

Wisconsin Veteran's Museum  
Research Center

Transcript of an

Oral History Interview with

**RICK BERRY**

Aviation Warrant Officer, A Company, First Cavalry Division,  
United States Army, Vietnam War

2007

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**Berry, Rick**, (1944- ). Oral History Interview, 2007.

User Copy: 2 audio cassettes; analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 2 audio cassettes; analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

**Abstract:**

Rick Berry, a Connecticut native, served in the Vietnam War between May of 1967 and May of 1968 and flew Huey helicopters for the First Cavalry Division as a Warrant Officer. Born in 1942, Berry grew up in Stamford, Connecticut and graduated from high school in 1962. After seven semesters of college, Berry elected to enlist in the US Military instead of remaining in school. In the fall of 1965, Rick joined a warrant officer program offered by the army where he was trained to fly Huey helicopters. He received basic training at Fort Polk, Louisiana and attended his Warrant Officer Rotary Wing Aviation Course in Fort Wolters, Texas. Berry then completed advanced training by earning his Tactical Instrument Ticket at Fort Ruckers in Alabama. Berry flew primarily the Bell UH-1 Iroquois helicopter or “Huey” while at Fort Ruckers. Then in 1967 after taking a month’s leave, Berry deployed to Ankei, Vietnam as a member of A Company, 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division, US Army. He served in Vietnam between May of 1967 and May of 1968, participated in Operation PERSHING and flew missions in Khe Sanh. Upon arrival in May of 1967, Berry flew 229 hours of flight time over the course of fifty days. He mainly flew mission in which he transported ground soldiers in and out of Landing Zones. For his R&R time, Berry chose to go to Sydney, Australia. After leaving Vietnam, he requested to be stationed in Germany. While there, he met his wife, who worked as a civilian recreation director for one of the service clubs on base. Berry was discharged from the army in December of 1969. After discharge, Berry received a bachelor’s degree in Biology and a Master’s degree in Zoology and Ecology. He has worked for the US Army Corps of Engineers, Fish and Wildlife Service, and National Wildlife Refuge System, and finally, he worked on the Wetlands Restoration Program in Wisconsin. Berry and his wife reside in Madison, Wisconsin.

**Biographical Sketch:**

Rick Berry (b. July 20<sup>th</sup>, 1944) was born in Stamford, Connecticut and spent his youth there until 1962 when he graduated from high school. After seven semesters of college, Berry enlisted in the US Army. In the fall of 1965, Rick joined a warrant officer program offered by the army, in which he trained to fly Huey helicopters. He received basic training at Fort Polk, Louisiana and attended his Warrant Officer Rotary Wing Aviation Course in Fort Wolters, Texas. Berry completed advanced training at Fort Ruckers in Alabama. Then in 1967, Berry deployed to Ankei, Vietnam as a member of A Company, 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division, US Army. He served in Vietnam between May of 1967 and May of

1968. After leaving Vietnam, he served in Germany, married, and left the military in December of 1969. After discharge, Berry settled in Madison, Wisconsin.

Interviewed by Jim Kurtz, 2007  
Transcribed by Alison Hyde, 2014  
Edited and Abstracted by Kylee Sekosky, 2014

## **Interview Transcript:**

Kurtz: March 7, 2007. My name is Jim Kurtz, and I'm interviewing Rick Berry at the Wisconsin Veterans Museum. Ah, Rick, where and when were you born?

Berry: I was born on July 20<sup>th</sup>, 1944 in Stamford, Connecticut.

Kurtz: And, ah, is that where you grew up?

Berry: I sure did. I grew up, went to school there, graduated from Stamford High School.

Kurtz: In what year did you graduate from high school?

Berry: Ah, it would have been '62.

Kurtz: And while you were growing up, were there any veterans that were members of the family, or in your community that made any impression on you?

Berry: My dad was a veteran of World War Two.

Kurtz: And what was his service?

Berry: He, ah, spent the time in the United States as a dental technician.

Kurtz: Okay.

Berry: And, um, then ended up working as a dental technician after he left the service.

Kurtz: And were there any other people that had any influence on you as a veteran?

Berry: I had some uncles that also served in World War Two, but I don't know about too much in the way of influence—

Kurtz: Okay.

Berry: — because I can't remember sitting down and talking to them about their experiences or anything like that.

Kurtz: Did either the Korean War or World War Two experience make any impression on you as you were growing up?

Berry: Not that I can recall. Very early on I was interested in aviation.

Kurtz: Okay.

Berry: I'd spent time as a kid making little plastic models of various airplanes and getting involved in, ah, U-Control gas engine flights around in a circle and making models, so I was—I'd been interested in aviation for a long time.

Kurtz: Okay, did the Vietnam War have any impression on you when you were in high school or when you went on to college for a bit? Did there—

Berry: Actually, I was in college for seven semesters, so I was in for quite a while, and, some interaction with respect to Vietnam but not a heck of a lot.

Kurtz: So, you said you were in college for seven semesters, I take it you didn't finish at that time?

Berry: No, [laughs] as a matter of fact, I left probably just before they threw me out.

Kurtz: Okay.

Berry: So, I was not thrown out, but I was close.

Kurtz: And that was because you were spending more time in the library and forgetting to go to class?

Berry: Yeah, something like that [laughs]. No, I spent a bunch of time partyin'.

Kurtz: Okay. So, at what point in time did you decide that college wasn't for you? What year, what date?

Berry: That would have been the fall of '65.

Kurtz: Fall of '65.

Berry: Yeah, I realized I was gonna leave college, and I knew that I would be subject to the draft.

Kurtz: So what did you do?

Berry: Well, I started checking around a little bit, and learned about the Warrant Officer Aviation program that the army had—

Kurtz: Mm-hm.

Berry: And that sounded like just a wonderful opportunity.

Kurtz: What was that exactly?

Berry: That was a situation where a person could enlist for flight school and requirements were a high school diploma.

Kurtz: Mm-hm.

Berry: And what you could do actually before you enlisted was take a flight physical, and you could take a written exam. I did both. Assuming you passed both, you could enlist for flight school. You enlisted for two years. So, your obligation was essentially the same as it would have been had you been drafted, and the deal was that if you made it through basic training without being injured, your next duty assignment after basic training would be flight school.

Kurtz: Okay, and if you completed flight school did that increase your obligation?

Berry: Right. At the end of flight school, you essentially were discharged, and, um, you re-enlisted essentially as a Warrant Officer. The other aspect of that was—

Kurtz: What was the time commitment then?

Berry: It was an additional three years.

Kurtz: Okay.

Berry: After basic training when you went to flight school, you received E5 pay and flight pay—

Kurtz: Okay.

Berry: —while you were in flight school.

Kurtz: So that was quite a bit better deal than the 11B [Army Infantrymen] people.

Berry: Sure, sure.

Kurtz: Is there anything that stands out about your basic training experience?

Berry: Um, well, yes I guess. Basic training—

Kurtz: And where did you take basic training?

Berry: —Was in Fort Polk, Louisiana.

Kurtz: Okay.

Berry: And I think that was, ah, this is thinking about this afterwards, many of the individuals that enlisted for flight school ended up in basic training at Fork Polk, Louisiana. I suspect that was associated with the fact that there was some jungle training there.

Kurtz: Mm-hm.

Berry: And, ah, 'course when you enlisted, you were aware that upon completing flight school, you were probably gonna end up flying in Vietnam, so—

Kurtz: Like a high percentage?

Berry: Yeah.

Kurtz: Did they treat you any different as a trainee enlisted for flight school as opposed to just anybody else in the training?

Berry: Not that I could tell. I'm not at all certain that the individuals in basic training, ah, Company Commander and so forth, even knew we had enlisted for—for flight school. Now one of the things that happened to me that's kinda interesting is when I took the flight physical before enlisting, I flunked it.

Kurtz: Mm-hm.

Berry: And the flight surgeon asked me—and the reason I flunked it was I had high sugar in my urine—flight surgeon asked me how—how much I wanted to fly. And I said, "Well I do! That's why I enlisted." And he said, "Well I'll tell 'ya what, I'll throw away this physical and what you do then is, ah, is they'll give you a flight physical in basic training and just don't eat a heck of a lot before you take the flight physical and that'll solve the problem." So that's what I did.

Kurtz: So this guy was a good company man?

Berry: Yeah, apparently.

Kurtz: [Laughs].

Berry: But he gave me the choice. He essentially, if I remember correctly, he essentially said that the results of the physical would actually make me 4F [The term 4F mean Not Qualified for Military Services due to medical reasons] if I chose—

Kurtz: Oh, that is interesting.

Berry: But he also said that in his opinion it had nothing to do with my ability to fly and so forth.

Kurtz: Okay.

Berry: So, actually, what I personally did was, when I enlisted I had taken the written test, but I received the flight physical while I was in basic training and passed it.

Kurtz: Ah, then when you went to flight school, where was that?

Berry: The primary flight school was Fort Wolters, Texas, which is by Mineral Wells, Texas, a little bit west of Dallas-Fort Worth.

Berry: Okay.

Kurtz: And primary flight school was where you essentially learned how to fly. Another interesting item here is, at that time, the Army was the only armed forces that started pilots out right in helicopters. The other services, to my knowledge, would send a person to fixed-wing flight school and then after that they would transition into helicopters. Whereas the Army, um, actually it was called the Warrant Officer Rotary Wing Aviation Course. You started right off in helicopters so—

Kurtz: Okay.

Berry: There were observation-type helicopters that you usually learned to fly in.

Kurtz: And were those just those small ones with the plastic bubble?

Berry: They had two there. They had one was specifically, ah, designed for training. It was called TH55; a Hughes 300 I think would be the—the commercial version of it. That was a very small aircraft. And, the other aircraft they used, which was the one I personally flew was an OH23, which was also an observation-type aircraft.

Kurtz: How—how many people—how long was flight school?

Berry: It took about ten months. And so, you were at Fort Wolters, Texas for your primary flight school and that was all in the observation-type aircraft.



Kurtz: Okay.

Berry: So you would solo, and you would have your cross-country training, and learn how to make steep approaches, and different kinds of approaches, learn how to auto rotate, those sorts of things. So, your primary helicopter training was in Fort Wolters, Texas and then your advanced training was at Fort Rucker, Alabama.

Kurtz: And how did it feel the first time you auto rotated?

Berry: Actually, I can't remember the first auto-rotation. I can certainly remember the first solo, though.

Kurtz: Okay.

Berry: As someone that was like most of the people there, I mean joined the service, really learn how to fly. That was the whole purpose of it. I can still remember the instructor pilot telling me to move the aircraft over to the side of the runway and then open the door and get out and he'd say, he'd say, "Take it around the pattern three times." And I can remember picking up the aircraft up to a hover, taking it down to the, ah, end of the runway, taking off, and looking around and sayin' to myself, "Wow! I'm flying this thing all by myself!" It was—and I think most pilots can remember their first solo.

Kurtz: Was the trainer a Vietnam vet?

Berry: They had some people that were Vietnam veterans, probably the vast majority of them. A lot of them, though, were civilian contractors—

Kurtz: Okay.

Berry: I—that I think had probably learned to fly in the Army. Probably were Vietnam veterans.

Kurtz: That might have gotten out, too.

Berry: But them were private contractors.

Kurtz: Is there anything that stands out about the Fort Wolters experience we haven't discussed?

Berry: No, not really. Just, ah, absolute pleasure associated with flying the aircraft.

Kurtz: Did you get leave before you went to then Fort Rucker?

Berry: I don't think so, because I can remember when we went from—from Wolters to Rucker we were driving, and there was like five or six of us in the car that was at night and we were stopped for speeding someplace in the south. And the officer looked at us and obviously recognized we were in the military, and he asked us that, and the person driving said, "Yes." He said, "Well, where you goin'?" And he said, "We're goin' from Wolters to Fort Rucker," and he just released us. He didn't bother with a ticket or anything.

Kurtz: What, what kind of license plate did you have on that car? Do you remember?

Berry: Ah, I don't know.

Kurtz: When you got to Rucker, how were you treated? Were you treated as a professional or was it—

Berry: Yeah, actually, the first month at Wolters was pure harassment.

Kurtz: Okay.

Berry: It was ground school. You didn't fly, and, again, in retrospect what the outfit was trying to do was get you to quit. I mean it was—

Kurtz: [Coughs]

Berry: —full race Mickey Mouse. Inspections at two o'clock in the morning, and walkin' around the room with your foot locker or port arms and then being informed that an hour later you're gonna have an inspection, ah, just full race Mickey Mouse.

Kurtz: Okay.

Berry: But once you started to fly, they left you alone for the most part. You still had inspections, and this, that, and the other thing, but there wasn't as much Mickey Mouse, and I'm sure they didn't want someone to roll up a helicopter worrying about whether or not their shoes were shiny. It was, you know, it was still—tight discipline and so forth but way less Mickey Mouse.

Kurtz: Okay. So what happened at Rucker?

Berry: When you arrived at Rucker the first thing you did was went back to an observation-type helicopter that was an OH13, but it was outfitted for instrument flying.

Kurtz: Mm-hm.

Berry: So you're first experience at Fort Rucker was instrument flying and earning your Tactical Instrument Ticket, ah, which was essentially everything that a regular Instrument Ticket would have except a certain kind of precision approach, called an ILS [Instrument Landing System] approach.

Kurtz: What kind of weather did they have you do this instrument work in?

Berry: Well the instrument work there was under the hood.

Kurtz: Oh, okay.

Berry: So you would wear a hood that precluded your ability to look outside the aircraft.

Kurtz: Okay.

Berry: And the instructor-pilot, of course, could look outside the aircraft all the time, and could monitor the instruments. So it was essentially practice instrument flying.

Kurtz: Okay, so you weren't flying in the adverse weather conditions that you might be tactically?

Berry: Right. All the flight was not actual instruments, it was called "under the hood" but it perfectly simulated what it would be like to fly under instruments, because you couldn't see outside the aircraft.

Kurtz: Did this instrument work deal with topography at all?

Berry: Not really. You, ah, it was all just learning to manipulate the aircraft by looking at the instruments on the instrument panel as opposed to visual flight rules looking outside the aircraft.

Kurtz: Okay. Gotcha.

Berry: And it went right down to making instrument take-offs, so you'd be sitting on the ground at a hover—at ah, I mean, not a hover—straight on the ground, and then you would make an instrument take-off under the hood

so you'd be monitoring the direction of the aircraft, and so forth, without looking outside the aircraft.

Kurtz: So, when you completed that, what did you do?

Berry: Then you transmi—you transitioned into the Huey [Bell UH-1 Iroquois helicopter]. You received, ah, training in the UH1 aircraft, which is what you were gonna end up flying in Vietnam, just learn how to fly the aircraft, how to start it, and those sorts of things. And then there was some tactical training that would involve landing in smaller landing zones as opposed to a runway, also some formation flying, and also a little bit of the introduction to a gunship.

Kurtz: So you—I was gonna ask—so what was the difference between flying a slick [slang for a UH-1 helicopter] and a gunship [an armed helicopter]?

Berry: The slicks were, ah, UH-1D or H model aircraft. They had a larger cargo area. They had door guns on each side. The door guns were pedestal mounted, and that was primarily to help preclude friendly fire, in a sense. And your job as a slick pilot was to essentially move troops around the battlefield. So you were making combat assaults in the slick, and then after the units were inserted into an area of combat assault, you might fly what we used to call, "Ash and Trash" which would be hauling food and ammunition and, so forth, out to the units. We had some other types of missions. Many, many landings. As a matter of fact, I was explaining to Bill the other day that a slick pilot, just because of the nature of the flying, could make a Huey sit up and bark at the end of a tour, and I was trying to explain to him why. We looked at my flight records, and I arrived—the first day that I flew in Vietnam was May 11<sup>th</sup>, '67. In a period from the rest of May and all of June, which constituted fifty days, I flew 229 hours, and I was involved in 1,122 landings. So even if I flew half those landings, because there were two pilots in the aircraft, I mean you were shooting like ten approaches a day, you just flat had to learn how to fly the helicopter. That's all there was to it.

Kurtz: Yeah.

Berry: The gunships were a little bit different. The gunships also had a crew of four: two pilots, two gunners. This is before the Huey Cobra, and would be the same aircraft we have hangin' from the ceiling up here. As a matter of fact, that ceiling is from my unit. That's D-Company. I flew in A-Company, but those aircraft, um, would be heavily loaded with ammunition and rockets and so forth, and their job was to either escort the assault helicopters going on a combat assault, or they might be sent out to attack specific areas on the ground with machine guns and rockets. But

they would make very much fewer landings and take-offs than we would in the slicks.

Kurtz: What were you trained on as far as the weight that you could carry in a slick?

Berry: They talked to you a little bit about that, and much of that sort of thing was learned after you arrived in Vietnam.

Kurtz: Okay.

Berry: And, actually, a big portion of it was the responsibility of the crew chief on the slick. Crew chief was, ah, well the whole crew was important and worked together, but the crew chief on a slick had some major duties. One of which was to, um, monitor how much weight was being put on it when you were flying "Ash and Trash," because the grunts would like to get as much weight on the aircraft as possible, and if you were picking supplies up at the coast, for example, and then shooting a pinnacle approach up in the hills at four or five thousand feet, or four thousand feet higher with too much weight on the aircraft you might have enough power to take-off on the coast, and then not enough power to hover on the pinnacle and you could get into a problem.

Kurtz: Now was the altitude or the heat the issue?

Berry: Well, both, because what really relates to the power of a helicopter or any aircraft has is called "density altitude" and that's a function of not only the altitude but how hot it is. So on really hot days, um, the density altitude would be a lot higher for a particular elevation than it would be on a cool day, so it was both.

Kurtz: We've kind of jumped away from Rucker, but let's—is there some things about Rucker that we should talk about before we go to Vietnam?

Berry: Oh I don't really think so. I went through the same program that everyone else did, and I think it was excellent training. The majority of the pilots, I think, figured they were regular Steve Canyon's [Steven Canyon was a cartoon character in a long running American adventure comic strip who was military pilot] when they left flight school, and the reality was they were dangerous is about what it amounts to [laughs].

Kurtz: Can you tell the people who Steve Canyon is? You're showing your age [laughs].

Berry: I sure am! [Laughs]. Steven Canyon is a cartoon character that was a pilot. But you ended up putting in somewhere around two hundred, two

hundred-ten hours of flight time in flight school, um, and you were a competent pilot, but your ability to fly the aircraft was nowhere near what it would be after some flight time in Vietnam.

Kurtz: What did they—I would assume that some of these trainers had Vietnam experience. What did they tell you about the difference between your skills coming in and what you'd really need to do to survive in Vietnam?

Berry: I don't really remember too much of that, but once we got to the point where we were transitioning into Hueys, the majority of the instructor-pilots were regular Army and had Vietnam experience. So the assumption was that they were teaching you the skills that you would need to have once you arrived there.

Kurtz: Okay. Leading by example is much a part of the curriculum. I mean what they were teaching you because—

Berry: But then for certain then after I arrived in Vietnam we learned to do things—a high overhead approach is one example that comes to me, that was not taught in flight school.

Kurtz: Okay. We'll hop there in just a second. Now, did you get leave before you went to Vietnam?

Berry: Yeah. So, I took a month's leave and went back home. Um—

Kurtz: How were you treated when you got home?

Berry: Just fine! And this was—this would have been in, uh, probably April of—

Kurtz: '66?

Berry: '67.

Kurtz: Ah, '67, excuse me.

Berry: And, at that time the anti-war sentiment, and so forth, I really did not experience that.

Kurtz: Did any of the people that you grew up with—did they have any views about the fact that you were going to Vietnam?

Berry: Um, encouragement, for the most part. As a matter of fact, a very, very good friend of mine, a guy that, probably my best friend still, knew each other since grade school, and I talked about it, and I suggested to him that flight school is a pretty good deal. He ended up going to flight school after

I did, and he was my best man, and I was his best man, and he ended up flying for the First Cav [1st Calvary Division] also. As a matter of fact, I spent some time with him in Vietnam just before I came back home.

Kurtz: Okay, that's interesting. Okay, when you completed your leave, how did you get to Vietnam?

Berry: Flew on a commercial aircraft to Oakland, and flew from there, and I believe we flew into Pleiku [Vietnam] if I remember correctly.

Kurtz: Okay. So when you landed in Vietnam what was your first impression?

Berry: Oh, I guess, um, a little bit of anxiety, a little bit of, ah, what I was going to be in store for. I knew I was going to the 1st Calvary Division, which of course had a reputation of being a—

Kurtz: Did you know that before you left the United States?

Berry: I sure did. We received our orders in flight school at Fort Rucker. So just before we graduated, we all knew where we were goin'. The way it worked was, ah, the individuals who enlisted for flight school, to my knowledge; all went from flight school to Vietnam. There were quite a few people though that were already in the military. They were enlisted guys that decided to go to flight school. I think all of those that I knew of that had all ready served a tour in Vietnam had their first assignment after flight school being some place like Germany or—

Kurtz: Alright. Did the weather or smell or anything like that make an impression on you?

Berry: Not that I remember.

Kurtz: Okay. Ah, so you went directly to the First Cav, and where was the First Cav when you came in the country?

Berry: I went to Ankei in the central highlands.

Kurtz: And how were you received there?

Berry: I was received just like a new guy [laughs].

Kurtz: Yeah.

Berry: So you did not have a huge amount of respect from the individuals that had been there for a while.

Kurtz: Mm-hm, and did you receive any training before you started operating?

Berry: I received, I can remember the first flight was from Ankei out to the coast and the aircraft commander, also a Warrant Officer, had me fly under the hood for a ways, I think he was just trying to see how well I could fly instruments, and um, you were watched very, very closely as a new pilot, because you simply did not have the skills necessary to operate the aircraft the way it should be operated.

Kurtz: Did they tell you that or did you know that? I mean, that you didn't have the skills?

Berry: Well, they—they didn't specifically tell you that, but it was just the way you were treated. You could tell that the aircraft commander was watchin' you like a hawk, 'cause as you were makin' an approach. And the aircraft commander would do things like, ah, you'd look out to the—to—outside the aircraft, far to the right and the aircraft commander would pull a circuit breaker for a fuel pump or something like that and then want to have when you brought your head back into the cockpit to recognize right away that something happened while you were lookin' out, a lot of intensive training. And you really—

Kurtz: Like—

Berry: Pardon?

Kurtz: As part of some tactical flying?

Berry: Well, yes, but it was more associated with the fact that once a person made aircraft commander, one of their duties was to essentially train the new pilots.

Kurtz: Okay.

Berry: The aircraft commander designation had nothing to do with rank.

Kurtz: And how long did it take to achieve the status of aircraft commander?

Berry: Oh I would say something on the order of three months. So you might—you'd have a couple hundred or a little bit more hours of flight time in flight school, and then you probably fly another three hundred, three hundred-fifty hours or something like that, is what we used to call, "Peter Pilot". And then there'd be a decision made that you had reached the skill level necessary, not only from the standpoint of your ability to fly the aircraft but your coolness, and so forth, to be designated as an aircraft commander. It was no orders cut for that sort of thing. The company



commander would essentially just say, "Starting tomorrow, we'd like you to fly as an aircraft commander."

Kurtz: And does that make a difference what side of the aircraft you sat on when you're—

Berry: It sure did. And this is an interesting aspect of the situation, because the command pilot seat in a helicopter is the right seat, um, which is the opposite of the fixed-wing aircraft. So the right seat in a Huey is where you started the aircraft. The right seat in a Huey has some controls that aren't on the left side. For example, the controls you would use to manipulate the landing light, those sorts of things. More flight instruments on the right side of the aircraft that would allow you to fly the aircraft on instruments. So the right seat in aircraft in a Huey was a command pilot seat, but the aircraft commanders flew in the left seat. And the reason for that had to do with visibility. If you look at the instrument panel on a Huey, the instrument panel comes all the way to the right side of the aircraft. On the left side of the aircraft in front of the pilot there's no instrument panel, so what that essentially meant was that you could see better out the left side of the aircraft and all of our flying was what's called, "BFR flight" [biennial flight review, or a periodic flight review] visual flight rules. We did a lot of formation flying, um, right to the ground on assault. Lot of flying into tight LZs [Landing Zones] and, ah, we did a particular approach called a "high overhead approach" that required you to be able to see well. So essentially when you were flying the aircraft you needed to keep your head out of the cockpit and watch what was going on, and because the ability to see out of the aircraft was better on the left side that's where the aircraft commander sat.

Kurtz: So, to a degree, the co-pilot was almost like a flight engineer then in some ways?

Berry: No, the co-pilot would fly half the time.

Kurtz: Oh, okay.

Berry: Um—

Kurtz: But it wouldn't be—the visual part was the premium?

Berry: Right. That and also there was no doubt in anyone's mind who the aircraft commander on the aircraft was, and it was kind of like the captain on a ship. Had nothing to do with rank, um, when the skids left the ground any decision that was made with respect to what the aircraft did and so forth was the responsibility of the aircraft commander. The aircraft commander was responsible for the aircraft and the crew, and the whole works.

Kurtz: What was the relationship between the aircraft commander and the, ah, come on, my brain, the crew chiefs?

Berry: Ah, well the whole crew worked very cl—

[Tape Break][00:30:39.24]

Kurtz: —and the tape clicked off.

Berry: Okay, let's talk about the crew of the aircraft.

Kurtz: Okay let's do it that way.

Berry: There's two pilots. Vast majority of pilots in the Army are warrant officers, that's still the case. So, in our unit, let's see, we had sixteen helicopters in the company, the company commander was a major, the XO was a captain, there were maybe five lieutenants, and, this is a guess now, twenty, twenty-five warrant officers. So often times when the aircraft was being flown you would have two pilots—well you'd always have two pilots, they were often both warrant officers. Often, both warrant officer 1s. You also had two gunners, one of the gunners was a crew chief and trained as a crew chief, and the aircraft was actually assigned to the crew chief, so the crew chief would always fly with a particular aircraft and a crew chief was responsible for daily maintenance on the aircraft. In our unit, at least, the pilots would rotate amongst the different aircrafts. So you would determine what pilot you were flying by going—I mean what aircraft you were flyin' by going into the operations area and looking at the mission board.

Kurtz: Mm-hm.

Berry: So you had two pilots, two gunners, one of which was a crew chief. Often times the second gunner was also trained as a crew chief, but was waiting for a crew chief to rotate home before he would actually get charge of an aircraft. Sometimes one of the gunners would be, ah, a grunt, an infantryman, that wanted to stay in country longer and fly as a door gunner or whatever. I would say most of the time both door gunners were trained as crew chiefs. Crew chief sat on the left side of the aircraft, that's the gun that they sat behind, and the reason for that was that the crew chief—or the left side of the aircraft had a better view of the tail rotor. So when you were making an approach into a very tight LZ, a one ship LZ, one job the crew chief had was to hang out and watch the tail rotor. And if you were flying and the crew chief said, "You need to move the tail rotor four feet to the left," that's exactly what you did was move the tail rotor four feet to the left, so.

- Kurtz: When you were talking about weight, how many soldiers would you carry?
- Berry: Depended on the aircraft model. When I arrived there we had UH-1D models, and about halfway through my tour, all of our D models were replaced with H models. The only difference really between the two aircraft is the H model had a 1400 horsepower engine, and the D model had a 1100 horsepower engine. And particularly when you were flying in the mountains and in the hills in the central highlands or the western portion of I Corps, ah, that extra three hundred horsepower was important. So the, ah, normal aircraft load would be seven grunts. But the way the First Cav made assaults is that those seven grunts, when we made the initial assault into a landing zone would have only their weapon, ammunition, and water. So packs and so forth were brought in later.
- Kurtz: Okay. That's the way I remember it—
- Berry: The normal aircraft load would be seven grunts. And, as a matter of fact, if you look at the, um, picture we have next to the Green Beret upstairs was a pinnacle approach. If you looked at that closely you'll see—and that's a First Cav slick—you'll see there's four grunts gettin' off the aircraft on the side you're lookin' at, and if you look real closely you can see the feet of three guys gettin' off on the other side, and if you also look closely you'll see those guys do not have packs. All they have is their weapon.
- Kurtz: We always sat on our helmets, too. What kind of protection did you have from the underneath—the, ah, crew members—
- Berry: The, ah, pilots were way better off than the gunners, because the pilots sat in an armored seat that would stop a thirty caliber round cold, and you also wore chicken plate, chicken plate being aluminum, um, item about the size of your size chest with some ceramic on the front, front of it. That would stop a thirty caliber, also. And, again, with the pilots you had a panel next to your head that you could pull forward, and you did pull forward after you got into the seat, and you looked kind of over as you were flying. So pilots were fairly well protected. The gunner, ah both gunners, wore chicken plate and that's about it, but a lot of them sat on another chicken plate while they were back there.
- Kurtz: What was the pilot's responsibility in examine the aircraft before you left in the morning?
- Berry: You would pre-flight the aircraft and, ah, just as you would any other aircraft. So you would make sure that the all the fluid levels were correct and so forth, and, um, the aircraft commander 'course, was responsible for

the mission that day. So the aircraft commander would learn about what the task was for that day. Whether it was gonna be flying an assault and, if so, what position in formation you were going to fly, or if it was gonna be hauling supplies out to a unit in the field. You would have to find out what unit you were working for that day and where the logistics pad was, and so forth.

Kurtz: As far as weather, what were the constraints on flying?

Berry: It wasn't a heck of a lot, and again, it was all VFR flight [Visual Flight Rules]. Weather could become a real problem, because we would normally fly anyway, I mean, grunts needed help, but you could fly low with a helicopter, and I can only remember being grounded, essentially, one day there was some sort of a typhoon or something. But normally during the day you would, you would fly anyway and you would maintain contact with the ground.

Kurtz: Visually?

Berry: Visually, right. Normally what you did from a safety standpoint with respect to ground fire is that if you couldn't get about three thousand feet above the ground, you would fly right on the deck.

Kurtz: So it was the deck or three thousand feet?

Berry: Right.

Kurtz: Three thousand feet was always better. It was cooler.

Berry: Well it was cooler and you could see where you were goin' out there, too. Plus, if something went wrong with the airplane you had time to react to it.

Kurtz: What about battle damage to the aircraft?

Berry: We received hits. Um, and I suspect the First Cav learned a bunch in the assault in the Ia Drang because, I can remember only one full race combat assault that I flew on where the aircraft I was flying took hits. And the reason for that was that the 1st Cavalry Division had that down almost to a ballet. One of the good parts about flying for the 1st Cavalry Division is the entire division operation was really oriented around the helicopters. So we had our own artillery, we had our own infantry, and everything was oriented around the helicopters. We were used to working with each other. For example, the typical combat assault would involve five Hueys, five slicks, and two gunships. With—we'd have seven grunts on each slick, so with each lift you could put, um, ah, ah, thirty-five guys into the LZ, but you wanted to kinda land in a formation so the door guns on the

helicopters could cover each other kinda like a box formation of World War Two. Plus, you wanted to put as many grunts on the ground as you could with the first lift so they could protect each other. But in route to the landing zone, the landing zone would receive, um, artillery. 105s [105mm Howitzer], and, quite a few for two reasons: one of course was to take care of any enemy that happened to be in the landing zone, but maybe even more importantly, the enemy as well as us knew that we liked landing zones that we could put five aircraft in at one time. And they had a tendency to put booby traps in the landing zones.

Kurtz: What type of booby traps?

Berry: Oh I don't what the—

Kurtz: Okay.

Berry: —heck they would be. But the artillery impacting in the landing zone—

Kurtz: So, it was—

Berry: —set all of that off.

Kurtz: So it was soft—

Berry: So you didn't have to—

Kurtz: Did, ah, in your experience, going on these combat assaults did you touch down or did you have the people get off the aircraft?

Berry: Now, they, what happened was, um, the last round that was fired out of the artillery battery would be a white phosphorus round. And that would normally be, oh I don't know, forty-five seconds before you would touch down. So normally the formation was on the final into the LZ when the white phosphorus round went off in the LZ. And what that meant was that the tubes were clear, so that you didn't have worry about a 105 round falling in the landing zone while you were in there. And as soon as the white phosphorus round went off in the landing zone, that's when the gunships would start shooting rockets and shooting their mini-guns and the door gunners on slicks would start shooting. So there would be ordinance impacting in the landing zone until just before you touched down. And the grunts, of course, knew that, um, if there was gonna be anybody shootin' at the slicks they'd be shootin' at the slicks, so they wanted off the slicks just as quickly as possible. You didn't have to tell people to get off, they were gone that's all there was to it. The normal situation was you just touched down, or just get to a hover and, ah, the grunts would bail out very quickly, and then the whole formation would

just leave the landing zone. So you were in the landing zone a matter of seconds.

Kurtz: Ah, how many techni—well I guess that would be a dumb question because it depends on how big an operation it is—would it—how would they move a company or battalion if there, if it was that size operation?

Berry: It depended on what they expected. Ah, I guess the more typical situation was we move company in four lifts. So you'd make one lift with thirty-five guys, they would secure the LZ, then you'd make three more lifts into the LZ [coughs] 'course without the artillery present.

Kurtz: Yeah.

Berry: And you'd bring a company in. A larger size operation, you'd just use more helicopters. So we made one assault, ah, around Khe San that had a, ah, musta, musta been fifty Hueys involved and probably five hundred people on the ground.

[BREAK IN TAPE]

Kurtz: Okay, we can go—we're back in business again.

Berry: Okay. Another thing that seemed interesting was with the door guns on the slicks is they were solid tracer. The reason for that was that on an assault the aircraft is moving along at eighty knots or so, you didn't have to worry about, ah, the barrels overheating because of that—

Kurtz: Yeah.

Berry: The door gunners shot the weapons kinda like hose.

Kurtz: Mh-hm

Berry: So what they would—they wouldn't use the sights on the weapon, they would look forward and look at the LZ and look at a tree line, for example, along the sight of the LZ that might have the enemy concealed if they were there. And then they would shoot solid tracer, and essentially shoot the gun like a hose. It was kind of interesting, because the bullets appeared to curve forward, because the aircraft was movin' forward. I mean a pronounced curve.

Kurtz: How many rounds did you carry for each door gun?

Berry: I don't know that for certain, if I had a guess, I would say it was somewhere around three hundred.

Kurtz: Okay.

Berry: And you could, ah, clean the box out if you wanted to. I mean the barrels did not overheat on the approach because you were in—

Kurtz: So if you were like moving a company, there would be more ammunition for the door guns back at the place where you're pickin' up the company to move 'em?

Berry: That's correct.

Kurtz: Yeah. So after you com—did a combat assault then you would start doing these "Ash and Trash" things?

Berry: Sometimes you might, ah, be assigned to fly a combat assault in the morning and then you'd fly "Ash and Trash" the rest of the day. Other times, you'd be assigned to the combat assault flight the entire day, some other aircraft in the unit would be assigned "Ash and Trash".

Kurtz: Well when you're assigned to a combat assault all day would that be— they would go into an LZ you'd pick up and go to another one, or there was just combat assaults going on all day?

Berry: Sometimes you'd, ah, you might make four lifts into the same LZ. And that would take a while, and you might have a separate combat assault for a different First Cav unit later on.

Kurtz: Oh, okay. Could you describe what a pick-up was like from an LZ?

Berry: Yes, I sure could. Most of the time when we were in the pick-up zone you'd—the pick-up zone was a secure area back near one of the base camps and we almost always shot the approach into the pick-up zone in a trail formation. Whereas we made the combat assaults in a B. The reason for flying a trail formation into the pick-up zone is that of course you'd land on the ground. The aircraft would remain running, but if you were lined up in a trail formation on the ground it was much less likely for a grunt to walk into a tail rotor 'cause they'd come in from the side and get on the aircraft, so—

Kurtz: Okay. What about picking up tactically from an LZ? I mean units—

Berry: Well again we kinda did the opposite there. You'd wanna make the last pick-up zone, the last pick-up if you were, ah, bringing troops back from a field operation with as many grunts on the ground as you could. So you'd

try to make the last pick-up also with five aircraft. And you would go into the landing zone, the grunts would board, you'd leave. But—

Kurtz: They come on pretty fast.

Berry: Oh, they sure did.

Kurtz: Ah, was there any artillery or gunships following on, on—in that situation? How was that?

Berry: Oh there sure was, yeah. Whenever we made a combat assault or we made—or we were extracting units that were, ah, completing a field operation, the normal formation of five aircraft was accompanied by two gunships. And the time—the majority of the time I was there the First Cav had Huey Cobras as opposed to the C model or M model we have hanging from the ceiling.

Kurtz: Was there any—ah at least from the grunts standpoint being the last thirty-five on the ground was not desirable. Is there any—how—how did you regard that as being a pilot, picking people up?

Berry: Just didn't bother me, because you really didn't have time to think about those sorts of things if you were flying in the formation, because you were concerned about maintaining your position and just operating the aircraft, and so forth.

Kurtz: What were the differences if you were flying into smaller LZs like?

Berry: Well smaller LZs could be more of a problem obviously, because there were fewer aircraft there, so normally a smaller LZ might be something on a pinnacle and, um, little bit more concern there be—simply because there weren't as many troops, either, on the initial assault or at the end on the taking people out.

Kurtz: What kind of ground fire did you get from the enemy? What kind of weapons were they using?

Berry: Most of it was thirty caliber [carbine rifle], AK-47 [selective-fire assault rifle], or SKS [Soviet semi-automatic carbine].

Kurtz: What about fifty-one caliber [heavy machine gun]?

Berry: That happened, ah, but nowhere near as often while I was there. The end of my tour involved the, ah, Khe San Operation. I went home. Right after I went home the First Cav went into the A Shau Valley, and there were all kinds of 51 caliber and, ah, anti-aircraft artillery that much more difficult.



Kurtz: Okay. Well I'd like to go back now and talk about—there's—let's see. I'd like to talk to you now a little bit ab—oh one other operational general issue then I want to ask you about specific operations that stand out in your mind. Ah, what was the problem with artillery? I mean there's artillery going off all over the country. When you were flying there's a problem with artillery shells in the air, too—

Berry: Sure is.

Kurtz: Could you explain—

Berry: Ruin your whole day if you get hit by a 105 round [laughs]

Kurtz: [laughs]

Berry: Again this is a good aspect of flying for the 1st Calvary Division, because the number two person for aircraft in the formation of five had as a responsibility clearing the artillery.

Kurtz: What does that mean?

Berry: What that means is that you would call 1st Cav Artillery and tell them that you were making an assault and you were flying such and such an area where there were artillery rounds you needed to be concerned about. And they would tell you about that, and you would inform the flight leader if there was a problem. If you were out flying single ship you would do the same thing. You'd call 1st Cav Artillery and tell them that you were going out to a landing zone, and you needed to know if you were—needed to be concerned about artillery.

Kurtz: What about fixed-wing aircraft?

Berry: Fixed-wing aircraft wasn't that large a problem. The areas that we were operating were almost all helicopters. Although LZ English on the coast in II Corps had a thirty five hundred foot airstrip, and it was some fixed-wing aircraft in and out of that. Probably more problems with fixed-wing once we got up into I Corps. As a matter of fact, after I left there was a collision between an Air Force fixed-wing aircraft and a CH47 First Cav that killed everybody involved. So you had to have some concern, but—

Kurtz: Okay. Could you tell us about your operational experience? You were there roughly from May of '67 to May of '68.

Berry: Mm-hm.

Kurtz: You started down at An Khe and you mentioned that you ended up by Khe Sanh, so can you kinda lead us through—

Berry: Sure. The unit, if I'm recalling properly, when I joined the unit it was at An Khe and it was at An Khe for about a month operating some in the mountains around An Khe, but we were also flying out to the coast, um, then northern portion of, ah, II Corps. Something called, "Operation Pershing," if I remember correctly, and flying out there and my company moved to a place called "LZ English," which was really a base camp for the First Cav on the coast in II Corps, large area. Thirty-five hundred foot landing strip, number of artillery units, number of aviation units, and our company set up and operated out of LZ English for the rest of the time that I was in II Corps, which would have been 'til the, towards the end of January in '68. We did most of our flying out in the coastal area of II Corps, making assaults and there were some valleys that would come out of the mountains down towards the coast that there were a lot of assaults made in.

Kurtz: Ah, is there any particular events that stick out in your mind in your experience at LZ English?

Berry: Um. Let's see—I guess some of the missions that stick out in my mind were all what we call, "Emergency Re-supply".

Kurtz: Okay.

Berry: And, again, this is another good reason for flying for the First Cav, because "Emergency Re-supplies" took place at night and they meant that the unit involved needed something before the morning, usually ammunition which meant they were in contact.

Kurtz: Mm-hm.

Berry: So there was one crew in the company that was on call each night for "Emergency Re-supply" and that could get quite dangerous. Not so much from the standpoint from being shot at, although that was certainly a possibility, what was really dangerous was flying at night in Vietnam, and it was simply associated with the fact that there were no lights on the ground. So maintaining visual contact with the ground was quite difficult at night, ah, particularly if there was an overcast sky, it could really get kind of heavy. So if you were flying on "Emergency Re-supply" missions what you would do is pre-flight the aircraft during the day. Make sure it was set up and ready to go. And then if you were called, what that meant was that some ground unit needed re-supply that night. For an emergency situation, was normally they had had contact and they wanted ammunition. So you would go to the logistics pad and load the aircraft with whatever it

was they needed, and then fly out to the ground unit which was normally out in the boondocks, difficult flying at night. We had an FM homing device in the aircraft that worked quite well.

Kurtz: Would you fly higher than the ground, ah—you wouldn't do ground—

Berry: Oh no, no. 'Cause you had to—so you'd be up—but you really didn't worry about getting shot at five-hundred feet or whatever because it was difficult to see the aircraft anyway. But once you got out to the ground unit, um, you would shoot a lights-out approach, because the chances were excellent that they had had contact recently, so you were making an approach into a landing zone at night with no landing light and it could get—

Kurtz: So you actually landed the aircraft rather than—

Berry: Right, yeah. You would land the aircraft and they would unload whatever it was you brought out to them, and if they had been in contact we would often bring KIA [Killed In Action] or wounded back.

Kurtz: Okay.

Berry: And this is after forty years now I can still remember clearly two emergency re-supply missions that I was involved with, and neither one of them were we shot at. It was just really difficult flying, dangerous flying.

Kurtz: And it was be—it was the flying part of it, not the enemy contact?

Berry: Right.

Kurtz: And did you have some rules about how big the LZ would be for something like—

Berry: Well, again, this is another reason to fly for the First Cav, because the grunts were experienced about what the capability of the aircraft was and they knew it was dangerous. So they didn't ask us to come out there unless they needed it, but what you would do is talk to the grunts on the ground in the LZ and they would tell you what the LZ was like—

Kurtz: Mm-hm.

Berry: —how big it was, um, whether there was a tree on the south end of it, ah, they might even recommend that you approach the LZ from the east because of obstructions, and you normally listened to what they were tellin' you and accepted it, trusted it, and went ahead and followed it.

Kurtz: Okay. So when you left LZ English where did you go?

Berry: The entire unit went to I Corps just before '68 Tet [Tet Offensive of 1968].

Kurtz: Did you know that Tet was going to happen?

Berry: Um—we sure didn't. But I suspect that Westmoreland [General William Westmoreland, commander of American troops in Vietnam from mid 1964 to mid 1968] and company did. And as a matter of fact, just before we left II Corps, so this would have been the middle of December in '67, one of the 1<sup>st</sup> of the 9<sup>th</sup> Scouts, which is another aviation unit for the 1<sup>st</sup> Calvary Division, noted some—noticed some aerals sticking out of a pooch out on the coastal plane and that turned out to be a good size NVA unit [North Vietnamese Army] that were probably moving into that area getting set up for '68 Tet. There was a good size battle probably five miles from LZ English in mid-December of '67.

Kurtz: What did you know about Khe Sanh before you went to I Corps? I mean was there any talk?

Berry: Essentially nothing. When we went to I Corps, um, we initially set up at a place called Wai Fu Bai, which is a little south and west of Wai, and were there for a while, and then we moved to a place called, "LZ Evans" or "Camp Evans" along Route One between Wai and Quang Tri. But for the initial time that we were in I Corps, we operated pretty much on the coastal plains areas around Quang Tri and Wai.

Kurtz: So in other words, you were doing essentially the same thing you were doing at LZ English then? That type of thing. Now did you—when you said you set up at Wai Fu Bai, did you have occasion to be in Wai before the Tet?

Berry: Yes I did. I was the assistant operations officer for the company, so rather than fly one of our aircraft from LZ English to Wai Fu Bai from the northern portion of II Corps into the new place that we were setting up in I Corps, I was responsible for moving our few vehicles. And the way we did that was to load the vehicles, mainly Jeeps and if I remember correctly, there were one or two III Corps towed onto C-130s [four engine turboprop military transport aircraft] and we flew up to the vicinity of Wai and, again, my recollection is kinda hazy here, but I believe we landed on the north side of Wai, and then essentially led a little convoy of the air—ah of the vehicles from there to Wai Fu Bai on the south side right through the city of Wai.

Kurtz: Did you have any impressions about what Wai looked like at that time?

Berry: It was a very beautiful place. This would have been probably something on an order of a week before '68 Tet that this happened. I've got a number of photographs of villages along the way, and some photographs of buildings in Wai that are pristine and really pretty.

Kurtz: I gotta switch [BREAK IN TAPE] On to Wai Fu Bai, were you harassed at all by—

Berry: No. As a matter of fact it was full race tourist type stuff, ah, I can remember we set the Jeep up with sand bags and at your feet and on the fenders and so forth in case you hit a mine, but I had my camera along and just took a—photographs it was a very pleasant ride.

Kurtz: Are there any operations that stand out when you were up at, operating at I Corps?

Berry: Well the one assault that I can remember where we received hits in the aircraft I was flying took place up in that area. That would have been in, probably, in February sometime up near Quan Tre.

Kurtz: Is there anything or do you care to share anything about that?

Berry: Well it was just a, a regular five—five aircraft assault. If I remember correctly we were flying troops from the one-oh first Airborne [101st Airborne Division] as opposed to the First Cav, and believe the one-oh first Airborne also became an air-mobile division. They hadn't received their helicopters yet or something like that. While we were on the assault on relatively short final, we received hits in the aircraft, couple through the windshield. No one was injured, though. We had hits in the aircraft, hits in the main rotor, hits in the windshield.

Kurtz: Where is the Huey vulnerable to 30 caliber?

Berry: It's kinda interesting, ah, particularly if you're talking about AK-47 rounds, which are relatively low powered, um, the majority of places that you take a hit would just punch a hole in the sheet metal. Unless you hit one of the cables for the flight control, or you hit an engine, or you hit a tail rotor gearbox, or something like that, um, you could take a bunch a hits, but then, one hit in the engine could bring you down, too.

Kurtz: Okay. How did they fix combat damage to aircraft?

Berry: They—of course it depend on the nature of the damage, but if it was a hit in the sheet metal, it might be just a, a piece of duct tape for a while. Then they would eventually put an aluminum patch on the hole.

Kurtz: How long—how long did an aircraft last over in Vietnam?

Berry: Well kinda depended on, ah, whether or not it was involved in a crash.

Kurtz: Yeah.

Berry: Probably, ah, I, ah, the indication I read is that something on the order of half of the aircraft are lost to crashes as opposed to ground action. There is, for example, a Huey in the Smithsonian right now, a new exhibit at the new facility out at Dulles that I flew in Vietnam, which it turns out that that particular aircraft was in A Company Two-Two Ninth [229th Aviation Battalion] when I arrived there. It was a D model and that aircraft and I were in the same company for probably five or sixth months, and then we switched the D models out for H models, but highly likely that I have flight time in that aircraft and that, that aircraft I believe had two or three tours in Vietnam and was, um, involved in an accident and then after Vietnam was flown by a National Guard unit for a while and then was donated to the Smithsonian.

Kurtz: That's interesting. So in other words, it, like you said, it just depends on what happened and so an aircraft, if it's well taken care of and doesn't crash, can last a long time?

Berry: Oh, it sure can. As a matter of fact, they have time change items on the various aircraft parts. So, an engine would be changed out after a certain amount of flight time before it failed.

Kurtz: In a routine situation how—what was the maintenance cycle for a Huey? I mean as far as how many hours could you fly it before they had a—

Berry: I don't know for certain—

Kurtz: Okay.

Berry: —because that whole operation was really taken care of by the crew chief and the maintenance officer and the unit, and being a pilot I wasn't really involved in that too much.

Kurtz: What was the interpersonal relationship like between the pilots?

Berry: Oh it was fairly close. I mean you got to know people, but, again, the situation in Vietnam was different than it was in other wars in that, um, people were there for a year and then they rotated out. And of course, your first three months or so, you were a new guy, and I don't think you really got to know more than a couple three people all that well. Whereas in a situation like, oh World War Two, were the unit was there for the duration

as were you, I think people were a heck of a lot closer than they were in Vietnam just generally.

Kurtz: What was your reaction after you were no longer a new guy to new people coming in?

Berry: I was really pleased that the, the outfit decided I had the ability necessary to fly as an aircraft commander. I was proud of that, and took it very seriously and—

Kurtz: What did you think about the commissioned officer corps that you dealt with?

Berry: They were just fine individuals. They all flew as we did. As a matter of fact, I can remember one night when I was assistant operations officer where the company commander, who was an outstanding person who I happened to be in the operations office, and we received a request for an emergency resupply, and he suggested that he and I fly that mission as opposed to getting a crew that was on-call. He and I went out and flew the mission, so they were, they were good people that's all there is to it.

Kurtz: Were there any racial difficulties in your unit?

Berry: None that I'm aware of. Ah, we had few minorities in the unit. I can't remember any of the pilots being minorities. And we had a few of the enlisted people, but I remember no racial problems. I remember absolutely no problems with drugs.

Kurtz: Okay. What about alcohol?

Berry: Alcohol was a problem [laughs].

Kurtz: [Laughs] what were the rules about drinking and flying?

Berry: They were left to the discretion of the pilots involved. And the simple fact of the matter was there four people in the aircraft, three of them depended on you. You simply did not drink if you knew, for example, were signed up to be on emergency re-supply or something like that. But there was plenty of drinking that went on—

Kurtz: So what would happen at the end of the duty day?

Berry: Well, at the end of the duty day we, ah, we would play poker and drink a bunch a beer.

Kurtz: Okay. And what time—what time would you have to be ready for duty the next morning?

Berry: You, ah, well when the sun got—came up, you usually—the CQ would come in and wake you up. We didn't fly at night, unless it was emergency situation, and—Well, take that back. We had one night mission we flew. It was called a "Lightning Bug Mission" and there were certain pilots kinda checked out to do that. I was one of 'em, but that was an interesting mission, because you—the slick aircraft commander would be in charge of the operation. The operation would involve a slick that would have a cluster of landing lights that were—I believe they were from C-130, in the cargo compartment that could be manipulated a spotlight by the crew chief. You would also have some flares. I think they were one million candlepower flares on the aircraft. You would have two gunships, and you would also have an Army fixed-wing aircraft called an OV-1 Mohawk, which is a very high-performance observation twin engine fixed-wing aircraft that had side-looking airborne radar on it. And this was a mission that would be assigned for a particular night, so you take off in your slick and if you were the aircraft commander you were Lightning Bug Six, but that Mohawk aircraft would fly around watching the side-looking airborne radar, which could detect something moving on the ground. And it was supposed to be an absolute curfew at night in the coastal plane area there, so theoretically anything movin' on the ground was a—

Kurtz: VC.

Berry: —bad guy. What you would do then, if you received coordinates from the OV-1 Mohawk that there was something movin' on the ground, you would go over into the area and you would drop flares or, put the spotlight on the area and try to figure out what it was, and then if it was the enemy, the aircraft commander could release the gunships to fire at—That was an interesting mission. Now that was flying at night, but it was not as dangerous as the emergency re-supplies—

Kurtz: Yeah, 'cause you didn't have to land.

Berry: —only because you weren't going to an area where there was contact. But even more importantly, you weren't making a lights-out approach into a landing zone out in the boondocks.

Kurtz: Did you have any contact with the Vietnamese people?

Berry: Very, very little. I spent the majority of the time when I wasn't flying inside the wire at LZ English. There was a town close LZ English called Bang Sanh. The enlisted guys went there I suspect more than we did. We—at least I, myself, went in there a few times, but not very often.



Kurtz: Did—how many days a week did you fly?

Berry: At the beginning of tour, quite a bit. Again, I looked at my flight records for the month of June '67, and I believe there were like three days in the month of June that I did not fly. The first day I flew was on May 11<sup>th</sup>, and the rest of May and June would have been fifty days. I don't know how many days I did not fly during those fifty days, but I flew 229 hours of flight time.

Kurtz: Did you ever get a day off, per se?

Berry: Well, we did.

Kurtz: Yeah? What did you do on those?

Berry: Kinda depended. If, ah, how tired you were you just kinda hang and cool it, although some of the pilots, and I did this a couple times, would find a crew chief or a gunner, more often a gunner, that had been flying as much. Of course the crew chief and the gunner flew as much as the pilots did and then had to maintain the aircraft afterwards. See, if you weren't particularly tired you might find a gunner that had been packin' the load and needed a break and tell the gunner that you'd sit behind his gun for the day. So you'd essentially fly as a door gunner, and then give the gunner an extra day off.

Kurtz: What was that experience like?

Berry: That was interesting. I did that more, because I guess I just wanted to experience what it was like to fly as a door gunner and shoot the door gun. That's—that's really why I know about the curving of the bullets—

Kurtz: Yeah.

Berry: —and shootin' out like a hose, and so forth. It was interesting.

Kurtz: What did the command structure think about you going as a door gunner?

Berry: I remember the company commander asking me—he learned about it from some person and he asked me if I was flying as a door gunner, and I said, "Well just a couple times," and he didn't say anything one way or the other.

Kurtz: Okay. Did you ever see any of the brass like General Westmoreland or anything like—

Berry: The closest I came to that situation would be the commanding general of the First Cav.

Kurtz: Any impressions of that gentleman?

Berry: Ah they're quite good, as a matter of fact, because the first time I met him had to do with a crash that I was involved where we lost a tail rotor, and I guess the Army would call it a, "hard landing" now, but everybody would call it a crash [laughs].

Kurtz: Yeah. Crash.

Berry: But we crashed on a beach and I was, ah, Peter Pilot at that time, so I wasn't flying. The aircraft commander was flying the aircraft. But I can remember making mayday calls on three different radios on the way down—

Kurtz: Yeah.

Berry: —I let the whole world know [laughs] we were goin' down. But the first aircraft that arrived after we hit the ground was the commanding general of the 1st Calvary Division. He happened to be out flying around, and he was a rated pilot, he was out flying around in a D model and heard our maydays calls. So the first aircraft that arrived at the scene of the crash was the commanding general of the 1st Calvary Division.

Kurtz: Yeah.

Berry: Which is kinda neat.

Kurtz: Yeah it is. He have anything to say of interest?

Berry: No. He just asked how—I was knocked unconscious in the crash—and dragged out of the aircraft by crew chief. And soon after that the rapid reaction force came in with thirty grunts or whatever and kinda secured the area and so forth.

Kurtz: How did they get the aircraft out?

Berry: Ah, C-47 would go in the next day and sling load it back out.

Kurtz: Not—

Berry: There wasn't much left of it.

Kurtz: Not a C-47. CH-47.

Berry: CH-47.

Kurtz: I just wanted to make [laughs] different airplane.

Berry: Chinook.

Kurtz: Yes, okay. I'll but that. Ah, I gotta ah, what other type of missions did you fly that were of interest?

Berry: Okay, one was when we would insert a long-range reconnaissance patrol alert team. And that would involve maybe four or five guys whose job was to essentially sneak around in the boondocks and look for signs of the enemy and so forth. So they weren't supposed to have any contact with enemy whatsoever, as a matter of fact, if their activities were made known to the enemy, they had to be extracted very quickly. But the insertion of alert team was a really fun operation to fly as a pilot, because the way we did it was use three slicks and two gunships, and normally when you were flying for the alert team you would have one crew that would spend a week or so with alert team. The aircraft commander or the slick would go out the day before with the leader of the long range reconnaissance patrol and pick a landing zone that you were gonna use to insert them. And you would want the landing zone to be relatively small, because you didn't want to be concerned about booby traps. And you would also want it to be surrounded by, ah, elevation of some sort, small hills or whatever. You would get that all set up, and the way you would actually make the insertion is to use three slicks with the first slick having the alert team in it and you would come down and start flying low level in a very loose trail formation a couple miles, or so, away from the LZ, challenging from a low-level navigation standpoint if you were the aircraft commander in the lead ship, which had the alert team. But what you would do is set your approach up so that you would come around a hill, know where the LZ was, and do a—and you be goin' quite fast, sixty seventy knots—make a big flare and then come to a hover in the landing zone. And you didn't set down because you didn't want to sound of the engine to change. Soon as you came to a hover, the alert team would bail out and the two aircraft behind you would fly right over you in the LZ, and you'd be lookin' up. And as soon as you saw the nose of the second aircraft you'd make a maximum performance take off out of the landing zone. So if you happened to be watching these through the aircraft, you'd see three aircraft go behind a hill and three aircraft come out from the other side of the hill and the difference would be that the lead aircraft goin' in would be the trail aircraft comin' out. Never got caught doin' that once. You really, obviously, you wanted to get the alert team on the ground without the enemy knowin' where they were.

Kurtz: Now that is interesting.

Berry: That really worked good. And it was just like fun to fly.

Kurtz: Yeah, I could see that.

Berry: And then what you would do if you were working with alert team you'd go back, wasn't all that much flying associated with it because you would just wait for a while, and if they were discovered then you'd have to go get 'em, and extracting alert team after they were discovered could get difficult.

Kurtz: Did you ever have that experience?

Berry: No. It never happened to me.

Kurtz: Did you go on an R and R [Rest and Recreation] while you were on your tour?

Berry: I sure did. I went to Sydney.

Kurtz: Sydney? How was that?

Berry: It was just wonderful. I have [laughs] I still have—I had an interest in wildlife and animals—

Kurtz: Yeah.

Berry: —at that time, and I had expected to spend some time in the Outback and never made it out of downtown Sydney [laughs].

Kurtz: [Laughs]. Did they have beer in Australia?

Berry: Yeah, they had some pretty good beer.

Kurtz: [Laughs]

Berry: Had some nice beaches, too.

Kurtz: Well that's good. So when it got to the end of your tour how did you feel?

Berry: Oh, I was lookin' forward to goin' home.

Kurtz: Okay.

Berry: I wasn't flying anywhere near as much, and that had partially to do with, ah, my duties as the assistant operations officer in the company, and also the way the outfit worked was once a person had six weeks or so left in their tour you had a tendency to fly less.

Kurtz: Okay.

Berry: So the last flying I did had to do with Khe Sanh.

Kurtz: Would you tell us about that?

Berry: Um, yeah, I sure can. That would have been first week, first two weeks in April of '68. I believe the initial assaults by the First Cav actually took place on April 1. Khe Sanh had been under attack already for two and a half months or so—

Kurtz: Yeah.

Berry: —that started actually before '68 Tet. And I think what happened was, um, the North Vietnamese had essentially already started to leave the area when the First Cav moved into that area as a result of the Air Force and Marine airstrikes, and just an incredible amount of bomb evidence out in that area. I mean overlapping craters. It was a huge number of bombs dropped around Khe Sanh. So when we made that assault, or those assaults, we essentially made assaults down Route Nine starting, um, oh, a place called a "Rock Pile," west of there, and the operation was really designed to open up Route Nine from the coast into the Khe Sanh area. And the initial assaults were, were pretty large. I can remember one assault that must have had fifty Hueys involved, so we probably put a battalion of grunts on the ground in one lift. So we really used kinda the airmobile capabilities division to its nth degree there. But the landing zones were all cold. I mean there was as far as I know—

Kurtz: So it was kind of leap frogging down the highway to—

Berry: Yeah, I believe the initial assault was pretty close to Route Nine east of Khe Sanh. And then very quickly after that we made some assaults in a more open area that—in a little bit south and a little bit east of Khe Sanh. But we moved a bunch of First Cav troops from the coast to the area around Khe Sanh very, very quickly. But that whole operation didn't last but two weeks or so. And then the First Cav came out of the Khe Sanh area. That's when I stopped flying. And my understanding is the next operation of the 1st Calvary Division went into the A Shau Valley south of—more west of Wai.

Kurtz: Yeah.

Berry: And that was a heavy operation.

Kurtz: And you weren't involved in that?

Berry: No I was not.

Kurtz: Did you maintain any contact with the people you flew with when you left country?

Berry: Not really. I left country and had requested assignment to Germany, which is where I was sent, and met my future wife in Germany. She was a Department of the Army Civilian working as a recreation director in one of the service clubs there. And just, I got involved in myself and my engagement and so forth.

Kurtz: So how much time did you have left in the military after you—

Berry: I had in the vicinity of two years, and actually I think my flight school class might have been the first one that didn't have people sent back to Vietnam kinda involuntarily, but I arrived in Germany and spent the rest of my time in the Army in Germany, and actually ended up leaving the service, probably ah, four months prior to my four years.

Kurtz: Okay.

Berry: So I left the service in December of '69 whereas if I had stayed in the entire amount I had was obligated to it would have been in like April of '70.

Kurtz: And what kind of discussions did you have about Vietnam when you were over serving in Germany?

Berry: Not a heck of a lot. I flew for an engineer unit which got to be interesting, because the engineering unit, in absolute contrast to the 1st Calvary Division, essentially didn't know a heck of a lot about helicopters. And you would ask people to—or people would ask you to do things with the helicopter that weren't possible to do or weren't safe to do or whatever.

Kurtz: So you said that you did not—were you ever really feel threatened that you might have to go back to Vietnam?

Berry: No I sure wasn't. I was ready to if asked, but, um, I was not asked to.

Kurtz: Okay. How would you assess the Vietnam experience and how it affected the rest of your life?

Berry: Well in the first place, I joined the service knowing that I was going to be flying a helicopter in Vietnam, so it didn't come as a surprise to me, and to tell you the honest truth I found it fun. Um, the flying was fun. The fact that you learned to fly the aircraft kinda to the edge of what it was capable of was fun. The formation flying was a kick, that's all there was to it.

Kurtz: Okay.

Berry: So, I think the experience I had in the service, in general, probably a large part the experience in Vietnam, made a much better person out of me. I guess I would describe myself as on the edge of a punk when I went in the [laughs]—

Kurtz: Mm-hm.

Berry: —the army. I certainly squandered my parents' money and school the first time, and just partied rather than studying and so forth. Um, so my experience in the service is all good.

Kurtz: What do you think about our country's Vietnam adventure?

Berry: Well, I studied a little bit about it afterwards. Essentially had no knowledge whatsoever of the political aspect of it before I went to Vietnam. I'm proud I went to Vietnam. I'm proud of what I did in Vietnam. I guess after studying it, I'm not at all certain the country should have been there. I've learned a little bit about Ho Chi Minh, and think Ho Chi Minh was more much interested in reunifying his country than he was in expanding communism around. As a matter of fact, if you look at the, ah, the Declaration of Independence that Ho Chi Minh wrote for North Vietnam, you'd think you were reading our Declaration of Independence.

Kurtz: Not being a native of Madison what did you think about the war protesters?

Berry: I wasn't really involved in it to tell you the honest truth, because I came back in the spring of '68, which had been after '68 Tet and probably when the protests really started in full force, but I spent the next eighteen months in Germany. And, um, we didn't own a television in Germany, so I didn't have much involvement in it. And then after leaving the service, I went back to school with a way more focused attitude [laughs]—

Kurtz: Sure.

Berry: —of studying.

\*\*[1:26:18]Kurtz: Did anybody care that you were a Vietnam veteran when you were going to school?

Berry: Not that I was aware of. I can't remember other students—or asking me if I had served in Vietnam.

Kurtz: How did you end up in Wisconsin?

Berry: Ended up in Wisconsin just through my work, um, I went back to school after the service got an undergraduate degree in Biology and then a Master's degree in [??] Zoology and Ecology. And actually my first job was with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and I worked with them as a biologist for about four years. Then I joined the Fish and Wildlife Service, and I had a great job. I ended up in, ah, National Wildlife Refuge System, and had some really fun jobs managing National Wildlife Refuges on the, on the Mississippi River and in southern Illinois. Then my last job assignment was in Madison having to do with the Wetlands Restoration Program that the Fish and Wildlife Service had in Wisconsin. Soon after I arrived in Madison it was an early-out retirement opportunity, so I retired probably ten months, or so, after I arrived in Madison.

Kurtz: And you liked Madison enough that you just decided to stay here?

Berry: Oh it's just absolutely wonderful. We moved downtown now, and I've been retired for almost eleven years already, which is kinda hard to believe. But, um, we're back in school. I'm doing volunteer work for the Red Cross, 'course volunteer work here for the museum, [Wisconsin Veterans Museum] which I think I'm really gonna enjoy. We're also volunteer ushers at the Overture Center, so we're just really enjoying living in Madison.

Kurtz: Have you joined any veterans groups?

Berry: I was a member of the, ah, VFW [Veterans of Foreign Wars] in Viet—in southern Illinois for a while, but I haven't joined a group here in the Madison area.

Kurtz: Okay. Ah, is there anything that we haven't covered that we should cover, Rick?

Berry: I don't think so.

Kurtz: Okay.

Berry: No, I think you—



Kurtz: Well thank you very much.

[END OF INTERVIEW]