'll never forget—it's one of the most traumatic—I just arrived there and I went down to the village and I saw these two young ladies. They were in the Miller's house, and while I was there—I think it was a Bru mother brought in her child, and the child looked dead already. The eyes were open. I remember one of the ladies gave it an injection in its rear end. It must have been penicillin or something, caused a big bump there, and then within two or three minutes the child was dead—definitely dead. And the mother was just wailing. And these two missionaries told me they don't trust the American medicine—that they should have brought the child in earlier when they could have done something, but they trust their medicine man and then when all else fails, they come in—too late. So anyway—soon after I got there the Millers came and I came to know them. They were just such wonderful, wonderful people. In fact, Harper Bohr that I was talking about before, when he and I went down to see the Millers, he told me later on that if Jesus Christ were alive today walking the earth, he could see him as John Miller. Not saintly in the sense of being so pious, but just so genuinely Christian and full of joy and love and peace and everything else, just a wonderful person. They had me down to eat one time, and I remember they had this salad and they had a salad dressing on it and I said: "Gee, that tastes good. What is that?" And she said, "Well, eat it first, and then we'll talk about the stuff later on." So I ate it, and she said, "You were asking about the salad

dressing?” And I said, “Yeah.” And she said, “Well, that’s called nuoc mom.” And I said, “O, what’s nuoc mom?” And she said, “Well, it’s fish oil.” And she said that one of the things about living in this area is that people have a tendency to lack salt and because of that they become dehydrated and very weak, especially in the mountains. Along the coastal areas, they can eat fish, they get the fish oils and they get the natural salt—sea salt, but in the mountains, salt becomes almost like gold. So she said, “What this is—.” Fortunately I’d eaten it. But she said, “It’s made by putting fish in a barrel of water and after about six months you scrape off the oil that’s on the top, and that’s nuoc mom.”

Kurtz: How could you not smell it?

Stubbe: It smells fishy.

Kurtz: I mean, it smells awful! If you’ve ever been where they make this stuff.

Stubbe: It wasn’t that much.

Kurtz: O, OK. It’s got a horrible smell.

Stubbe: That was that. They left about the first week of January of ’68. Colonel Lownds called them in and said things are getting really bad; you need to leave. They said, “Well, we have a conference anyway that’s scheduled in Saigon, so that’s a good excuse to leave.” So they left. And on the 20th of January, a Saturday afternoon. It was bright and sunny, and INDIA Company, 3/26, had already got into a big battle going up to Hill 881-North, and Lieutenant TONC had already surrendered and gave all the battle plans and that we were soon to be hit. So all of this was going on, and all of a sudden John Miller appeared and went down in the command bunker to see Colonel Lownds and Colonel Lownds was very angry—not vocally angry, but John Miller told me that he was angry. He said: “I got you out of here!” And John Miller had come back because he wanted to get his Bru helper that helped him translate. What they do is they have a person called an “Informant.” They said they had to change that later on in Vietnam because it sounded like a spy. But what they have—they call them “informants”—when they translate what they’ll do is they translate into Bru and then they’ll speak it in Bru to the informant and ask “Does this make sense? or is this something that shouldn’t be said?” For example, as an aside, this one seminary student had studied in Strasbourg [France] for a year and knew French very well, and he was up in Canada and sat in an airplane, and it was kind of cold, and a woman came in, and in perfect French said, “Madame, [etes] vous froide?” But in Canada, Quebec, “froide” has a primary meaning of being frigid, so he was really saying, “Are you frigid?” And this woman got very angry with him, and he couldn’t understand why; it was because the language was different. So anyway they had these informants, and John Miller came up to get his Bru helper,

and he did get out. But he lost basically all of his books. I happened to have his Greek-English Lexicon because I was doing work in the Greek New Testament myself at that time. Also, another Chaplain up there at the time, Hampton, was teaching his young assistant Greek. So later on when I got to Quang Tri, I still had that lexicon, Arndt and Gingrich. And John Miller said, "Do you still have it?" And I said, "Yeah." And he said, "I'd like it back." I said, "Sure, no problem. Take it. It's yours." But he lost everything else. And then, later on, they went to a place called Ban Me Thuot in the Central Highlands and they were captured and spent about a year as prisoners with the North Vietnamese. Carolyn Miller wrote a book called *Captured* which is among the books that I donated [to the Wisconsin Veterans Museum] which talks about that whole experience. There was also a Wycliffe Bible translator named Hank Blood that I met in Quang Tri while trying to get back to Khe Sanh during the siege when I was medevaced. He was a real tall, British-like person with white hair, very ramrod straight [in posture], and he told me about how he had almost been captured once and how he escaped, how the Lord helped him. But he told me one thing that I've used in many sermons. He said, "Never think of the greatness of your problems; always think of the greatness of your God." I've used that in many, many times. And then I found out later on that he was killed, sometime around the time the Millers were captured. But the Millers right now have risen, still work for Wycliffe Bible Translators and are regional coordinators for all of South-East Asia. They work out of Bangkok and attend lots of conferences and they're involved in translating some of the languages in Laos which are related to the Bru. They told me that there's sort of an arc that runs from Khe Sanh all the way to Chaing Mai [in Thailand] which are little pockets of people that are separated by terrain, but they all have a similar language. And I talked with Carolyn on the phone one time and asked, "Were they ever together?" And she said, "Yes, at one time they had a kingdom, and then their king was killed, and then they all separated, scattered."

Kurtz: Very fascinating.

Stubbe: Yeah, some of that early history—I wish I had talked more with the Poilanes.

Kurtz: In the book that you wrote with John Prados, there's a chapter—is that your research that was in there?

Stubbe: All of that book is [based on] my research except where he talks about Westmoreland, MACV, or Washington, and Johnson—but everything else is all my research.

Kurtz: That's another interview. Now the last person I'd like to ask you about today is Oliver North. What do you know about him?

Stubbe: OK. I was in Okinawa in '73, '74, with Third Marine Division at Camp Hansen. When I first got up there, there's a place called the Northern Training Area, NTA, where infantry Marines are sent to learn river crossing techniques, rappelling down cliffs, rappelling out of choppers, night navigation using compass and stars and so on, things like that, survival. When I first got up there, there was some officer in charge—I can't remember his name [*it was MacDonald*] but then, later on, Oliver North came up there to replace him. He was a Captain. And I remember being up there in November of '73 when it was Marine Corps Birthday, and Oliver North had a huge birthday cake that he had sent up there and the Division Band up there—and I say this because it was a very primitive place. There were about twenty Marines up there. It was very detached. It took maybe two or three hours to travel up there by road, which was winding and difficult to get to, and there were very primitive living conditions up there. But Oliver really took care of his men. Like I say, he got the cake, he got the band. I could tell the men just really admired him deeply. He was a very humble kind of person, just very down to earth. He had one Marine up there named Golightly, and Golightly was a Southern Baptist and wanted to be baptized. And there was a river up there at the base of the hill, Shin Gawa River. And I told this Marine, "You're Baptist and I'm Lutheran, and they might not accept your baptism as valid, and in any event, even if I were Baptist, they'd probably want to re-baptize you anyway." He said, "I want to be baptized." So we went down to the river. It was cold, and he was in a white T-shirt and I was in regular Marine utilities. And we went into the river and I submerged him because that's what he wanted. I did my baptism by submersion. And then we all ran up right away into the showers and took a hot shower. But Ollie North was the one that had put him with me. He really took care of his men. He wrote me a note later on expressing his appreciation for that. Then about three or four years ago, he suddenly called me—or, actually a lady called me from New York, and said that they wanted to do a video interview, and I said I didn't like to travel and wouldn't come out to New York. She said, "Well, I'll come out to see you. It's 'Ollie North with War Stories'." I said, "OK, if you come out here, that's fine." They arrived here in two limousines. I live at the end of a court in the suburbs here and all the neighbors who saw him coming out and knew who he was, and they saw these limousines, and later on they said, "What's happening?" But he came in here, and I've been interviewed by several for television and different things, the Weather Station, the History Channel, and other people have interviewed me for one reason or another—I don't know why, but they do—and he's the only one that put makeup on my face, I guess so I didn't glare and shine. He was asking me questions, and one time I looked at him—I was sort of looking off into space—when someone asks me a question, I just sort of get into it, 'into the zone,' so to speak. And I happened to look at him, and there were gigantic tears—.

[End of tape. Beginning of Tape 9, Side A]

- Kurtz: ... [*fragment of another interview*]. I've finally decided to another tape, and when the tape snapped off you talked about Oliver North coming here and what a relatively nice person he was. Do you have any views about how controversial he became after he left the Marine Corps?
- Stubbe: No, quite frankly no. I just always remember him—of course, people are so multi-sided. What the public sees about a person and the images they form and so on is not always the way things really are. And I always remember Ollie—and I spent hours and hours with him as a Marine Captain, and he really cared for his troops, and I hear that from other people who have known him from that time. He just seemed like a very genuine person with convictions. I have very good feelings about him. And what he might of done later, I don't know—we probably will know fifty years from now as we declassify things, but sometimes people aren't always able to say everything either, what they do and why they do it. I must say, though, that when he first contacted me—or, when he was going through these troubles, I wrote him, because I have this picture of him, smiling with this Marine Corps Birthday. And I had this fantasy of putting him up in my attic or something as a refuge, like in World War II with the Jewish people, like the *Diary of Anne Frank*, and I thought, well, I'll put him up for awhile, keep him safe. I never told him that.
- Kurtz: Well, is there anything about Vietnam that we haven't discussed that would be useful.
- Stubbe: Well, I think Vietnam—there is no "Vietnam Experience." I think it's hard, it would be very difficult for anybody to put it in a few words, which really must be difficult for those teaching American history in high school. I don't know what they say about us. Vietnam was just so multi-faceted, just like the people I mentioned. I mean you had the coastal areas which were hot and cultured, like Hue City had a golden throne and beautiful porcelain vases and everything else in the Citadel and people dressed in very brilliant clothes, and then you have these very primitive mountain tribesmen living in an area which is very cold and full of animals and wild life, and then you have the different kinds of service. You have the people who served in infantry who were always in the mud, maybe spending six, eight weeks without a shower, without any hot food for months and months, and then you have people who were living the rear areas with supplies maybe getting drunk every night. We had a Chaplain at Khe Sanh who arrived there right after I did, John McElroy, who mentioned that when he came in he reported to a place called Red Beach, which is where all the supplies are, at a place called FLC, which is Force Logistic Command. And he went there because he had a friend who was a senior Chaplain there. And he went into this plywood hut where this Chaplain was, and there was music playing Mozart or something like that, and a "washy-washy woman" was washing his clothes, uniforms and hanging them up. And he gave John McElroy a glass of scotch or something with ice cubes, and after awhile he said, "O, I have to go off and play a tennis match that I'm scheduled

for. You can stay here and enjoy for awhile.” And then he said, “Vietnam really isn’t so bad once you get used to it.” Of course, he was referring just probably to the separation from family—which is a big thing for anybody. But John McElroy was telling me this after he had stayed at Khe Sanh one night in a bunker along which there were rats crawling around in the upper rafters or ceiling so to speak—overhead, and one had lost its footing and fallen right unto his bare chest. It was hot and just had his bare chest. And it went “squeak, squeak, squeak!” It landed right on his chest, woke him up. He went straight up and said, “Shit!” Then he told me the story about Red Beach, and he said, “Vietnam really isn’t so bad once you get used to it.” But the thing is, it’s many things to many people, and everyone has different experiences. I think that those who flew helicopters, for example, in our support would come into a combat area where all hell is breaking loose and just pandemonium and sheer terror and horror and excitement, and the adrenalin must be rushing and wondering, “Am I going to get out alive?” and “Am I going to rescue this person,” or whatever, and then go back to where the air bases are, and usually they’re air-conditioned and you have nice hot food and you’re going back and forth and back and forth, which for those who are stuck, like the infantry, like where I was at Khe Sanh where I was, you become sort of numb, and you just go on automatic, and you don’t even think of how bad things are. It’s just what is, and you never think of how things could be better. But for those who go in and out and in and out, I just think it must have been more difficult, even though they didn’t have to put up with all the stuff we did, they had to put up with the *realization* that it was bad. And then there were different times: people got there in the early 60s as opposed to the early 70s. By that time, more disillusionment, more anti-war, more non-acceptance by home—do I have a home to go back to?—more marijuana and drug use, whereas in the early parts, that was unheard of, and you had—like where I was, there were no local women where the men could go out at night, whereas at DaNang and those places, they’d go through mine fields and everything else just to get to the “skivvy shacks” as we called them. So Vietnam is many things, depending on what time, what kind of unit, where you were, and it covered over seven years. So it’s going to be—for those who try to make a general survey of Vietnam, it’s going to be very difficult to do. But I was going to say that after I left Khe Sanh, I went to Quang Tri for four months. I met Harper Bohr there and some recon people. I did a Memorial Service for 1/26, which relocated from Khe Sanh to a place called Wunder Beach, and that’s spelled W-U-N-D-E-R, oddly enough. It was an old Army logistics site. And I conducted a Memorial Service in an old, bombed out building. And I remember the Adjutant read all the names of the people from 1/26 who were killed—I think it was about 180 or so, very many. And I remember the Commanding Officer, [Lieutenant] Colonel McEwan, who had been the S-4 of Regiment before the siege, remarking that this will always be with us; we will never forget it—words to that effect. After that, I came home for thirty days on extension leave and my mom said I looked like a scarecrow because I had lost so much weight. I’d gone from 180s to 120 something. She was al-

most in tears, she told me later on. She told me that I talked in my sleep; I had no awareness of that—was thrashing around and that sort of thing. I did get to talk with a company called Amron in Waukesha which were making the grenades that we used—these M33 grenades, and I was talking about COFRAM munitions and I remember afterwards we had a little luncheon and the President of the company came to me and said, “O, how can you talk about it? That’s all Top Secret!” I said, “O, it isn’t anymore!”

Kurtz & Stubbe: [*laughs*]

Stubbe: But for them it was. He was amazed that I talked about it. I remember going to see the Bishop of my church and his opening words to me were, “How can you spend any time at all with such immoral people?” Meaning the Marines. And that just took me by complete surprise. But that was the temperament of the time. I wanted to tell him—in fact it was in my mind at the time, I remember—I wanted to tell him, “What about all the immoral people in college and seminary?” Because I remember—I had just come from that, too—before going to Vietnam. I had a good awareness there. So anyway, then I went to DaNang and the main thing there—I won’t go into all the details there—but there’s one thing that happened: I think it was the 20th of August. At DaNang there’s a group of hills called the Marble Mountains which rise out of the earth almost straight up, at least one of them does. And I remember taking—had an enlisted assistant, a clerk who was in the Navy, called a Yeoman, and he had just come off a ship. His name was Dick Straubel. He lived in Kaukauna until just recently; now he lives in Florida. And I had heard that in the Marble Mountains (which are made of marble) that there were carved Buddhas and some statuary that were many hundreds of years old that was very interesting, and I’d never seen it before. And I told him, “Well, let’s go down there. We’ll take our own little day off and go down there.” He said “Fine.” So I had my own little vehicle—because my job was to visit some of the small little facilities of the Naval Support Activity like Camp Carter, which was where our Shore Party and security forces were, and Bridge Ramp and Ferry Landing which were our logistic places, and Covered Storage—a lot of logistic things where there’d be only ten people, and I was to go from one place to another. So I had a vehicle, and we went down to Marble Mountain and the Marine unit at the place at the time was Third LVTs, which refers to AMTRACs, Amphibious Tractors, Landing Vehicle Tracked, LVT. And I checked in with their intelligence officer and asked, “Is it alright to walk around in these hills?” I thought it was only prudent to do, to see if there’s any enemy activity. And he said, “O, there’s nothing to worry about. We haven’t had any problems at all.” So Dick Straubel and I walked around, and we saw some people carving little statues and ash trays and whatever out of marble in a little village at the foot of Marble Mountain. And then I started walking up a path and pretty soon a little Vietnamese boy about seven or so started following and he was whistling. He just wanted to follow, and I said “OK.” And he just followed us. And we saw, indeed, some very beautiful

and interesting statues. And I remember there were some unusual things. I remember seeing a Vietnamese soldier, or a man in a uniform; I'm not sure what he was, now. But kissing a young Vietnamese girl, sitting on some stone stairs. And I had been taught that Vietnamese don't show affection in public, and I remember it registered in my mind at the time that this was something unusual here. And then we continued walking, and we came into an area which was like a crater, into the side of crater. Or, let me put it this way, I walked in, and all above me was open, but it was like inside a volcanic crater, and in there was a reclining Buddha on one side and some other Buddha statues carved into the side of this crater, and then there was like another little cave that went off, and I started walking in there and saw just a lot of old, rusting tin cans, like it had been a garbage dump. And at that point this little boy started whistling just very, very loudly. At the time, again, I thought this is very, very unusual, but I wasn't afraid and I didn't think anything other than that it was very unusual. I thought "What is he doing?" And then he ran off; he wasn't with us anymore. And I looked inside this cave and thought, "Well there's nothing in here to see," so I walked right out again. Then we continued about two or three hours, walking all through the place. Then we went back to our base which was called Camp Tien Sha, which is on the opposite end of DaNang. There's like an area of DaNang and then there's a little peninsula that goes north and south, and the Marble Mountains are at the south part of that peninsula and where I was stationed at the north part of that peninsula where there's another large mountain, like this peninsula's throwing a big football, and that was called Monkey Mountain, and the camp was called Tien Sha. So I was there. And I remember that night there were all sorts of flares in the air and that kind of thing, and then the word came out the next morning that at this foot of the Marble Mountain where we were, there was an Army Special Forces Headquarters for all the SOG units in I Corps, and that had been overrun, and in fact some of the people who were at Khe Sanh who went down there and made it out safely out of Khe Sanh were killed, including the Sergeant Major, Sergeant Major Pegram, and there was a senior Medic who was killed and quite a few others. So I went down there again to the Marble Mountain, curious to see what was happening. The battle was over. And all at once while I'm down there, we started receiving 105 rounds, which we found later on were from ARVN artillery, not accurately being fired. They were probably supposed to be fired south, and were being fired north—who knows? They were impacting and making a ringing sound. The 105 is just a terrible sound, and there were no bunkers or trenches or anything. There was just sand in that area and here's Straubel, who has just come off a ship, never been in battle or anything. He's just absolutely shocked by this whole thing, and I'm still a little numb from Khe Sanh but realizing this is not a good place to be in. So I said, "Let's make a run for the vehicle and get out of here." So we did, and got out of there, and got just north of the Marble Mountain, just about a block or two, and he made the remark, he said: "It's interesting how in Vietnam you can go from sheer terror to where everyone's just walking like nothing's happening in a flick of an instant." And I found out later on that the

people who attacked this Army Special Forces camp Headquarters for the SOG called CCN, Command and Control North, about sixty to eighty North Vietnamese soldiers or whoever they were, were in that Marble Mountain while I was walking through there the afternoon before! And that Dick Straubel and I could very easily have been killed or captured during that time, and probably they were in that cave where the tin cans were and that's maybe why that little kid was whistling loudly and then ran off—to warn them. But obviously they were not about to trigger-off their presence before they did their attack, so they didn't do anything to us. But nevertheless, it's one of those instances where we just came that close. Another incident that happened on New Year's Eve: I was going to the Officers' Club in the main part of DaNang, which is called the Stone Elephant: they had hard drinks for 35 cents each, I remember, and we were going there. There was a big bridge between the peninsula area and the main part of DaNang, and we were stopped right at the end of the bridge because there was a Vietnamese convoy from the main part of DaNang and then they were going to go south. So we were right there. And off to the right side is sort of like a cliff, like twelve feet, and off to the right is the road where these trucks are driving like fifty, sixty miles per hour, going as fast as they can. I don't know why they were doing that, but they were going fast. And this was early in the evening and there were all sorts of Vietnamese people crowded all over the place. About six vehicles passed me, and all at once there's this one that's coming fast, and then comes slower and slower and then veers into my lane, like it's going to crash into me. Well, this bridge is like three blocks long, and this vehicle is coming slower and slower and I wondered, "Is it going to crash into me or isn't it?" Because I couldn't back up because there were Vietnamese behind me. I couldn't jump off to the side or either way, and I had another Chaplain with me at the time. We're just sitting in this jeep. This truck comes more and more, like a juggernaut, just advances on me—directly in front of me. And it did crash into me! But at the time of impact it was maybe only going five miles per hour, but nevertheless crashed and caused damage and I couldn't drive. And all at once there's this Marine running down the bridge with his rifle saying, "I had to shoot him! I had to shoot him! He wouldn't stop! He wouldn't stop when I challenged him!" So they opened the driver's side of the thing and this dead Vietnamese flops out with a round right through his skull.! And all these Vietnamese are going [*makes chaotic noise*]. And this other Chaplain and I are the only Americans other than this one Marine who ran down. O my God! So pretty soon there are some MPs came and, but we had to stay there and make statements, and never got to the club for supper, or to celebrate New Year's Eve. But that was another one of those funny incidents—not "funny" but "peculiar." So Vietnam still was always a dangerous place, even in a rear area. After that I stayed in the service, went to [Marine Corps Recruit Depot at] Parris Island for a year and a half, started writing about Khe Sanh at that point. I needed to get it out of my system, it seemed. And on the basis of diaries and clippings and all that—.

Kurtz: Now they were your diaries?

Stubbe: Yes. I donated them to the Veterans Museum [in Madison]. Fortunately—I kept them daily, too.

Kurtz: How difficult was it keeping a diary in the conditions at Khe Sanh?

Stubbe: Not bad. I usually wrote in the evenings, when things were quiet. Of if we were out on an operation, like three, four days, obviously I didn't, but then I would write in everything as soon as I got back. I had a sense that this was historic, I really did. From the very first day I arrived there, I felt: This is something that is different. I need to write this down. I hadn't kept diaries up to that point. I said I need to keep a record of what's happening here because this is historic. And I didn't know why, but I felt it was. So I wrote this all down in 1970 and then I did it on weekends and on evenings. They had a typewriter there and I used that. So that was Parris Island. I could say many things about Parris Island, but I won't get into that—funny things with Marines, funny things that happened. But anyway then I went on a brand new ship called the USS SHREVEPORT which was just being commissioned in Bremerton, Washington. It was a brand new ship and I was part of the original crew. And we left there and went south, pulled into San Francisco and into Acapulco and then went through the Panama Canal and pulled into New Orleans where some people from Shreveport came down, then went around the Gulf and pulled into Mayport, Florida, where I met the USS NOA, which was a destroyer, hull number 841, which I had served two years enlisted after high school, and [it] was being decommissioned and then we pulled into Norfolk. I was on there for two years. After that—I left there because it was going on to the Mediterranean and I was due for orders, but the Navy ran out of money to transfer so I ended up in Little Creek Naval Amphibious Base in Norfolk, and got interested in working out physically with the SEAL team because [the Chaplains at] Little Creek didn't have very much for me to do, and because of that I got to go to the Army Jump School at Fort Benning. Then from there, when the money became available, I went out to Okinawa for a year, '73 to '74; that's where I met Ollie North. I was there for one year. And from there I went to Camp Pendleton for two years and had a variety of experiences there. Started getting interested in Force Recon—did some writing there. Also was continuing to re-write the Khe Sanh experiences, gathering more information—official information.

Kurtz: Were people contacting you that you knew at Khe Sanh?

Stubbe: No. Well, at that point I had kept in touch with 12, 13, 14 people mainly through Christmas cards and occasionally through other letters. Most of these were from the recon company, but there was also [Lieutenant] Colonel Wilkinson, Colonel Lownds, Major Bohr, and I can't think of who else, but there were about 12 to 14 people I kept in touch with. Then after Pendleton, I was

sent to the USS IWO JIMA (LPH-2) and we did a variety of operations on that. Okinawa and IWO JIMA were places that the command didn't seem to appreciate Chaplains generally, and I felt very alone and maybe some of my Vietnam memories were coming back more and more, because I was re-writing about Khe Sanh all the time. I also had a fairly major surgery at that time. Then after that I went to Great Lakes Naval Training Center which I really liked because it was close to home, maybe only 45 miles away. I could come home on weekends. I worked there as a Supervisory Chaplain, I worked retreats, I was the Chaplain of the Chapel for awhile. There was a senior Chaplain who arrived who knew me—I didn't know him at all—and I had orders to go to Bahrein Island in the Middle East, and he said: "Would you rather stay here at Great Lakes?" And I said: "O yes, definitely!" He said, "Well, I want you as my Administrative Assistant to do budgets and that kind of thing." And I said: Fine. So I ended up staying at Great Lakes for about six years, which was very, very unusual, but I was getting to retire anyway. And then about my last year, my grandma died and my only cousin, who was 26, and that left my parents and my uncle. That's the only family I had at that time. And they were dedicating the Vietnam Memorial in Washington. A lot of it was on television, and for some reason it just started flooding back at me very badly, all these memories, and I was wondering whether there was anybody left from Khe Sanh other than these twelve or so that I had kept in touch with.

Kurtz: What year was the Vietnam Memorial dedicated?

Stubbe: I don't know, but I'm talking about '83, '84, in that time frame. My grandma died July 4th in '83, my cousin the same day, about half an hour apart. Grandma was in her 90s; we expected her to die. And my cousin had a brain tumor and we expected him to die. But we didn't expect them so soon. My uncle at the time lost his only child and his mother, and four months later, lost his wife. So he really had a very bad time. He was a World War II veteran from Burma. He's still with us. So anyway I started getting all these nightmares and dreams and everything else. I went to the Dispensary and I told them about that and they said you need to see the shrink. So I saw the shrink—he was a Navy Captain, and he said, "Well, I don't know why you're having problems with war. War is normal human behavior and you go to it and you come back and then you forget about it, and that's it." And that's what he told me. And then he went on leave. And he had an assistant Navy psychiatrist, who—.

[End of tape. Beginning of Tape 9, Side B]

Stubbe: I'm going into all of this because it has cast me in a very poor light—maybe it's human light; it makes me real, I guess—it explains, nevertheless, why certain things happened afterwards. So I was—at the time we didn't know very much about what they now call Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, but I found

out that there's this thing called the Stress Unit. So they sent me there as an outpatient, to go to one of their evening sessions. And I remember there was this psychiatrist there who had established this unit maybe a year earlier, and his name was "Skip" Shelton, a very intense but very competent psychiatrist, just with a real heart for Vietnam veterans. And I'll never forget, at the end of the session—he could just "read me," I don't know—he could read anybody, I think. He said: "Yeah, Ray, this is the best of all possible worlds, isn't it?" A quote from Voltaire, *Candide*, Doctor Pangloss. And he kept repeating it, and I got angrier and angrier. Because it wasn't the best—he hit a nerve, and I don't know how he hit it or why he knew that that would hit it, but he did. Because I'm not usually a person who gets very angry. But I started getting very angry and I sort of lost it, and in fact, I did lose it. And that was at the end of the session, and he said: "OK, come back next week." And I remember getting into my car and somehow I arrived at the Bachelor Officers' Quarters on Great Lakes maybe about an hour or so later. It only takes about ten minutes [to] drive. And I don't know where I was in the meantime or how I got there. And I knew immediately then that there's something definitely wrong. So I went back to this psychiatrist and he got me into the program and I spent three or four months there as an inpatient. And I was still on active duty. And they told me that I could retire on twenty years sometime about April to June of '84, that I could retire. And I got out of that Stress Unit around January of '84, and I thought: I only got three months to go and I can retire and in the meantime the Chaplains put me in an administrative thing to do schedules and whatever, do paperwork. So I was doing that and my orders came in to retire. And then a message came in saying: We have miscalculated your time. In order to do 20, you now have to serve until December of '84, so I had to serve six, seven months more. And the senior Chaplains didn't know what to do with me, and I was just sort of a basket case then, quite frankly. So I took leave and went to the Vietnam Memorial in DC by myself—which was a bad thing to do, because then it really came back to me. So I came back and was just in a really bad way and I went back to the Stress Unit and said: This is not working out. So they readmitted me and kept me there for like three months more. So I was there a total of six, seven months inpatient. At that time the senior psychiatrist was really up in arms because I had used up a lot of their funds because they had to pay the VA for me to be there. And he was going to give me a Medical Board and wanted me to become a patient at the Navy Hospital. I told him, "I can manage now. After all this time, I can handle myself. I know what to do, what to avoid to trigger things off." He said, "OK, if you promise not to go back there as an inpatient, we'll keep you until you retire." So that's what happened.

But anyway, while I was in there as an inpatient, we had a thing called Goals Group and in there we were to determine what we want to do when we get out. And I was the only active duty person at the time. And I'm sure when I first got there they were wondering: What is a Chaplain doing here? Or an officer? But anyway, my goals—I formulated them at the time were two: I was going to form a group, a network, of those who were at Khe Sanh, first of all

find out if there were any alive—and I wasn't alone in that, by the way. There's a news article that came out towards the end of the siege in which the Executive Officer of the Recon Company was quoted. It was an article by John Wheeler, Associated Press, in which this officer, his name was Pappy Schlack who was enlisted before he became an officer. He was what they call a "Mustang." He was quoted in this article as saying: "When I get out, I'm going to open a bar, and when it gets more than three deep of people that say they were at Khe Sanh, I'll know someone's lying." So I wasn't alone in the fact of "Is anyone still alive?" So anyway, I wanted to form this group. And the second goal was to get this book that I had on Khe Sanh published somehow, or somehow get a story about Khe Sanh done. Because while Khe Sanh had occupied the majority of the news in the United States while it was happening, right after it happened, it became conveniently and rapidly forgotten. And I remember reading in the Marine magazine that's designed for enlisted called the *Leatherneck* that there was an article on a new type of Navy ship called a LHA and there were going to be five, and I believe the first was the TARAWA, and there was a BELLEAU WOOD; they were all going to be named after battles. And the fifth one was going to be named USS KHE SANH. And they mentioned that in the article. And then, of course as it happened, LHA-5 was not named USS KHE SANH; it was named after some other battle. There is a ship named after Hue City, but there's no ship named after Khe Sanh. I remember while I was at Parris Island, the Drill Instructors were told not to mention Khe Sanh or not to emphasize it. I think the Marines felt—either of two things, either they had lost it because they abandoned it, or that the other services might have had a major part, like the Air Force with the B52s or the Army coming in to relieve, or whatever. But none of those take away the glory of Khe Sanh, not the glory, but the immensity of the sacrifice and the courage of the people who were there, and somehow I had it in my craw that Khe Sanh should not be forgotten, and that's why I wanted this book to be published. And so the way that I did this was that I immediately started writing these people I had kept in touch with and asking them if they knew any others that had been at Khe Sanh. And then I put an ad in *Navy Times* and the *Leatherneck*, and eventually I did start to get responses. And then about this time, in '84, I believe it was, I was still on active duty, but I got leave to go to a ticker tape parade in New York City that was in honor of Vietnam veterans. It was organized by two people, one of which was James Hebron who was a Khe Sanh veteran, not of the siege. He left right before the siege. He was with BRAVO Company, 1/26. And while I was there—he had managed to get a banner made that said "KHE SANH." And somehow a whole bunch of us, maybe thirty, forty, maybe even more, fifty, Khe Sanh veterans rallied. We saw this banner and we just went there. And we got it together. I got all their names and addresses and everything. And then, after I got out, the Third Marine Division Association—I think it was '88, was having its reunion at Tampa, Florida—it was going to be the 20th anniversary of the Battle at Khe Sanh, and they invited General Westmoreland to be the main speaker. And Colonel Lownds, who lived at Naples, Florida, who only lived a short ways

away, didn't attend. I learned later on—not from him, but from others—I had heard he did not attend because Westmoreland did attend. He must have had something there about Westmoreland.

But anyway, while I was there they were honoring Khe Sanh and obviously there were many, many more people that we got in touch with, so we were putting out a newsletter, which was mainly a listing of people, a network for people to get in touch with each other, so we rapidly went from 12 or 13 to 30, then 60, and then 100. We got to 300. So that's how all that started.

And while we were at Tampa in '88, we all got together in a small room and I remember I addressed the group and I said: "Now I think we should organize, and I'll take care of getting us organized, if that's what you want." And they all agreed that's what they wanted. And Earle Breeding passed around his Marine utility cover to get a collection, and he immediately became our first Treasurer because of that. And I went back here and saw a law firm, Padway & Padway here in Milwaukee, and we became incorporated as a Wisconsin Incorporation, Nonprofit, Non-stock, and the date of that is September 1, 1988. Our Khe Sanh veteran group met annually as part of the Third Marine Division Association. We let them do all the arranging for rooms and everything else, and we would meet like one afternoon during the reunion as a group. This lasted about five, six years until we decided we were large enough—we were getting like 70, 80 of our own people. We wanted to have our own reunion. So we broke off. Because at that time Third Marine Division Association was mainly World War II, which didn't want much to do with us, and also, for example, if we would meet on a Saturday afternoon they would suddenly have a parade or something to go to that really interfered. They made our guys make a decision. So we really didn't feel welcomed, and we started meeting separately. And since then—about that time, I withdrew from active leadership. I knew that if a group were to succeed it had to develop its own leadership, and quite frankly I was working on the book at that time and was caring for my ailing parents and I was doing church work.

There were a lot of things going on. So others stepped forward, and the group is very solid. We have over 3,000 members now, and they still meet annually, and we still put out a first-class magazine that's a good quality magazine. And the book was published. Unfortunately the book was published. It's called a "Marc Jaffe" book. It's published by Houghton Mifflin. Marc Jaffe was a World War II veteran, and from what I heard from John Prados, Houghton Mifflin was trying to get rid of him and they gave him this one book as his project for the year, and didn't do any publicity at all, which John Prados thought was very unusual and very detrimental to it. They only had a printing of 5,000 copies, did no publicity, there were no talk shows, there was no advertisements, there was nothing. It didn't sell obviously well, then. I bought up a whole bunch of them and gave them out for free to quite a few of our Khe Sanh vets. The book became "remaindered," which meant that I could buy more for about \$2.00 apiece, which I did, and I remember seeing a whole stack in Barnes & Noble one time. Then it was out of print for a long time. Then it came back as a paperback by Dell, and there were a couple minor re-

visions of some incidents there. Then about two years ago the Naval Institute Press wanted to reprint the original one, not the one with the revisions, but take the plates—it had to be the same content on each page, and it came out as a quality paperback. So that's the history of that book.

Kurtz: The casualty book?

Stubbe: OK, the casualty book—I had come out with a smaller casualty—well, first I came out with just a listing back in the late 80s, like two pages of a letter that would be folded over into four pages, something like that. It was just a listing of people and their location on the Wall. Then about '90, '91, I came out with a book called *The Final Formation* which was a little bit more detailed about the casualties that I knew about, maybe where they were, what was happening. But it was very abbreviated. It was about 200 pages long. I had just gotten my computer. It was the first thing I did on my computer. and it was really a learning process. I did that and paid for it by myself and it was sold by our Khe Sanh group—given to some and sold. After that I received innumerable comments of people saying you should have added this or added that of whatever else. So I kept all of these in a big box with the idea that eventually I would rewrite it. In the meantime, also, families of those killed would—that I came in contact with—said that they received very little information about their son or their husband or their uncle, that when people called on them, they learned very little. In fact, sometimes maybe they were told false things, or just were not able to understand. So anyway, I decided when I redo this I've got to put in some background information so people will understand the bigger picture as to why a unit was involved, or why an incident occurred, or that kind of thing, and also to cover the whole breadth of the Khe Sanh battlefield from beginning to end, not just the siege, but through the time the Army was there in '71, '72 era. So I embarked on this and put together all my records pertaining to—I made folders for each day of an incident, and started putting everything in these folders and went through all my files, which are extensive—I'm talking of over well over 100,000 pages of files, of official documents, of interviews, of award citations, of whatever—anything that pertained to the day of the casualty of why an incident occurred. In some cases, these folders might be two inches thick; in some cases only one page, but I had something. So I started to organize it, and then I solicited more comments. I said: "I'm going to come out with this, please send me more," and people did. So I got memoirs, and poems, and letters written home from Vietnam, and all sorts of things, and I just started writing, and going on and on and on. By that time I was living alone, and I had no other obligations. So that's what I did. I just devoted day and night for a little over a year, weekends, doing nothing but writing this book. I finally finished it. I found out that I could get it printed by the same people that put out our [Khe Sanh] magazine, for well under what I thought it would cost. I think we finally got the cost per book was like seven dollars. It was over 400 pages long. Which is very interesting to me that we could do that. And there was a lady in Lon-

don who had made a painting that she called “Khe Sanh.” She had a friend who was a correspondent who was there, and she said I could use her painting for the cover, which I did. So anyway we got that done. It got finished in May, and our Khe Sanh reunion was going to be in early July. I wanted to get it ready for the reunion to save a lot of postage—to get it to them. And so because of that I really didn’t proof read it as much as I should; there are quite a few typographical errors, places where the computer—I can’t say it was always my fault, but the computer would sometimes do things, like for example, instead of “the” I would have “t9he,” or somehow a number would enter a word or instead of “too” I would have “to0.” It would just get in there; I don’t know how. So there were a few times those got in there and I could have polished it up more, but I just didn’t have time. I thought there would be a thousand copies printed. I paid for that myself; I donated the \$7500.00 or whatever it was, but they could only print 850 copies, and then our veteran group had to put in a thousand dollars, too, because of preparing pages for printing. So I got a few hundred copies and sent them off to families of next of kin and people who had made major contributions and also libraries and archives. It was printed on acid free paper, mainly so these people would never be forgotten. Then the remainder went on sale at our reunion as a way of making some money for our organization. I think there’s still a few copies left that they still sell. But for the most part it’s all gone. And again, I’ve received maybe a box full of additional things on some people I didn’t have much information on. And I plan to come out with a small supplement that will include some more information. But I’m sort of through with that. The only other project I have is a book that I might come out with that will be the North Vietnamese history of the battlefield, and that’s based on some books that a fellow named Robert DeStatte, who was with General Vessey in Hanoi, sent me. I didn’t know him from Adam, but he knew I was interested in Khe Sanh and he sent me these books of history that the North Vietnamese had come out with on Khe Sanh. And some of them are even classified Secret by the North Vietnamese. And I had them in my safe. It was like a treasure that I couldn’t read; it was very frustrating. And I made several attempts—Vietnamese here in Milwaukee, Vietnamese veterans, through other people I knew. And a lot of people said: “We can do this,” and then they never did. Finally a fellow named Sedgwick Tourison, who had been a document translator for Lieutenant General Davidson on the MACV staff—I contacted him one day because he had written a book on agents and it was very interesting, a good book. And I said: “Are you writing any more books?” And he said: No. And he went on; we had a long conversation on Tonkin and all the background on that. He had been privy to a lot of military documentation and I thought: This was so interesting, I could listen to him for hours. And he was doing translating work for Vietnamese here in the States in the D.C. area for legal and hospital for people who couldn’t speak English that well, pro bono kind of work. He had worked at the Pentagon. He said to me: “Did DeStatte ever translate any of those books he sent you?” I said: “No; I’m very frustrated. I would like to.” He said: “Well, make some Xerox copies of the pages you want. I can do it over the

phone. I can translate it as I read it, and you can record it on cassette and I'll transcribe it. So we did that for a little over a year, once a week—three, four hundred pages with tables! It's very detailed and very interesting. None of this is available in English. And I thought, well, how interesting that our Khe Sanh guys would be the first to read it. So that's been done for a little over a year, and all I want to do with it—I plan to do what he did it but with some footnotes where I think they're in error. And I thought I'd do it before the academics get a hold of it to make money or assign it to their own bias or to use it to make academic credentials. I just want to do it for the guys, so they can find the other side of the story. And in some cases if a guy is wounded on a certain day, he can figure out what unit fired at him and where it came from and what the plans were of the North Vietnamese. Of course, in some areas they are definitely way off, but in many cases they're probably way on and they supply some missing information—like when our platoon went out and got decimated, they talk about what that all was and who fired on Captain Pipes—they even have the name of the Vietnamese who fired on him, and all this sort of stuff. It's all there. So Tourison said I should publish commercially through the Naval Institute. Then I'd have to revise and edit; my interest is just to get it out to the guys. I don't know when I'm going to do that, but that's the other thing I plan to do. And then after that, as Bob Brewster says, I still have some stuff—in fact, I still have all the documents that I microfilmed, the 105,000 pages in 30, 40 boxes which I plan to use for this book. But once I get through with all of that, then you all can have everything. But right now you do have everything. You have the microfilms. If that were lost, it still wouldn't be all lost. After a few more years, you'll have everything if you want. So that's how the book came out, the organization. And I'm sort of in the background now, and that's fine. I feel really in the background because in the last decade or so the Internet has really taken over, and I'm not on the Internet, and we do have a Khe Sanh website. A few years ago they sent me all the pages, three or four hundred pages. There was a lot of interesting stuff and a lot of stuff that was nothing. And since then I haven't received anything, and I'm sure the guys are talking back and—

[End of tape and all interviews]