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SFC E7 Bert Campbell, Ret.



SFC E7 Bert Campbell (left)
Interviewed by Tom Davis
[Photos taken by Joan E. Hamilton]



SFC Bert Campbell's Presentation Speech

Edited by Joan E. Hamilton

[*To be edited and approved by SFC Bert Campbell]

Our May 2022 presentation was an interview of Board President SFC E7 Bert Campbell by Tom Davis. SFC E7 Bert Campbell served in Vietnam as a member of a LRRP team (Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol). The Vietnamese knew the LRRPs as "The men with green faces." Camouflaged, silent, and very deadly, the LRRPs operated as six-man teams which were inserted deep inside hostile territory to observe and report the movements of NVA and VC forces in order to bring down the US military's overwhelming firepower on their positions, and to perform highly dangerous raids and ambushes. A breed apart from the regular infantry in Vietnam, these shadow warriors became some of the conflict's most feared units. [Introduction from Flight Lines, editor, Dwight Gruber, May 2022]

SFC Bert Campbell: [1965] My dad had intentions of [inaudible, buzzer]. Didn't know he was talking to me today [joke]. His [father's] intention was once you get out of high school you go to college. I didn't mind high school and I like grade school. I didn't want to go to school. I didn't have any objection to going to school, but I wanted to have some time. So, I had set up and I'd taken my GED and all that stuff. Not GED—[Tom Davis: The exam you take to get into college.] And I'd been accepted to go to college that fall all fine and dandy and I get this idea. Once my dad's mind is made up, you cannot change it. It's carved in stone. If you try, you end up with a multi-month lecture. So, you've got to figure out how to get around it. So, I decided what I was going to do—and I was eighteen when I got into my senior year. I started grade school a year late because my folks moved out here and they didn't get here until December, so that was a bad time to start first grade.

SFC Bert Campbell: So, I'm eighteen when I'm starting my senior year. So, I'm legal to go into the military without anybody's consent. So, I decided what I was going to do was go into the National Guard. I went over to the Armory there on South Shore in Lake Oswego [Oregon]. They had the M42 Duster. It's a twin .40 mm anti-aircraft device. I got accepted there. I took my test probably November-ish. In February, they signed me up. Now, I'm officially in the National Guard.

I told my dad, "This is a hedge, so I don't have to worry about losing my deferment."

That was all fine and dandy with him. The agreement was I'd finish high school, then I'd go to basic. They sent me off to basic the first week of June. I got out of high school the first week of May. In that month, I worked for a construction company stripping concrete foundations. So, I showed up at Fort Campbell, Kentucky. I got into basic-training company. We were in there a week or so. We'd gotten into our classes and all that and I asked the DI to give me an audience with the company commander. He was looking at me kind of funny. So, he got me in there and I asked the company commander can I go full time, full regular Army. Well, he was more than happy to let me go regular Army. So, I went ahead and signed the papers. Now, I'm no longer in the National Guard. I'm in the regular Army.

Audience Question: What year?

SFC Bert Campbell: [19]65. A long time ago. I didn't say anything to my folks or anybody. Only a couple of people in my basic training company even knew that I had gone regular Army.

I went through basic. Went to Fort Sill, Oklahoma. I was supposed to be a cannon cocker on a 105 and 155 [mm] Howitzer. I went through that training. In the meantime, I got a drivers license. Even though I got all the training, most of what I did was hauling ammunition for different gun crews. So, I got done with the training there and now I'm officially a cannon cocker. When they shipped the rest of the battery out, they said, "Come hither, young man, we've got a job for you."

They recycled me and made me a forward observer. That was artillery spotting. So, I finished that. I had thirty days before I had to show up at Fort Riley, Kansas. I was put into the 1st Infantry. I left Fort Sill and went up to Des Moines and spent a couple of days with my grandparents and then I went home and I got about 2 ½ to 3 weeks and I've got to report back to Fort Riley. That's when I let my folks know that I was no longer in the National Guard. I am active military. It took my old man a long time to come out of the overheads. He was a little irritated. There wasn't anything he could do. So, I went to Fort Riley and was there three or four months and then went to Vietnam, An Loc, which is north and west of Saigon about seventy-five miles. I spent the next year there as a forward observer.

Tom Davis: What year did you go to Vietnam?

SFC Bert Campbell: December of [19]65. I came home December of [19]66. So, I was a forward observer and we wandered around there. Life went on. So be it. When I left Vietnam and came back to Fort Riley—let's back up.

SFC Bert Campbell: Twice Charlie tried to get inside our wire. The first time, we completely stopped him. The second time, he got inside but didn't hold it. In the meantime, somebody got his face in the wrong place. I got hit in the nose with an AK-47. Kind of made a mess out of things.

Tom Davis: With a bullet or with a gun?

SFC Bert Campbell: The butt of the rifle. Kind of swelled up. Busted my nose pretty bad. They sent me down to Saigon for a while. The whole side of my face here was shiny. That bruise come clear over into here and clear up into here and down into here. It was several weeks before they even knew that I still had an eyeball here. It all came back to life and everything. About the time that I was starting to feel pretty good and I'm looking around and, you know, this hospital's got some nice-looking nurses. They booted by butt back up on the line and that took care of that. So, I got back up there and got done with everything we were doing up there and I came home. When they broke my nose, it closed my sinuses up completely. So, when I was there at Fort Riley, the doctor there was going to operate on it and do a Roto-rooter up there to make everything fine and dandy.

I asked him, I says, "Do you have to do this surgery here?"

"Well, no. Why?"

I said, "Could you do it at Madigan [Army Medical Center] up in the Seattle area?"

"What do you want to go there for?"

"My folks live in Portland. I think I could sneak down there for a couple of days."

[He said,] "Oh, I think we can work that out."

So, they shipped me out to Fort Lewis. I did the surgery at Madigan over there and then went down to my folks' place and spent about two weeks down there and come back up and then got a release and went back to Fort Riley. By the time I got back there, I started taking other classes. First thing I took was demolition at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. And then I took a survival class at Fort Polk, Louisiana. In the meantime, I had re-enlisted and the purpose was because my first enlistment was a three-year enlistment and I wanted to go into the Rangers and I needed a four-year continuous enlistment. So, I was four-plus years when I started my Ranger training so that they would accept me. In the meantime, I did demolition at [Fort] Leonard Wood, survival at [Fort] Polk and went to [Fort] Bragg for Jump School, [Fort] Benning for Ranger School, Sniper School. I loved training. I finally ended up at Fort Benning and that's where then they assembled our group and shipped us back to Vietnam in January of [19]68.

Tom Davis: Were you a LRRP [Long-Range Reconnaissance Patrol] Then?

SFC Bert Campbell: I was a LRRP.

Tom Davis: Did you know what you are getting into?

SFC Bert Campbell: Pretty much. They're a little more intense on occasions. But, no, my eyes were open.

Tom Davis: In that book, it said they only accepted volunteers.

SFC Bert Campbell: Oh yeah

Tom Davis: So, you volunteered for that.

SFC Bert Campbell: Oh yeah. You've got to be a crazy [indicated quotes with hands] to do this stuff.

Audience member [male]: You were about nineteen at this time? Eighteen or nineteen?

SFC Bert Campbell: I was nineteen when I went over, actually, when I went to Vietnam my first time, I was twenty because my birthday's the 21st of December. So, I was twenty my first year in Nam and then I'd have been twenty-three years old. Do you have something you want to ask?

Audience member [female]: I was just going to say that poke in the nose probably did something to your brain. That's why you volunteered.

Audience member [male]: He's an American hero.

SFC Bert Campbell: My radio marked--. The forward observation team was two people. We were both, actually, forward observers, but one is designated as the forward observer and the other is referred to as your RTO, radio/telephone operator. Mike Webb was my RTO, my radio operator. Maybe four days after I went to Saigon, he showed up down there. I'm not sure if he walked out the back door and took a little walk or not. I don't know. I didn't ask. He didn't tell. But he took a picture and there's a picture of my face. It looks bad. My niece has the picture. She's the family archivist. She's got boxes of pictures. I think it's still in there. My folks had the picture and I think it's still in the box. I never asked her.

Tom Davis: You probably don't want to see it again, right?

SFC Bert Campbell: No, I remember what I looked like.

Tom Davis: When you went over this time when you were a LRRP, what was your rank?

SFC Bert Campbell: The Forward Observer carries the rank of Sargeant, Buck Sargeant. An RTO carries the rank of Corporal. So, when I went over in [19]65, I was a Corporal. Middle [or] end of January of [19]66 when the forward observer rotated out, I got my third stripe. So, I was a Buck Sargeant. So, I went through all of the training as a Buck Sargeant, but when you're in school, you have no rank. You have the rank on your sleeve, but your rank has no authority. You might as well be a slick sleeve. So, when we formed the team up, there was three Buck Sergeants and the rest of them were Corporals: myself, Keith, my assistant, and Earl who eventually was our point man. I had three days more time in grade than Keith did and about two weeks more than Earl did, so I got the rocker. It wasn't that I was more qualified. There wasn't anybody in that team that was more or less qualified than the others. We all had eight years of combat behind us when we went back over there. I ended up there the--.

Tom Davis: Were you the team leader?

SFC Bert Campbell: Team leader. And I was an E-6 at that time. So, we wandered all around there and raised a little hell.

Tom Davis: When you'd go on missions and that, there's no rank or anything on your uniforms is there?

SFC Bert Campbell: No and you don't refer to anybody at rank. If you happen to run into an officer over there, the last thing you do is salute him [or] you'd just put a big target on his back.

Tom Davis: In one of the books I read, the team leader was a PFC and had Lieutenants and Sergeants on there and the PFC was in charge. Whatever he said, they obeyed. They never questioned him ever. He was in charge totally. Imagine that [inaudible] a Lieutenant or higher. That's the way it was.

SFC Bert Campbell: Lieutenants don't like the responsibility.

Tom Davis: Were you a six-man team?

SFC Bert Campbell: The whole squad was ten man, but it was intended to break down into two five-man teams. On two different occasions, we broke down into five two-man teams.

We had a Major, Carl Wilk-in-son. Let's back up. When I went back to Vietnam the second time, I was stationed at Tan Son Nhut Air Force Base. We had concrete barracks we lived in that had hot-and-cold running water, air conditioning. I mean it was like the Hilton Hotel. But, in two years I think we may have spent five or six weeks total there. It was our mailing address. When we weren't out in the field, that's where we were and Carl, the Major, he would call us in. Well, he'd call me in, usually, and he'd tell us we're going someplace. Either I'd go back and tell the squad we were going out on a mission or he'd—we'd get together and we'd sit down and I'd say, "This is what we're going to do."

We'd discuss it and, "Anybody got any ideas?"

There was an open forum. There wasn't anybody in there that had more knowledge than I did. I didn't have more knowledge than they did and beings that run this together nobody's going to cut somebody's throat. And so, when we left we knew what we were going to do. Once we were out there, we just did our thing.

Tom Davis: I read in a book [that] said sometimes when you landed in your area of operations, it was lucky if they made 1,000 yards in a day. You went so slow. Is that true?

SFC Bert Campbell: There was times, yeah. There's times you landed there and you ran like—got away because there were other things that were happening that you didn't want to happen. Basically, yeah, once the chopper left, you would sit there a long time—thirty, forty, fifty minutes, about an hour maybe. And when everybody's quiet and everything's quiet, then you'd just start easing out and, when you'd walk, you'd walk real slow. Not that you want to go slow. If you walk slow, you're quiet and you want to be as quiet and as invisible as you can be. Don't want them seeing you. If we were there at Tan Son Nhut and we'd been there a couple [or] three, four days, you'd been there [and] got all showered up, cleaned up and everything. Before you'd go out, you would quit showering. When you used soap, you used a non-scented soap. You didn't use deodorant. You didn't use toothpaste. You didn't use aftershave because you could smell that 100 yards away, 200 yards away. So, when you went out, you stunk. You stunk. There was no doubt about it. But then, again, the Vietnamese—a lot of times we would have a Vietnamese scout, Kit Carson scout we called him—and we went out to scout. He stunk. That's just the way it is. The Vietnamese had cigarettes. We had cigarettes. There's all the difference in the world in what cigarette smoke smelled like American and Vietnamese. So, what you did is you made sure that you were part of the world. You stunk.

SFC Bert Campbell: They had a tablet you'd chew and it'd take care of that fuzzy mouth you'd get in the mornings and then you didn't have to brush your teeth or anything like that. If for some reason--even if there was an opportunity for water the way you'd jump in and kind of wash off—you didn't want to get in the water because there's leeches and stuff like that. So, you didn't want that. So, you know, you stunk. You'd come back into civilization and some people walked away from you.

Tom Davis: When you went on missions, how long would they be typically?

SFC Bert Campbell: The shortest one was twenty-seven hours. The longest one was six weeks, I think. We went up north and homesteaded in that area [with] the mountain guards. We were doing some work with them. We actually lived in their village and they fed us. I have no idea what they fed us, but it tasted good. They say they eat dog and cat over there. I may have eaten it, but it tasted just fine.

Tom Davis: In the book, they gave a list of what each man took. You won't believe this. Six M26 fragmentation grenades per person/per member. One concussion grenade per member, two CS [continuous discharge?] grenades. What's a CS?

SFC Bert Campbell: Tear gas.

Tom Davis: Oh, tear gas, okay.

SFC Bert Campbell: I don't know what CS stands for. It is tear gas. That's a chemical name.

Tom Davis: Two Claymore mines per member.

SFC Bert Campbell: Yep

Tom Davis: Three strobe lights per team. Two signal panels and two signal mirrors per team. Three lensatic compasses per team. Three pen gun fire sets per team.

SFC Bert Campbell: Keep talking.

Tom Davis: Three smoke grenades per member, two pin [inaudible]. One SOI [signal operating instructions?]-whatever that is—per team. One poncho liner per member. One can foot powder per member. One pair of extra socks per man.

SFC Bert Campbell: That's a lensatic compass.

Tom Davis: One first aide bag per team. One sling rope and snap link per member. Two radios per team. They name what they are. One emergency radio per team. Two extra batteries per radio. Two extra headsets for two radios. One field [inaudible] antenna per team. Five days ration per man, eight during monsoon season. Five quarts of water per member. When you think about all this and you'd load all in one rucksack, right? How did you get into it? It weighed about 100, is it?

SFC Bert Campbell: 100 pounds was a normal load.

Tom Davis: How'd you get into it or on?

SFC Bert Campbell: Everybody had their own way. Sometimes, two guys would pick the rucksack up and you'd step into it. Sometimes, you'd lay down and crawl under the rucksack, roll over, get up on all fours next to a tree or something and pull yourself up. One hundred pounds is a lot of weight and it frequently went north of 100 pounds by quite a bit.

Audience Question: At that time you were what? About 120 [pounds]?

SFC Bert Campbell: 160, actually, I went into Basic at 148 and got out at 162 and ever since that time, my weight has gone between 160 and 165. So, I mean, I'm still basically the weight then that I am now. I can still fit in my uniform. I know that because a couple of years ago when we had the forest fires down there in Detroit [Oregon], we got evacuated and we took my uniform and my medals with me—us, my wife and me. My wife was with me there. But I put the blouse on and it fit just fine. Once we got back to the house, I'm not sure where the uniform is nor where my medals are, but they're in the house.

Tom Davis: Weapons? What did you carry for weapons?

SFC Bert Campbell: There was four qualified snipers in our team. When I say a qualified sniper, a sniper works in a two-man team like a forward observation team is a two-man team. You have your shooter and your spotter and it doesn't matter whether you're shooting or spotting, you are both fully-qualified snipers. My rifle was a 700 Remington aught 6 [06] and it was very well tweaked. Without any problems, you could put five rounds in a thumbnail at 100 yards.

Tom Davis: Is that the M14?

SFC Bert Campbell: 700 Remington is a very much civilian weapon. Your M14 like your M16 is a semi-automatic weapon. Actually, they had fully automatic, but they typically are semi-automatic. You had full automatic would be SAWs, squad-automatic weapons. Every squad would have a SAW. So that was fully automatic. The rest of them had the block out on it, so you couldn't make it fully automatic. But when I was a forward observer, because we were in places that it was only Mike and I and we were four or five miles from anybody, and if we got overrun, we had acquired—I was issued an M14. Mike was issued a .45. When I was working as a radio op before I had a .45, somebody forgot to turn it in, so now I've got a .45 and an M14. We scrounged Mike an M14 and then we scrounged the trigger group out of them and make both of those weapons fully auto. As an FO team, it was two rifles and two pistols. It was only supposed to be half that. With the LRRPs, the snipers had their aught six [06]. That was a single-shot, bolt action. As far as the rest of the LRRPs team of which we all were that, we had M16s that were somewhat modified. We'd put a 10-power Redfield on there that had some infrared-type capabilities, so we could see places that we weren't supposed to see. The flash suppressor on that had been removed and highly modified and it was a silencer. Both the M14 and the M16 were dash-check operated which, when you fired the rifle, out toward the end of the barrel was a port that went into a port that went down that helped to operate the bolt so that it would cycle. On the 16s, we had a thing up there. You vented that so that it didn't cycle and there was a latch that dropped over the back of the bolt so that it would not come out and became a single shot. With that silencer on there, about the only noise you'd hear is a [quiet noise] and you could, if you put it on fully automatic and let it cycle, you'd hear the noise of the rifle cycling. You wouldn't necessarily hear the muzzle. And then we all had .45s. So, I had three weapons. Keith, Earl, and Ben had three weapons. We were the four snipers. The rest of the squad had two weapons.

Tom Davis: With all the stuff I read that you'd carry, it would make noise. You had to sound proof that stuff, didn't you? See, what I read was sometimes they'd tape the stuff down.

SFC Bert Campbell: [Inaudible] All GIs are issued a canteen that hangs on your hip and it sets in a canvas pouch and there's a canteen cup in there. It's a stainless-steel thing. That's your cup. You've got a mess kit and you've got that. Then the canteen goes in there and that'll rattle. So, in order to keep it from making noise, you'd cut the toe out of a pair of socks and you'd slip it over the canteen so it went in there [and] it didn't shake and rattle. You'd pad anything, tape anything down so that it did not rattle. You did not carry stuff in your pants pocket [because] it'd rattle. I didn't realize how much noise that made until three or four years ago I got hearing aids and I'm walking around and I'm hearing change rattling in my pocket that I didn't even know about.

Tom Davis: I read, too, in one of those books that, before you went on a mission, you got all your gear and stuff on and then you had to jump up and down and see if it made noises. If it did, you'd get—

SFC Bert Campbell: And you'd poke into stuff, anything you could do to make it make a noise, you tried. Before you went out, each individual would look at the other individuals to make sure that everything [end of first video] was the way it needed to be in case somebody overlooked something.

Audience Question: How about a belt buckle?

SFC Bert Campbell: We used a GI belt buckle, [start of second video] and when they're pulled up tight, they do not make noise. At that time, we used the old style, the web, and the end of it would go through and there's a bar in there and [you'd] pull it tight. Those don't make noise. But then after that, then they went to a different style which made even less noise. But we all had a web-gear pistol belt and suspenders and they didn't make noise. But your canteen was on there, so you checked to make sure that didn't make noise. If you did carry a canteen cup, you'd only carry one. Six, eight, ten canteens were not uncommon for us to carry at any one time, but they were just a canteen in a pouch. So, that was all quiet.

Tom Davis: About the food, there was something in one book I wanted to ask you what this was. They called it a John Wayne bar or "greeny". What was that? Does that ring a bell? It's not important. I was just curious about it. Green [inaudible].

SFC Bert Campbell: If you had C-rats, sometimes you'd get a little candy bar, but they'd always give you two Chicklets in each C-rat. Then, you'd get four cigarettes. They'd be Camels, Pall Malls, Lucky Strikes, Marlboros.

Tom Davis: But you didn't take them in the field, though, did you?

SFC Bert Campbell: No. You might scrounge some of Charlie's cigarettes, but you didn't smoke your own.

Tom Davis: In the film, did the clothing pretty well represent what you wore?

SFC Bert Campbell: Yeah. Once in a while, you'd get lucky and get camo. I don't think we ever saw that more than three or four times.

Tom Davis: Camouflage?

SFC Bert Campbell: Yeah. Otherwise, it was just plain old OD [olive drab].

Tom Davis: Oh really? So, you got none of those tiger stripes or any of that kind of stuff?

SFC Bert Campbell: Once a while, you'd get that, but what you'd do is take—we'd get new fatigues when you'd come home anyway. Cut slots and put grass in there.

Tom Davis: Mess yourself up, huh?

SFC Bert Campbell: Yeah, you made your own ghillie suit.

Tom Davis: Grease paint, would you put that on your face?

SFC Bert Campbell: Oh yeah

Tom Davis: Black and green?

SFC Bert Campbell: Black and green, two shades of green. And when you'd get done, you can take your face and stick it in a pile of brush and you won't even see it.

SFC Bert Campbell: If you do see it, you've got to see something that gives away and then you look real close and you'll see it. But, you're invisible.

Tom Davis: How close did a Viet Cong or Vietnamese come to you and not know you were there?

SFC Bert Campbell: Eighteen inches

Tom Davis: Eighteen inches? Can you imagine that? Can you imagine being close to somebody and not even know he's there.

SFC Bert Campbell: You can be close enough you can smell his foul breath. That's pretty close.

Tom Davis: Did you hold your breath while they were going by?

SFC Bert Campbell: Your heart stopped. You quit breathing. You didn't move. If they caught any one of us, it's ugly. When they're done with you your mother would not recognize you.

Audience Question: How did you go to the bathroom?

SFC Bert Campbell: How? Like we do now, carefully. You buried everything. I never had a problem where I couldn't take care of it properly. But if you'd get in a fire fight or something like that and if you've got a problem, you just take care of it while you're fighting.

Tom Davis: I read, too, that at night you guys were like the spokes of a wheel with your feet touching. That's so somebody could kick you maybe in your foot without making a sound?

SFC Bert Campbell: If you weren't in a wheel, you could reach over and tap somebody. You were never out of touch, literally, with your fellows. Now, if they dropped a mortar round in there to screw up the waterworks--.

Tom Davis: You can visualize that all their feet are touching with their heads facing out like the spokes of a wheel.

SFC Bert Campbell: It's full 360-degree observation.

Audience Question: How many teams were there at a time? Was this just one group?

SFC Bert Campbell: My organization was one team. We were a ten-man team. A typical LRRPs team was four to six people GI and then you would have your Kit Carson scout. You may have one or two or three of them. And then that would make your team. So, you could be as few as one and as big as mine was, was ten and I guess there were some larger teams.

SFC Bert Campbell: The barracks we were in in Tan Son Nhut were big teams. They were six-, eight-, ten-man teams and there was a building about the size of this [Elk's Club room] and there were rooms in there and the room was locked and that was our home. If we weren't there [and] we were out in the field, all the keys were put in a box and given to Carl, our handler, the Major. And he'd have in there. All of our personal gear was in there and nobody touched it.

Dwight Gruber: I think the question was how many teams were there?

SFC Bert Campbell: How many teams? Bazillion. There were tons of teams. I don't know, hundreds. But, with that said, our group and the group that we were associated with were more into special ops. We did more demolition and assassination than anything.

SFC Bert Campbell: We would go out and take somebody out, specifically to take a person out or take a group of people out. As far as a LRRPs team, they had a whole pot full of them out there.

Don Keller: There's two things I want to mention real quick. If you ever get a chance, go to Indianapolis to the Indianapolis War Museum. They've got a room that's about this size. Way up above you coming down is a helicopter that's coming down to make an insertion.

SFC Bert Campbell: A Huey?

Don Keller: [Affirmative] But, you're going through this little kind of winding trail [with] plexi[glass] on both sides of you. We were going through and I was kind of going, "Oh kids."

"This makes it look like what it would've looked like in Vietnam, right?"

And I go, "Kind of."

"What do you mean?"

"Look close."

"Yeah? It's a jungle"

"No, look close."

SFC Bert Campbell: People hid.

Don Keller: And if you look, there's LRRPs on this side of you and Charlie on this [other] side, but you can't see them. You have to stop and really look to see them. It was an amazing display.

SFC Bert Campbell: Charlie was quite talented, too.

Don Keller: When I was in college studying to be a police officer, I went ahead and took the FBI course for explosives. I don't know how many of you—you mentioned Claymores. They had them on this video. Have you ever seen what a Claymore will do? We had to take a class. [Inaudible] college kid driving my brother's [19]62 station wagon, an old Rambler Station Wagon. So, what do they decide to choose, but they're going to blow up a Rambler Station Wagon and they set the wagon right here. They set the Claymore right here [at] window level and set the Claymore off.

SFC Bert Campbell: Destroyed it.

Don Keller: The dashboard was gone. The steering wheel was gone. The posts were gone. They're very, very impressive weapons.

SFC Bert Campbell: It's impressive. And when you get them in six or eight feet apart and you set off groups of them, nothing survives and nothing's any taller than that when you're done.

Tom Davis: When the Claymore's exploded, does it have any ball bearings or anything in it like that?

SFC Bert Campbell: Part of the package becomes shrapnel. It's like a grenade. You've got a piece of explosive inside and you've got metal outside.

Audience Question: What was the deepest insertion that you made into North Vietnam, that you can tell us?

SFC Bert Campbell: Think I'm going to pass on that one. I will say this, it was way up north.

Tom Davis: I'm very tempted to have you tell the story about going in and getting all those officers, but I think I'll start with your first mission and probably work up to it.

SFC Bert Campbell: Well, the first mission was in February of [19]68. We went to Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Total mission was twenty-seven hours. We left Tan Son Nhut in our typical three Hueys and we went that way for a while and we went that way for a while and then they put us on a different bunch of choppers and we went that way for a while and that way for a while and that way for a while and they put us on a fixed-wing plane and we went off over here someplace. Then, they put us in a truck and they wandered around the countryside and we pulled up to this building. That was where we were going. We were in the chopper. I knew we were going to Phnom Penh, but the route we got there, I don't know. It's because they were doing some crazy things so that nobody knew where we were. When they'd send us out, I think you can put six people plus crew on a Huey and we were a ten-man team, so we had to go in two birds and they never sent two birds—if they were sending somebody out with a single chopper, they would send two choppers. One is none. Two is one. If something happened and you were the only one, then you'd have a backup to get you out. When they were sending us someplace, if we went down, we needed backup. Also, with the third bird, they gave us a cover bird when we were on the ground, like if they went in to pick us up. We got two choppers on the ground. We got a cover bird up there giving us overhead cover. Anyhow, we got up to Phnom Penh and we got out of a truck and there's a square building and it had two doors on it. We knew the layout before we got there and we eased in there and got out. Five of us went down one side. Five of us went down the other side. In each group, there was one each 10-pound sledge and a guy walked up and BAM hit the door and it blew open. On either side, there was a guy and he just sprayed a full magazine of M16 ammunition in there and stepped back and a second guy did that and the next guy up threw a pair of grenades in there. They went BOOM. Took four Willie Pete grenades that had extended fuses on them because the fuse wouldn't light off for like ten minutes. Threw that in there and walked over behind the truck and disappeared. I think there was like twenty Viet Cong officers in there and our purpose was to eliminate them. Ten minutes after we were there, the [inaudible] went off and they were well done when it was done. Then, we got back down. We got on the airplane.

SFC Bert Campbell: We got in the truck and went someplace and they had a—I've never seen one since—it looked like a U2, a skinny-winged unit and a long skinny fuselage and it had a pointy nose and it had a landing gear on it that looked like mosquito legs. Long, ugly-looking plane, but it fit all ten of us in and that took us from there straight back to Tan Son Nhut in one step.

Tom Davis: You've got another one on here called "Mama-San". You were doing chores. What was that?

SFC Bert Campbell: Mama-San. We were at Laos. Our M16s had silencers on them. So, you didn't hear nothing. We'd been surveying this field for a while for something like a week [or] ten days and we were ready to leave and we were bored and we were looking for VC and we decided there was none there. And there was this Mama-San out there. For the life of me, I don't know how both men and women can squat down, feet flat on the ground, their butt sitting on the ground and wrap their arms around their legs and work. That to me is the most awkward, uncomfortable position there was/is.

SFC Bert Campbell: Anyhow, this Mama-San's over there doing her chores or whatever it is and I'm feeling a little bit ornery and I'm in the brush and I put a round in a 16 and boom [quiet] and it bounced around off the ground right beside her leg. She doesn't hear the noise. This old gal jumps up and dances around looking, making all kinds of noise. She must've gyrated around there for about 10 minutes and she gets back down and goes back to work. I let her get into that and I put a round over here and she went berserk. Another ten to fifteen minutes, she finally settles down and she starts to work and she's looking like this, you know, like this. She finally gets squared away. I put a round right underneath her butt between her legs and I never saw her after that.

Tom Davis: She took off, huh?

SFC Bert Campbell: She disappeared. Not exactly, the best way to make friends, but that's what you do when you're bored.

Tom Davis: You've got one here [paper] called "the general reunited". What is that? The general reunited. That's in your handwriting. If it doesn't make sense, skip it. Okay, M-A-D-E-A Pass.

SFC Bert Campbell: Mu Gia Pass, it's a pass, the highway running north and south. Mu Gia Pass is above the A Shau Valley and the A Shau [Ashau] Valley's one of the stints you don't want to go into. Mu Gia Pass was, they would run all their supplies from north down south. Unbeknownst to me, my fishing partner—who I didn't know at the time—is Air Force. He was on a C-130. Mu Gia Pass, the VC would run their convoy down there during the night and my fishing partner would be up above there in a C-130 kicking flares up at night. And then the Navy and Air Force or whoever fighters would go over there and take the convoys out. Well, the VC figured out that, if they didn't run after dark, they wouldn't kick flares and they wouldn't get blown up. So, they quit and then they'd start running during the day when there was nobody up there. Well, they'd sent us up to Mu Gia Pass during the night and we'd mine the pass and when they'd come down during the day, we'd blow them up. So, then they decided it was a good idea to quit doing this during the day and then they'd go back to going up there at night and George would go out there with flares and kick flares.

SFC Bert Campbell: I didn't know it, but he and I were in the same area at the same time. He was a crew chief on a C-130 and was in Phnom Phen a week before I was, going in there to pick up some kind of dignitary and his entourage and his cows and his pigs and all that and put them in the C-130. He said it was a mess when they left. It was kind of a strange thing that the two of us were in those two places and we didn't know each other. [End of second video]

Tom Davis: You've got something here [paper], the Min-ton-len Rubber Plantation.

SFC Bert Campbell: The rubber plantation. Michelin. Michelin-Goodyear is my handwriting. Michelin had down in South Vietnam a huge rubber plantation and there was probably two companies of Army down there that were outside. It was a no-no to send bullet in there. The GIs could not go into the plantation, but they were guarding it because they didn't want the VC bothering that. They sent us down there and we would wander around outside there. It was kind of interesting. Actually, it was pretty good duty down there. Nobody was down there, but it was we'd go down there and look. That was probably one of the safest trips we had.

Tom Davis: You have down here, "Rescued a colonel".

SFC Bert Campbell: We were up north ten miles from Hanoi maybe and we were up there watching some stuff going on up there and we were ready to come out the next day and—I don't know—must've been 9 [or] 10 o'clock in the morning. You see this contrail through [inaudible] and then you see this other contrail come up there and BOOM. The plane explodes and a parachute comes out of it. So, Charlie shot down one of our planes and the pilot got out. Well, we'd been up there for ten days or so and we knew the area. We've got a crick [creek] down, river down here.

We're sitting there and I looked at Keith and I says, "You know, that guy's in deep sh_ _." If he's smart--now he's in the air, so he can see what's down below. I says, "He's going to come down right about over there. Well, if he's smart, he'll go just over here and grab the crick and he can follow it out."

Any time you're lost or [to] an escape an evasion, you find water and take it downhill and it'd put you out at a sea or big river or something like that. That's the best way to get out.

I says, "You know, in about two hours, he's going to be down here at this rock."

There's this rock around half the size of [inaudible].

I says, "He's going to show up down there. I think we need to help him."

So we sat there two hours or so. There was this noise coming through the woods and we sat there and this guy in a flight suit comes around. [Start of third video] He's behind the rock and you could hear him huffing and puffing and we're sitting there. He started to get his breath back and I says, "Sir, do you need some help?"

Tom Davis: He probably jumped straight up in the air.

SFC Bert Campbell: No, he flinched and he's looking around like that, looking. He started to relax. I says, "Seriously, sir, do you need some help?"

He's looking and I says, "Don't panic."

I just stood up like this and his eyes were this big around. I says, "Now, don't panic, now, don't panic."

And I went like this and nine more guys stood up.

Tom Davis: He never saw you?

SFC Bert Campbell: He had no idea we were there until I started making noise. I says, "You're kind of in a bad way right now, aren't you?!"

He said, "Yeah."

I said, "Well, we talked to our people and we called for extraction."

[Inaudible] the next day, but any time something went wrong, we could get hold of people and, if they could get somebody up to get us, they would get us out.

I said, "We've already set it up. They should be here in about two hours [or] an hour and a half, something like that. So, if you want you're welcome to tag along with us."

So, yeah, we communicated there and I said, "But, we're going to have to do something. You're going to have most of at least a platoon of VC chasing you and they're not going to want to let you go."

So I says, "Here's what we're going to do. You and the rest of the crew go up to our extraction point and I'm going to take all the grenades and all the Claymores and I'm going down the trail and I'm going to set a booby trap." Because, maybe a quarter of a mile down the trail is a big patch of elephant grass, a great place to set a booby trap.

Well, the Colonel seemed to think he wanted to help us.

I said, "Sir, with all due respect, you ain't got no rank. I'm the man in charge."

And so he ranted and raved. Finally, I says, "Okay."

So, one of the guys gave him his M16 and he had a .38 with six bullets. So, one of the guys gave him his M16 and I collected up all the Claymores. I think we had 8 maybe and then six or eight fragmentation grenades. I says, "Here's what we're going to do."

We scrounged junk and brush and dusted out a lot of footprints and then we had him backup and step in the last steps where he was and then I went ahead and I wiped out all the tracks and he followed me down and we went past the elephant grass and then he and I curled and came backwards and we set the Claymores. We came from back here and we were going this way and set the Claymores going this way with the last 2 set coming this way. And we stretched them out over 50 yards maybe and I think we had 8. We had 4 down each side. In over 50 yards, that's a lot of devastation. So, we were up at the far end at the front end of it and they were shooting that way. When they went by and everybody was in there, we touched them all off.

Tom Davis: This is the Viet Cong patrol?

SFC Bert Campbell: Yeah, they were chasing him. And we set them all off and put the kibosh on them and took the frags and threw them in there and then BT-ed out of there and then flipped up and got on the extraction, the choppers, and they took us home.

Tom Davis: I'm sure nobody after that was chasing you.

SFC Bert Campbell: No. We didn't leave anybody alive down there. So, they took us down and they refueled us in Play Cu or someplace like that and then we went on down to Tan Son Nhut and we parted company with the Colonel.

The last thing he said to me, he said, "When you get back to the States, I'm buying you dinner."

He went on his way.

Tom Davis: There's a lot more here on missions, but he told me a story when he got out of the service and he was twenty-four years old and you went to the university. You take it from there.

SFC Bert Campbell: I went to Oregon Tech.

Tom Davis: Tell them the story. You've got to hear it. We've got to be out of here by 2 o'clock, so I don't want you to miss this story.

SFC Bert Campbell: Most everybody's gone to higher education and you're a freshman and the upper class seem to think they're going to play games with you and you've got to wear a little beanie or something like this. Well, down there, they said we've got to wear a beanie. If you don't wear your beanie, a couple of these gorillas on the football team will take and put a rook stamp across your forehead. My temperament in life at that time was not good. I forgot to wear my beanie one day and we were going to lunch and we were in a line going into the cafeteria and these football players come up down there and wanted to know where my beanie was. I says it was in my room.

[He] says, "You're supposed to wear it at school."

"Well, I don't have it on."

"Well, go to your room and get it."

"No, I'm going to eat lunch."

SFC Bert Campbell: "If you don't go to the room and get it, we're going to put a rook stamp on your forehead."

I said, "I don't think so."

"You've got to go to the room and get your beanie or you're going to get a rook stamp."

"I don't think so."

So, they decided to put a rook stamp on my face, on my forehead. And the two on either side were linemen. So, they're pretty good-sized dudes. The guy in the center with the rook stamp was a halfback or something like that. The guy on my right went to grab me and I turned slightly to my left and the guy on the left came toward me. While he came toward me, I ducked down around and I took my heel and stomped on the guy on the right's foot and he made some funny noises and I stomped on his foot and went down. I'm hunkered down and I got my left foot on the inside of his left leg and I'm down and I slid my hand up his crotch and I took my other arm and hit the outside of his knee. It took about three times before it cracked. And I got up and I went around the back and this guy is now down on the ground making funny noises and the guy that was on my right, he was coming this way and he turned back around to move that way and I caught his arm in the right place and I gave it a twist and pushed him and yanked on that and his elbow and his shoulder went crack and made funny noises. The other guy, I was down low and I come around the front and come up and I hit him in the solar plexus. If you hit somebody in the solar plexus, it's going to do bad things. But, you usually hit them this way. If you come down this way, it's worse. He made some funny noises and he bent over and ran into my knee. When we got done, there was three of them laying on the ground having problems and I walked across all three of their faces and I then went up and ate lunch. The people were kind of looking at me kind of funny. When I got done, I went up to the room and, when I got up there, there were some people up there that said, "The dean of men would like to have a talk with you."

SFC Bert Campbell: So, we went down and had a talk with the dean of men. He says, "You know, you could get thrown out of school for that."

"For what? They assaulted me. I defended myself."

So, he grumbled a bit and we finally come to an agreement that we don't do this no more and I said, "Well, you just don't bother me and you won't get this problem."

So, I went back to my room and finished up. This is all part of the first week getting oriented and all that.

Audience Question: Did you get your beanie?

SFC Bert Campbell: No, no. The two linemen never played football again. I screwed up his knee and screwed up the other one's arm. And one of the backfield guys, it was late in the season before he played football again.

Tom Davis: Because he had forty stitches, wasn't it?

SFC Bert Campbell: Well, he had a bunch of stitches. Three of them had a potful of stitches. It was a day or so later, the coach and a couple of other goons confronted me and I kind of got in the coach's face and I says, "You know, you can bring your whole football team out here and you won't play football this year."

SFC Bert Campbell: After that, they tried to bully me and I didn't bully. So, they left and I walked down to the ag building down there and I walked up to the dean's secretary and I said, "I need to see the dean now."

[She said,] "He's busy."

I said, "I need to see him NOW!"

"Well, he's busy."

I said, "NOW!"

She went in and got him and I says, "Look, we had a problem and the problem was solved. If you don't tell your coach and his goons to get off my back, we're going to escalate that problem and I don't think you want that."

So, they agreed to maybe leave me be. Then, that would've been in September. Let's back up a minute. When I got out of the service, I got an 11-month early out, but in order to get that 11-month early out I had to find a reserve unit or some kind of reserve unit or National Guard unit to go into. I was able to go into a National Guard unit in Klamath Falls and they had a slot for an E-7, so I went right in at full rank. So, I think it was the November drill they had to have a Class A inspection with fancy dress uniforms. Being as I wasn't exactly regular Army—I was a Ranger and I was Airborne—I wore a black beret. Because I was Airborne in my Class A uniform, I could blouse and wear my jump boots. So, when I put my Class A uniform on, and I put a good chunk of ribbons up here. I had a blue and a burgundy rope on either shoulder. I was an E-7, so I had three chevrons and two rockers. I had six hash marks down here. I had marksmanship badges. I didn't look like these fancy Generals, but I got a little bit. And so I was living in the dorm and I was gone like at 7:30 in the morning--because most people weren't up—to the drill. When I come back, I walked in there with this uniform. Now, they were looking at me a couple of months earlier with the damage I did. Then, they were looking at that and I got more looks, but they let me be.

Tom Davis: Do you have your bayonet handy?

SFC Bert Campbell: The broken one?

Tom Davis: Yeah

SFC Bert Campbell: I elected not to bring that.

Tom Davis: Okay. Do you want to tell them about that or not?

SFC Bert Campbell: No, that's—.

Tom Davis: We probably ought to call it. We've got to be out at of here at 2 o'clock.

Audience Question: How do I find out if somebody was a LRRP?

SFC Bert Campbell: How would you find out? I really don't know. I don't know.

Audience Question: A guy I dated about thirty years ago sounded like [inaudible], anything exactly.

SFC Bert Campbell: Was he crazy?

Audience Question: Yeah

SFC Bert Campbell: I think you would have to access his military records and where would you access that? I don't know.

Audience Question: It's just getting deep into the records, right?

SFC Bert Campbell: I can get into my dad's records because I'm family. My fishing partner—who is retired Air Force—had the same rank I did in the Air Force and I pretty much know what he did. So, I don't have any desire to get into his. I don't think I could access his records because I am not family. I really don't know. Call the VA. Call the Veterans Administration. But I don't think a lot of that is open to the public. I would try the VA like on pill hill. I would try there.

Tom Davis: Thanks, Bert.

[Applause]