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Interview
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Interview conducted by Lenore Fenn
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INT: Where did you grow up? Where did you go to school?

BB: I was born in Everett, Massachusetts, had most of my schooling in Everett, Massachusetts; graduated Everett High School in 1966. I was seventeen and a half years old, and had prior to graduation signed up in a delayed entry program to go in the Marine Corps. So a couple of weeks after I graduated I went in the Marine Corps at age seventeen and half. And at the time you couldn't go to Vietnam unless you were eighteen, so that may have been a factor. They sent me to an aviation radio school, and at some point about two and a half years into the service time I finally was sent to Vietnam. I spent the first seven months around Da Nang at a major base, a Marine base, and the last about six months up near the DMZ, basically coordinating airplanes and helicopters—"Tactical Air Operations" they called it.

INT: Tell us a little about the politics of your family of origin, if you can, and how they felt about the war. Was your dad a vet? Did they support your joining the Marines? Were you strong in high school?

BB: Well, my mother is from a working class background; all her brothers were construction workers; two of her sisters were domestic help. My father was a small businessman, and they were pretty much non-political. They didn't really have an opinion other than on the developing situation. Before when I first joined in 1966 they didn't have an opinion on that. They basically were following the leadership of the country. My father was in the Navy in World War II, and so John Kennedy and then later Lyndon Johnson were his generation, and men in their forties, they were Presidents and Secretaries of Defense and that sort of thing, and they

were basically the Lieutenants and the Captains, the Lieutenant Commanders in the Navy. My father was an enlisted man, and now their immediate officers were running the country, and they didn't think about the specifics, they just—okay, this is the situation, you know, support. They didn't particularly want me to go in the Marine Corps, but they weren't particularly trying to stop me either. They both signed; you have to have both parents sign to join the service if you're seventeen.

INT: Did you have any particular political interests or affiliations at that point in your life?

BB: Yes. I was affected by the 1964 Goldwater-Johnson race. I got in as a teenager in reading Goldwater books and that sort of thing, and Ayn Rand and this conservative movement philosophy, and at the heart of it was that communism had to be stopped, and generationally I think it is related to having watched…on Sunday afternoons they used to have old World War II Hollywood movies that were made partially to boost the world morale, so as a kid watching these I was kind of like "Wow, these look like great days." So, I think there was that cultural aspect of it, along with this Goldwater phenomena, a new conservative, neo-conservative movement, and now, yes, here's our turn, and this is just the way life is, and America is, and you have to run things, and stop people from doing wrong things—evil, you know, stop evil countries. Actually, I was going to join the Navy, but one of the kids from the neighborhood came with the Marine uniform, and sort of challenged me, you know, and my father was in the uniform business. He made custom uniforms for the Fish and Game, the Toll Collectors, the State Police, and that sort of thing. So, there was an appreciation in the family for stylistics, and it looked pretty good, and plus this friend of mine challenged me on it, so I said, well, I'll join the Marines instead of the Navy. We're part of the Navy, too. My father was in the

Navy and this was the Marines. It's like one step above, but yet of the Navy; the elite of the Navy. It was that personal father thing, too.

INT: When you were in training were there discussions about the war? Were you aware of protests against the war during your training? Was your attitude toward the war changing at all before you went to Vietnam?

BB: No, not at all. In training there wasn't any discussion of anything. And in the later stages of training, when there's a little more elbowroom and freedom, we're so glad to be able to be breathing fresh air that we think we've arrived in heaven after finishing that training. So, in the secondary training we're more concerned with taking satisfaction and having finished the boot camp. Even though during Vietnam the Marines shortened their boot camp from thirteen weeks to eight weeks, there were eight weeks, plus several weeks after that on some sort of running through the woods kind of things. So, there's about three months more that attention was paid. Then coming home on leave after having done all that, it was pretty much I was having fun no matter what happened—I was satisfied with the success. My next duty station after that initial training was San Diego, which is the largest military town in the country. There were military people all over the place. So, it was not at all very noticeable, first hand. And I don't recall being tremendously affected by it, seeing it on TV news or any of that. I don't think I was even watching very much news. I figured we *were* the news. You know, we didn't have to watch the news.

INT: When exactly did you go to Vietnam? And did you go with friends, other people you'd trained with?

BB: We went to Vietnam pretty much individually, and they would have us get together about, I don't know, a plane load of other individuals, and we would do this what they call staging training, and we're thrown together with all these people and we're all going to Vietnam to different who-knows-where units, and it was rather good because I was very scared

of going over there; having people all getting ready together for a while was helpful, and they got me out of my fear enough to actually stage a play the night before we got on the plane, and it was so provocative that one of the Senior Sergeants started chasing me around, and, like, officers had to restrain him. This was satire.

INT: From your training?

BB: Yes. And this fellow was the symbol of the whole—all our fears and anxieties and displeasure—and it was very thinly disguised, and I could imitate his voice and accent. He was one of the few sergeants from the Boston area. Most of them were from down in Virginia or Alabama and places like this, so his voice was very distinctive with the Boston accent, and I could imitate it perfectly and I used to run in the barracks in the middle of the night, making people think that I was him, and playing jokes. We really worked on this, and I had a bunch of people who I was marching around the stage and pretending with his voice, the sergeant's voice, and making mistakes [laughter], and so it got me out of myself. When I left to get on the plane, and I went down and had my heart checked, because I was getting palpitations, and maybe there's something wrong with my heart and they'll have to bar me from military service, because I was more worried about going to Vietnam than having a bad heart. I was hoping I had a bad heart, so I was pretty scared. There was nothing wrong with my heart. It was anxiety. [Laughter] Drinking picked up.

INT: Hold on, please. Where exactly did you go in Vietnam? And how was the war fought in your unit compared with other units?

BB: Well, we landed in Da Nang, and I expected to immediately be running around ducking bullets, but I found that it was all pretty peaceful most of the time there. There's people running around, and I'm like, well, who are these people who are going to shoot us? What's going on here? As it turns out it was all hunky dory, people are out illegally in the middle of

the night running around partying, and well, gee—you know, big underground economy around the base, and every once in a while the NLF—we would lob some rockets or mortars then—just to let us know that there's a war going on. While I was there I basically worked at the headquarters for Marine aviation, and all we did was keep a big status board of all air activity under the Marine Corps control in Vietnam so the Commanding General of Aviation or the Commanding General of Ground or the Commanding General of everything could walk in and look at the map and see that status of air activity for the United States Marines in Vietnam. I was there for about seven months, and my sense of adventure led them to make the decision that my sense of adventure could be put to better use up in the DMZ rather than running around Da Nang, that if I liked to get out there and explore the countryside, perhaps I should be up at the DMZ. So, me and a bunch of other fellows with those proclivities got a standard set of orders with about a half a dozen of us and they sent us up to the most forward local versions of my job category, which in this case we went from running a status board for the air activity to one of the maybe dozen sites that we had around the Marine section of Vietnam, which was the north section of South Vietnam, about a dozen sites that had multi-radio units and a big status board, plexiglass board, and it was dark, and it was lit up like you see on the advertisements for the service—they always show these people looking at boards, you know? That was us. And we would also see people speaking into little microphones. Well, what we were doing in the Marine version of that was we were coordinating the air activity in about one-tenth to one-twelfth the Marine area of Vietnam. Helicopters and aircraft would be requested from us, and we would have access to all that was available. Then we would call whoever was available and send them to whoever needed them on the ground, because basically I used to wonder why we had on average six hour shifts a day whereas people that were

working at job versus being out in the jungle all had twelve hour shifts, and I couldn't figure out till years later—it never dawned on me—we had an extra crew and a half around in case a rocket blew up a whole crew. We had another crew immediately available because if people that could do this job disappeared a lot of people could get killed if nobody was doing what we were doing for a period of a few hours with no notice. It had to be dealt with right away and there was nobody available that knew how to do this kind of stuff. So it was an important job. We thought of it as an inferior job, as the lucky, and not participating in the war as a Marine. They had a term called "feather merchants," you know, light weights, rear echelon "pogies." A pogey was an often-used Marine term. It's a Southern expression meaning pig. It's also what they called the candy and sandwich trucks that would be around bases state-side, and major overseas bases like Okinawa that would pull up to an area where there's a lot of men (usually it was men) and ring their bailiwick with kids and all the guys would go running for the candy bars, sodas, and snacks, so the Marine Corps called it pogey-bait truck, it attracted all the little piggies with the goodies, making fat little people. So, we were rear echelon pogies.

INT: The attitude toward the works in your unit, did people talk about it at all?

BB: Well, we were all basically trying to win. We had a lot of conflict with the brass and the way we saw them doing things. We were of the age—at the time I was nineteen to twenty—where back in the States people were having giant upheavals, and as a matter of fact, we had a kid that got permission to go to Hawaii on rest and recuperation because he was married. If you were single they wouldn't let you go to Hawaii. You weren't stable enough. You might not come back. But if you were married you were more stable, theoretically. So what he did was he faked the thing, flew to San Francisco, wanted to get back to the actual States,

showed up…if you used a magnifying glass on the *Stars & Stripes*, the Armed Forces newspaper, on the front page picture of a big giant demonstration in San Francisco, here's guy that's supposed to be in Hawaii and he's on the front cover of the national *Stars & Stripes* at a protest demonstration, and here we are in Vietnam and he's back and we're looking at it. [Laughter] We thought that was "trippy." I mean, we were just being "trippy" like people wearing funny hats and psychedelic clothes, and there was something going on generationally in the culture that it was affecting us that way. We were just grooving on the audacity. You know, it's like with rock and roll. There was certain rock and roll that was popular in Vietnam, and [movie director] Oliver Stone by no accident chose Jim Morrison and The Doors as his anchor for his stateside view of that period of time. The Doors were not only artists in this country, but everybody in 'Nam that I knew liked the Doors, played a lot of Doors. But opposition to the war I didn't run into; maybe, you know, we had questions, but we weren't asking them. We were focusing our anxieties and our displeasures and our rebelliousness on what we called the lifers, the brass.

INT: Was there a difference in attitude and morale between the support troops and the soldiers on the line?

BB: Yes. Definitely. This job had a lot of perks. We were able to invite the construction, and maybe the Seabees in, and they built us a little club. It was like a little shack, like a little chicken coop, but big enough for people, and they built us a little bar in there, and some helicopters flew us up a refrigerator, and then they would fly us pallets of beer at a time—160 cases hanging from beneath it, at like $1.60 a case or something—and you know, we'd signal them in, and so we had access to that all the time because we were up near the DMZ [demilitarized zone], right in an isolated base. We were running the stuff off generators and taking showers underneath hooked up homemade things from water dispensers. We called them water

buffalos. We were living in bunkers, but we had this shack, tin-roofed, nice. So, we invite some of the grunts up and to be hospitable to the boys, right? [Laughter] It was the last time we did it. They tore the place to pieces, and we knew on a certain level that we didn't blame them for it, you know? But we decided, well, we're not masochists either. It was heavy. There was the Chaplain, the Catholic priest that drank so much of our beer that they shipped his ass home. He just started getting loaded all the time. He couldn't handle it. He'd break down and tell us, you know, "I can't take this. Bodies going down. Blessing guys, and then bodies come back." But yet, he'd try to get us to go to mass, particularly my French Canadian friend, Ballou. He knew he had him by the cultural hook. You know, "Ballou, you've got to get back to church." "Yes, father." You know, yes.

INT: Where you exposed to Agent Orange or any other toxics while you were there?

BB: I would imagine. We used to swim in an area…a lot of the area from the DMZ to several miles south of the DMZ was totally defoliated. We were a mile or two from total defoliation, and we used to swim in a stream that you could see wasn't crystal clear to begin with, and we were just a couple of miles from defoliation, and a couple of times I actually went up to, like, within sight of the DMZ, and how you could see it was there was a giant Soviet Redwood or some kind of tree, a post about 100 feet high with a flag the size of the side of a house, and it was right on their side of the river in the middle of the DMZ, and so I went up to where I could look at it, and it's Con Thien, which less than a year before had massive, massive battles with the NVA trying to take it and massive battles with people killed on both sides. Well, all that area was defoliated, and there was another stream, maybe part of the same stream in this other area, I don't know, a bridge, crossing the river right beside a bridge that was blown to pieces and we swam up there, and that was in the middle of

defoliated territory. So, I'd say compared to somebody at Da Nang or Saigon—yes. To the extent that I had a piece of benign lump cut out of my neck with a big scar on there, and I've got another one that's been there for a long time, but it turns out my mother said that one of her brothers had a lump like that. So, I haven't noticed any problems, but I would say I was exposed.

INT: You describe being critical of the brass during training, even before you got to Vietnam, but during the time you were there, did your thinking about the war or the conduct of the war or the objectives of the war change?

BB: We kind of had an undeveloped concept or almost like a feeling in the air that somebody wasn't doing something right, and the lifers were probably screwing it up. Being very critical of seeing what's what, the aviation I dealt with was all branches, basically, except the Coast Guard I guess. There was an incident that really sticks out in my mind. There were unsafe flying conditions, early morning fog and zero visibility, and all the Marine helicopters checking in for availability but yet saying we're standing by, because they called it socked in, and remembering an Army helicopter radioing in and saying is it available, and asking if there are any priority med-evacs (medical evacuations) or extractions (an extraction is getting people out of an area in a hurry because of problems) and we said, yes, we had some med-evacs, so we'll talk to you when the fog lifts. About five minutes later I heard the blades in the sky and a helicopter landed in the fog right outside the bunker where we were operating, and the Crew Chief comes running in and asks who he was talking with, and I raised my hand, and he says, “Where's your notes on that med-evac?” And I said, “Right here.” And he took them, so there’s no radio and he flew through the fog to us, picked up written instructions on the med-evac, and took back off into the fog, and did the med-evac. It was an Army helicopter, and we're in

the Marines. So, wow, those boys are pretty good, and it turns out the Army helicopter pilots were warrant officers, mostly high school graduates, shop, mechanical, high school graduates, some college graduates, some college, and whatever, whereas Marine helicopter pilots were all Naval Aviators, commissioned officers, and had all gone through Naval Aviation. They could fly fixed-wings, certain fixed-wing aircraft, as well as helicopters. Where the Army fellows were usually two to three years younger, and warrant officers, they were in between Sergeants and officers. They had certain officer's privileges, but they also were a non-commissioned status. So, when you're in the middle of the game, that's very striking, you know? It's very striking. The finest Naval Aviation takes these kids to actually go out and do it under rougher conditions than these—some of the best training in the world. That's very memorable, and also Army pilots…they were very thankful and treated us very nice, and if they were going somewhere we wanted to go, we asked them to drop by and they'd come by with a helicopter outside the front door and "Jump on." And because I know where they're going, "Could you drop by and take me there too?" "No problem!" The Marine and Army and, as a matter of fact, the Army fixed-wing pilot…it's so funny, a piper cub Army pilot will be a commissioned officer, but a helicopter pilot would be a warrant officer. They took me up in the piper cub type airplane on a familiarization run. He took me up to eyeball all the territory that we were dealing with on maps and over the air, and we actually flew around the North Vietnamese flag and the DMZ, made a circle around it, and so we had a good working relationship; when a pilot was killed by a 50 caliber round and his back seat was an artillery officer and the pilot was dead, the familiarization came in handy because I talked to the artillery officer, who now was in the airplane with his pilot dead, but with back seat controls. Hey, I'm a private and I flew this thing back. I didn't land it but I flew it back. What you do is you

go down to the Dong Ha River and take a right, go down the coast to the Dong Ha River and go up the Dong Ha River to Dong Ha. "By the time you do that we'll have pilots up in the tower and when I hand you over to the tower the pilot will talk you in so you can land this little airplane." "Oh, okay." So, it wasn't totally a joy ride. It came in handy. And he landed the thing and didn't get hurt too bad. Then simultaneously we called for a B-52 strike on that machine, just to show that when we get hurt we'll answer big, but you're dealing with aviation. So, for a nineteen year old to send a million dollar's worth of bombs on a guy—one or two guys or women with machine guns—and then come back and somebody yells at you because you're crossing the street or something, it's pretty heady. You know, it took us way out there; even though I was a rear echelon pogie, there was an element of dealing with the war that made it hard for me as well to come back and deal with this mundane day-to-day. I just was noticing the last couple of days when WBUR, they had three BBC correspondents at the Ritz Hotel and you can pay a hundred dollars so you can get your yuppie ass down there because you didn't go to Vietnam and you weren't a war correspondent, so you can go down to the Ritz and rub elbows with yuppies, people of your financial class who actually experienced war, and raise some money for WBUR.

INT: It sounds like you were in a position to observe the general direction and flow of conduct throughout the war, and also their casualties: The med-evacs, and so forth.

BB: Yes.

INT: So, what was your response to what you saw?

BB: Oh, we took it as a day-to-day activity in between drinking bouts. We had to allocate the resources. An American priority would take precedent over a Vietnamese priority. A Vietnamese emergency will be given the same priority as an American priority. It went: Emergency,

priority, routine, permanent routine, permanent routine being *dead*. And so if it was a Vietnamese with an emergency they would be treated like it was an American priority, and if there was an American emergency and a Vietnamese emergency, that's it. So we were functioning, actually carrying out the policies and listening to who they had. Sometimes they would give some specifics, too, along with the med-evac requests. They would tell the type of balloons and that sort of thing or "lost a limb" or "stepped on a land mine," and the fixed wing that we sent to do close air support, they would come and report to us the damage assessment in BDAs, Bombing Damage Assessment, and give us a BDA. And then we'd just send general people into battle, called *inserts*, and go pick them up, called *extracts*, but from a distance, you know? Safe.

INT: Is there anything else you wanted to talk about while you were in Vietnam, because my next question would be how you came home and were you with friends and stuff?

BB: Okay, well, one of the things…this morale in Vietnam, it should be pointed out that it got heavy. There were fraggings, and…

INT: What kind?

BB: Where somebody would throw a fragmentation grenade under somebody's bunk or something like that, or shoot them. Usually, it was the brass. There was one kid that was killed because the Civilian Investigating Division, the CID, scared him to hell because he was married and just had a baby and they caught him with some pot, and they made him give names so he just picked twenty names or something and told those fellows after he was through that, "I just gave them any names, you know, they were going to do this. They were going to do that." Well, somebody took offense to it, and he was bludgeoned and then a hand grenade thrown under him. He was bludgeoned unconscious and then the hand grenade thrown under him. He was killed and found in the elephant grass near the airstrip at Dong Ha.

There were actually…there were other…a kid tried to kill me, and they whisked him away. He missed by an inch, faked an accident shot, missed my head by an inch. Then there was another fellow, whisked away after he threw a hand grenade under a Sergeant Major's bunk at Dong Ha. I spent my last month at Dong Ha.

INT: And in these other cases the reason for cracking was?

BB: Well, the Sergeant Major was not respected. There were malcontents—a whole fifty, sixty people, the majority of them were malcontented.

INT: Why did somebody try to kill you?

BB: The guy was bizarre, and he focused some bizarre disliking to me, and when he faked the accidental discharge of the rifle he was trying to kill me and make it look like an accident. It was a bizarre hatred. There was another kid that we caught writing bogus letters of his dangerous exploits home, and really, really, really got on his case. He was a loner, and we got on his case about it, and he was isolated even further, and one of the follows went in and…well, no. We were outside roasting marshmallows, outside of a bunker, and we heard a rifle bolt go home, and one of the kids round the fire went in and said, "You know," he said, "Hey, don't go in there, what are you crazy, you know?" This kid went in and slapped him and so forth, and they shipped him home. When I was down at Da Nang, there was a guy living in my cubicle that took out a rifle and put a magazine in it, and said, "You go out and tell them that the next life that comes in here I'm going to kill." "Whoa! You sure you want to do...?" "Tom, I'm serious." "This could be trouble." "So, I went out and I said, "So-and-so is in there and said he was going to kill the next person that comes in. He's got the rifle thing. What are you going to do about it?" "Well, will you go in and talk to him?" I said, "What are you crazy? I just came out of there. That's your problem." I don't know what they did, I

forget exactly, but they took him away. There was also great racial tension. It was less so, even though there was separatism all over the military, Black Nationalism, even named De Mau Mau, and some De Mau Mau came back to the Boston area. If you check the media at the time of when this 1971 event was going on, De Mau Mau was back, and there were some shootings and there were Black Nationalists that came out of the Vietnam experience. Up north near the DMZ, a black guy in our unit took me and Ballou from Maine over to the De Mau Mau bunker. I mean, he didn't exactly jump up and kiss us, but we were accepted as friends. Whereas in the larger bases, the separation was more intense; there was extreme antagonism between blacks and whites. Blacks were very vocally pissed off about the war; did not like the idea of being there.

INT: Expand on that if you would, their reasons being that?

BB: Oh, so they were listening to people like H. Rap Brown and Stokley Carmichael, and were actually using the term, quoting the term "No Vietnamese ever called me nigger." There was tremendous politicalization with maybe a majority of black Marines. There were racial brawls. I was at a club one day after leaving Vietnam in Okinawa where blacks slowly took over the club and whites fled, and the band fled, and the bartenders fled, but this table I as sitting at, we were just one day out of Vietnam and we were stubborn. We didn't care what was happening. We were going to sit there. It turned into about several hundred blacks and our table and the brothers got up there with conga drums and bongos and doing militant war cries and outside they took the flag down from the flag pole in front of the club. There was a big picture window so we were watching this and ran up a sheet that they had dyed black. In due course rumbling occurred, and a dozen trucks or so pulled up and it looked like a battalion of deputized grunts wearing white web belts and clubs and white helmets made a circle around the club and a black Lieutenant and a white Lieutenant and a black

First Sergeant team of four came in the door and talked to the heaviest dude who looked like H. Rap Brown: Small, angry, smart. Negotiated with this fellow, and they came over to us and said, "Okay, leave." We said, "Okay great." And we left and we got beyond the circle and looked and watched and there was an organized demonstration: They dispersed, some people took some of the white belts, took the black sheet down, and put the flag back up, and that night there was brawling all over, because I came down with some kind of fever of unknown origin, and that night ended up in ward, and half the people in the emergency ward were all beat up. So, that was another perspective.

I guess the other thing that stands out was we had a situation come up at Dong Ha where I had, I think, something like less than thirty days left to do in Vietnam. I had already done a year and there was a rocket attack, and at 5:00 o'clock in the morning, and we jump out of bed and run out the back of the shack and dive in these ditches until it was all clear, and then we're sort of adrenaline flowing, because this was fairly close, these rockets coming in. So, we're in the showers and all gabbing away and kind of high. It's a high way to wake up for the day, you know, rockets coming in around. And we're coming out of the shower and there are bulldozers, like, filling in our trenches, and what is this? So there is a spontaneous rebellion. Spontaneous. This is it! They're going to come down here and they're going to dig these things out. We're not going to accept this. So we all went and got rifles, and all congregated around my hootch because we had a field phone because we were— you know, in case somebody got sick or something and they had to get in touch with us. So, we had a field phone in our hooch, and that was our little com [communication] center of the rebellion. We were waiting for the phone call. Like, where are you guys? It's 8:00 o'clock or whatever time, and who's supposed to be here and who's supposed to be there, and you guys are supposed to be down on

the radio, and we're not going anywhere until they come down here and dig these things out. And we're out, so don't send the officer of the day, and the First Sergeant down here with pistols. You know? We're not saying we're going to challenge, you know, but you better send the MPs down here or something; just don't send two guys down here, because we ain't going to put up with it. So we negotiated. They sent good guys—young Lieutenants down who we'd smoked pot with—and kind of informally laid it out on the table, and said well, they're going to build you bunkers. Well, we don't want bunkers on the back of our hooches. We just want a trench. A trench is better if you're not going to sleep in a bunker. A bunker is good if you're going to sleep in it because you're already there. You don't have to get up and run in the hole, but if you're going to get up and run into something you're better off with a trench. You just, pffhht, go in the trench. It's safer then the makeshift kind of cheap bunker that they ended up building. Look, don't be picky. They can't back down. They're not going to charge you with anything, never mind mutiny. Just let it go. They'll build the bunkers today. We said we want an admission that they did it on purpose. And he said, "You won't get that." He said the real deal…their story is that the Commanding General of the Third Marine Division walked by there on the way to church and saw all the beer cans in the trench. He complained about it and they scheduled covering the trenches up and they were going to build bunkers, and it just happened to be they started an hour after a rocket attack that hadn't happened in two weeks since the last one, and just coincidentally right after the rocket attack these things came down here. "Well, we're saying that we think that what he did was say the next time there's a rocket attack, send the Seabees down and fill their trenches over. That's what they get for putting beer cans in the trenches. And we don't think it was coincidental. We don't believe you, and we're not going to take it." So, we agreed to go back and go to work

or go on shift and go on the radio and they would build the bunkers, because it was either that or go to Portsmouth Naval Prison. We said, "Okay."

INT: Before we leave Vietnam, I wanted to ask about one thing, that you brought about in your last story about smoking pot with the Lieutenant. What was that drug scene that you saw in the places that you stayed, including alcohol?

BB: Alcohol was pervasive everywhere. Pot around Da Nang, while I was in Da Nang for seven months, I never saw it. I heard about it a lot. I never saw it, and I was a rebel and I didn't even see it. I'd never smoked pot before in my life. When we got up to the DMZ, *voila*: Pot for sale, a dollar a ten-pack, the most powerful weed I've ever smoked in my life. And it was weed. It was just good weed. That's when I smoked my first joint, up near the Z, and at that point I'd been in the country probably eight months and everybody was talking me into it. Well, they were debunking all the negative propaganda against pot, and you've got me convinced, and all right I'll try it.

INT: What about heroin?

BB: Actually, I didn't see or hear first hand or even hear of heroin until that same month with that rebellion where I'd in Vietnam for a year and was at Dong Ha, which was a relatively large base near the DMZ, maybe one-tenth the size of the Da Nang operation, a large base, but a major base. C-130s landed there, and that is big enough. My last month in Vietnam, I came back from landing zone stud, later renamed landing zone Van der Grift. I came back to Dong Ha, and that's the first time I saw and heard about heroin. There were a few guys who were also involved in the rebellion we had who were into heroin, and that was the first time that I actually even heard of it. I had been in Vietnam a year before I'd even heard of it. I left Vietnam in July 1969 and did another eleven months

state-side, and got word back from Vietnam, guys coming back constantly, what not, that the heroin was just growing and growing. We were just hearing, that last eleven months I did stateside stories were coming back of continuously increasing usage of heroin.

INT: Where was it coming from?

BB: I found out later through reading "The Poppy Trail," "The Heroin Trail of Southeast Asia;" the same fellow just did another study recently about cocaine. It makes a lot of sense too, but apparently a lot of it was coming in—I'm only speculating; I didn't find out till years after and this isn't any first hand Vietnam knowledge, I got this out of books—that it basically was being ground in Thailand, Laos, parts of Cambodia. The Hmong tribesmen of mostly Laos were growing the poppies, and the CIA was facilitating the process of getting the process of getting the poppies to the labs to make the heroin, so that they could given economic benefit to our allies the Hmong, who were heavy partisans to our side, India, 'Nam, and I guess they weren't such bad allies from the leadership perspective in Laos either. The way I understand what I've read was that they helped facilitate their poppy trade. The Hmong, as I recall, didn't process the heroin but supplied the poppies, and the CIA was transporting, and if they were transporting it, they might have been doing other facilitation as well, but as I say, that's just from reading about it. John Kerry, by the way, the United States Senator, I recall in the early Vietnam Veterans Against the War days, referred to that a lot and John Kerry more recently worked to expose the CIA involvement in cocaine in Central America, and the connection with the counter-revolutionaries of Nicaragua, the Contras, and cocaine trafficking. There's actually lots of—no, there might have even been some smoking guns—very strong circumstantial evidence that some of the people involved in contra anti-Sandinista activity (which was the legitimate government at the time) were also involved in cocaine

trafficking, and John Kerry, United States Senator, led the major investigation on these charges; John, having been a VVAW leader, as I said, was very aware of the similarities to heroin during the Vietnam War.

INT: From your reading you got the impression that the CIA facilitated the access of the military people who were using heroin?

BB: No, I think…in my opinion which is very much a guess, with very limited data that I'd be looking at for evidence and so forth, my opinion is they just facilitated certain aspects of the trade to keep helpers—our allies—in line, and just basically let it happen, and then just busted some individuals and it was just an uncoordinated mess, which is probably what happened, but I could be way off-base on it.

INT: So, you came home? How did you come home? Were you with friends?

BB: No. I was in that racial takeover of the club the first night out of Vietnam. The second night out of Vietnam I had a fever of unknown origin, and wound up in an Army hospital in Okinawa for a week, and after leaving there, a few more days, got on an airplane with total strangers, because you know this is a week's delay, came back and went on leave. I don't remember coming back, and I don't remember coming home to Boston. I don't know why. I remember fighting over lunch in Los Angeles. They ran out of lunches. I'd just come back from the war and they ran out of lunches. That's the only thing I remember about coming home.

INT: Military airline?

BB: No, commercial airlines. They wanted to get my acquiescence so that the plane could take off on time if I could skip lunch. This is on my way from a war zone of thirteen months. Would you mind skipping lunch? I said, "Fuck you, go get me a sandwich. I've just come back from the war. What are you kidding me? I don't believe this."

INT: You were in uniform?

BB: Yes. In the traveling uniform to get the discount. And, you know, I had ribbons. They were very angry. I held the plane up.

INT: So, at what point do you begin to remember being back? What did you find? How did you find the country? How were you received? What did you do?

BB: Well, the only thing that I remember on the trip, actually, is that I left my records somewhere, and was in transit between the two major airports that are in Los Angeles and a cab, and I said my records are back to the other airport, and went back and they were gone. They weren't in Lost and Found, and it was only a matter of twenty minutes, so somebody must have picked up my records and thrown them away. I mean, they wouldn't just disappear. I mean, if you picked up somebody's service records wouldn't you walk them over to… No, the climate, that was my introduction to the climate. Some Vietnam returnee's service records, throw them in the trash. Fuck him up and the service. That's what happened to them. I came back twenty minutes later they're gone. Either that or a spy picked them up or something. Whatever, right? Somebody. I found out that nobody was all that proud that I was back when I was on leave.

INT: How did you notice that?

BB: Well, while I was on leave—I was up in New Hampshire, my parents had a place up there—and the New Hampshire National Guard had been activated, one of the few reliable units in the National Guard where there were actually real National Guard and not draft dodgers, and they were over in Vietnam and one of the trucks ran over a land mine, and there were I think six kids killed, and, wow, holy shit, right from the guys that ran this unit, and I'm telling people at the beach who are laying out on chaise lounges and that sort of thing and water skiing and so forth, and I

just got the news, and I said, “Six guys blown to shit in a truck,” and they're looking up from their gin and tonics and kids are skiing away, and I says, “Well, don't you think we should put the flag down at half-mast, you know?” People are like, no, that's good. You know, who cares? It's like me and my brothers were over there, like, you know, fighting a war and like nobody gives a shit; nobody cares. [Laughter] It's like you went to do an air raid drill or whatever. You went to some little exercise that one goes through and, like, so what?

BB: And then we find out that like on top of this uncaring attitude, that on top of that, the whole thing was a sham anyway, that there were going to be elections in Vietnam and they did a study and saw that that Ho Chi Minh would have won, so they cancelled the elections sometime in the middle of the fifties. These people have been fighting for like hundreds of years. They fought the French, and we knew that, but they were on our side during World War II. We didn't know that. And the memories of the valor, the guts, and like—amazing. We never considered them fanatical. We considered them ferocious adversaries, compared to the people who were supposed to be our allies who—the majority—were useless. So, we've got vast majority, your enemy, ferocious, the majority of your allies useless. Something that's important in terms of, like, if you're combatant. Like you begin to wonder, now wait a minute. You know, what's so bad about these people? You know? They're unbelievable. They're hanging in there all this time, and you can't beat them. This isn't a few dozen tyrants making people do things. They've got tens of thousands of hard-core supporters, and our so-called friends are just corrupt, and the units…we're over there with a half a million troops, because the corruption in the Saigon regime, and Army, the armaments, and there’s a big unwillingness to fight, although some units did the work, but…just ask Vietnam Veterans. It's not anecdotal. You hear it from Americans that served in the South by the

Delta, Saigon, up to the DMZ. So, there's very significant evidence that the South Vietnamese troops are useless, and the reputation of the National Liberation Front and the North Vietnamese Army was superb. So, as warriors, particularly in the Marine Corps where you're wrestling with your own lack of "Marineness," and that you know you're a pogie, so you're wrestling with that. And then, you know, you look at the enemy—Marines think of these things. I'll never forget a pilot talking to me off the radio—he snapped back on because he wanted to talk to somebody—he was right out there, and he says, "I got a little guy down here with a rifle shooting at me in my jet." He says, "He's trying to knock me down before I blow him to pieces. I don't even want to fucking do this, but I'm going to take him out." There was respect. You know? I mean, they were serious, and there were a lot of them. They were taking on a half a million Americans and more—you know, a larger South Vietnamese Army, so you had to respect there are things…[sighs] maybe that's why the military causes fascists and radicals, because it really puts democracy in perspective, that even if you're less than 51 percent and you run a war like the NVA and NLF did, even though there might be less than 51 percent, you had to give them credit for making a very significant bid for power. You know? That stacked up against the sham government that was in Saigon. You just couldn't picture that as, like, there's something that didn't jibe with democracy and the sham. And then you picture these…even these people might have been a minority, so I guess we've got to oppose that. A lot of respect…but then you start reading the history and you're like, wow, what are we doing getting involved with something like that that has that strength? Now, if it were a matter of a smaller unit like terrorists and they had sent the Green Berets over, then they would have cleaned it up or whatever with a few thousand American troops, but what are we doing sending massive armies against these people if they've got that much

support? Even if it's not 51 percent? What are we doing having a war with them?

Mexico has had fraudulent elections all this…there's a lot of evidence that the last election they didn't really win. I mean what are we doing in a massive 12,000 miles away? Even though the domino theory makes sense on paper, how do you get to [taking] that theory that far?

INT: When did you start reading this history?

BB: In college. I applied to college while I was still in the service from North Carolina, and started at Northeastern a couple of months after getting out. I majored in History, and I was the first one in my family to go to college, so I had to check the ropes out a little bit and found that it was crazy to pay all that money to Northeastern to major in History, so I transferred to Boston State College, now the University of Massachusetts, Boston. And continued on, and majored in History and minored in Sociology. And that began September of 1970, and there was a lot of activity particularly in the Social Science Departments making sure everybody knew this history. And it wasn't like some arcane thing I discovered in the library. It was like they were standing out in front of the school handing it out. Then, you know, being a History major and having just come back from Vietnam, it's something you might want to take a look at, right? So I found out within a day or something.

INT: Now here we're going to generalize about the evolution of your attitude toward the war. How would you do that?

BB: You mean my attitude now or…

INT: Well, your attitude as it changed.

BB: Yes, yes. My first move away from conservatism was for civil rights. And I remember arguing very early on.

INT: About what?

BB: [Arguing] with a woman. I said, "Look, yes… you're liberals, okay, but the war? I mean, come on, I'm not a traitor." That was the first move.

INT: That was at Boston State College?

BB: Actually no. I was still at Northeastern that first year. Okay? At the second year of college, now over at Boston State. No, excuse me. I was still at Northeastern, but the second year had gone, the beginning of the second year of college. I saw John Kerry on "Meet the Press," and I believe he was twenty-six at the time, and he had just testified the day before at the Senate Foreign Relations Committee which he's now on, and there was also news coverage of the vets in Washington, D.C. where they threw their medals back and it made a big hullabaloo. And after listening to John Kerry I said yes, it's not just the brass. The brass were also the people running the war. The brass extends…the bad morale, you know, the anti-brass now extends to the people running the war. This whole thing is a sham. And I think I'm going to go to the next anti-war demonstration, but I'm going to wear a sport jacket, and some ribbons so that I don't look…You know, show [that] respectable people are against this thing, and I did that, and then I went down to VVAW headquarters in Cambridge, and it was party time as it usually was and I said, "Hey, this is great." Most people there were into the [anti-war] Movement. That's where I found out about the Movement, and I started checking into some of these youth leaders: Abbie Hoffman, and the Panthers, and so forth, and was slowly thinking about it, but it's still too wild. I'm against the war, and I like hanging around up here, but you know, I guess, I'm a liberal. When we came out to the Lexington Green and they said we decided to get arrested because they wouldn't let us camp there I was really anxious. I'm, like, arrested? Oh, my God! I don't want to get arrested. Jeez, I don't know. I mean it was a big deal for me to get arrested. I went from that to becoming

a revolutionary. Within a year after the Lexington Green I basically discovered that I was a revolutionary. Of course, it was easy to do, because there were revolutionaries all over the place, and the music was revolutionary; there were people calling for revolution in songs that were hits on the radio, and they're calling to revolution. So, there's a little self-indulgence, but I basically hung in there, and I've been a revolutionary ever since, which was about within a year of the Lexington Green action. When I was on my leave after coming back from Vietnam up to New Hampshire, another thing happened up there that I remember. We were old-young and there was a lot of people around our age, and there was a big party a couple of houses down and they said come on over, and I came over, and "You got to hear this. You got to hear this record." And it was Country Joe and the Fish. Right? And it just amazed me. I'd never heard anything like it in my life. The Marine Corps wasn't playing that on the radio station, you know? [Laughter]

INT: For people who don't know that song, could you…?

BB: Well, it's that song that it has the fish cheer in it: "One, two, three, four, what are we fighting for? Don't ask me, I don't give a damn. Next stop is Vietnam. Five, six, seven, eight, open up the pearly gates…"

INT: "Ain't got time to wonder why…"

BB: "Whoopie, and we're all going to die!" And it starts off with the spelling out of f-u-c-k and cheering, and there's a Woodstock version where there's like a million people, like, answering you and after me, "What's that spell?" And then he launches into this song. I couldn't believe it. Swearing like that in front of girls! And you know, they had this attractive quality to it. It kind of fit in with our attitude.

INT: Did they know you were a returned vet?

BB: Oh, absolutely. That's why they were dying to like see me, like, freak out or get a reaction, whatever it may be, you know? And years later

I got to meet Joe out in Nevada. He's comes around to an old roadhouse. As a matter of fact, last time I saw him was about a year ago. I've seen him like three or four times in the last few years at this roadhouse called "Reindeer Lodge." It's up on Mount Rose Highway between Reno and Lake Tahoe in the Sierra Nevada Mountains, and it was the grandfather, he had an old place, surrounded by National Forest up in the mountains, really beautiful up there, and Joe likes to come there, and we've been in the area every once in a while. So, I started throwing some names from the old days and we connected on some names and I knew Joe was involved with VVAW, at least in the later stages, so we had a wonderful time talking about all the VVAW people. It turned out Country Joe Macdonald was in the Navy, right before Vietnam. So, he was a vet, so a lot of the, well, hippies didn't know that. You know, in the late sixties you didn't go around bragging to people you were a vet, like, Jimi Hendrix was in the Army, and it was a secret because it was Yippies and hippies and the counter-culture, and changing the whole society. It was…you know, I wanted to join. As VVAW started getting some attention, it turns out that we served a purpose for the Movement, and if we're garnered some respect as fellow student radical activists…and we kind of fit in some ways that way. Actually, it's *me* more than *we* fit in anywhere else. I had friends of mine who gravitated at my suggestion and prompting, working class guys from the neighborhood in Everett, after some of their experiences coming home and then me hitting them with the radical stuff, they jumped on board. There were all sorts of things happening in the late sixties and early seventies. In Malden my cousin and friends battling the police in a youth riot in Malden, everybody was listening to the rock and roll, and taking the revolutionary youth revolution and radicalism very seriously, and a lot of working class people. And so it was catching on with lots of people, and it's a place where vets felt they fit more. Friends of mine who recently turned twenty-

one and are vets enjoying the VFW and a couple of clubs wouldn't let them in. [Laughter] On one hand. On the other hand you got VVAW kid from the neighborhood saying come on, this is a bunch of crap. The whole thing wasn't worth a damn and you know it, and actually a couple of neighborhood kids came down to Miami to the Republican National Convention in 1972, which was portrayed in [the film] "Born on the Fourth of July." To this day these guys aren't really political, but they don't forget that they once were in the working class, and the people who were in the working class, it's much easier to conjure up the old spirit than some of the radicals that moved into the upper middle class and know that there's a lot more to protect than a job at the MBTA. A job at the MBTA is nice, but it ain't like protecting a $75,000 a year position and perks.

INT: Could I follow-up on the couple of Vietnam vets who joined the VFW? And then weren't allowed in the club? What was the basis for being denied?

BB: They joined the Everett post of the VFW. Actually, I did join the VFW a couple of years ago while I was campaigning for a candidate for office, only because the Commander was so supportive, and I liked him so much. He was an old Chief from World War II, open-minded guy and so forth, and I said, "For you I'll join the VFW. I swore I never would, but for you I will." And I didn't swear I never would over the incidents with my friends either. I'll tell you why later. It had to do with VVAW, but what happened was they joined the Everett post and they went to Medford or someplace, and a very grouchy, disrespectful attitude of the guys that were in the place at the bar, and said, "Well, you're not a member of this post. So, we won't let you in." And they weren't all that friendly at the post they joined in Everett either.

INT: What was your family's reaction to your joining the VVAW?

BB: They thought I was crazy. Shortly after coming back they thought I should go see a psychiatrist. [Laughter] And this coming from the family [where] nobody had ever seen a psychiatrist, but we think you should. So, it's not like a family that comes from "My Analyst," and that sort of thing. Nobody ever did any of that.

INT: What was troubling them?

BB: My attitude.

INT: Can you be specific?

BB: I was very emotional and jumpy. I woke up making a lot of noise several times, and fell in love with a young woman and was rejected, and was just totally blown away, and I wanted to talk to my father about it, "How do I deal with this? I've never felt like this before." Which, you know, he thought was crazy, and not everybody would. And we did gigantic parties that were crazy. We'd end up…I'd have both kids that went in the service and kids that dodged the draft from the neighborhood up, and young women, girlfriends of these guys, and women we were meeting in New Hampshire, and we were all in our early twenties, and who would wake up in a boat in the middle of Lake Winnipesaukee and we would wake up there, and I'd be three towns over and I had twenty people staying at the house, and I'd disappear for two days because I was with this woman, and it was just what we did. This was everyday life. We bought out all the beer in the town of Waltham of a certain brand. We eventually just drank all that was in the town and had a huge speaker set up on the shoreline and you could hear it all over the bay.

INT: So, you were definitely just feeling a little strained?

BB: They were kind of going along with the party at that stage. But eventually got a little…it just keep going. It wasn't just, well, he's home and give him a few months. It just kept going. I started going up to West Roxbury VA Hospital, and we used to bring beer and pot up and party out

in the parking lot with guys on the paraplegic ward. The West Roxbury VA is one of the few paraplegic specialty hospitals in the country. The other one, Bronx, was in "Born on the Fourth of July." There's a few of them. We used to go up there and a lot of the guys from there joined VVAW, and we brought George McGovern up and getting an endorsement, a couple of guys on the ward, front page [*Boston*] *Globe*, and mixed around was psychedelic music and acid and pot, post-Woodstock values, or Woodstock values immediately following Woodstock. We were partying into the new age, the Age of Aquarius. Of course, it didn't exactly work out that way as we all know, but that's what we thought was happening. My political development went…I gravitated towards the theoretical people of this upheaval, and we foresaw a revolution in the country, where Cuba was a good example, we were turning the United States into a giant Cuba only with pot and partying, and the good life, and chickens running around in the yard, and everybody having a good time all the time; kids and everybody raising everybody's kids, and the Age of Aquarius, so, as that kind of died away through the seventies I refused to give it up, and kind of brought that into the more traditional political, radical groups. To this day I'll be with somebody who's older or newer or sectarian political-philosophical-radical groups, and who are usually kind of puritanical in a lot of ways, and I'm not hippie, but they know that, like my heart's in the right place, but I refuse to accept what this has all turned into. I'm just totally…it broke my heart, and it never got mended. There's got to be a different way of that. I tried a lot to adjust to it, but I was coming around somewhat, and then the Gulf…what I call "Gulf Massacre" happened and I just…

INT: Slow down a little bit. Is the "Gulf Massacre" what broke your heart?

BB: I was starting to mend it. I was working on mending it, and the "Gulf Massacre" just showed that there is no mending it; that this is rotten to the core, and it's more corrupted now than it was when we thought that we were changing it, that we haven't learned anything, and it's become more dog-eat-dog than it ever was, and it's even worse than it was, violently…whether it was foreign policy or life in the country, it's horrible and I can't adjust to it. I want to see better things happen.

INT: Could we go back to your connecting VVAW and moving toward the demonstration in Lexington, how did you hear about it? I guess I have no problem with the order, it's with these two questions here about the VVAW and how it was organized and how decisions were made, and how that applied in moving up on the Operation POW?

BB: Well, the way VVAW functioned was, ostensibly it was a democratic organization, but in reality there were heavies and lightweights, and the heavies ran the show really. You could have your say and so forth, but basically there were leaders that kind of ran things. It was somehow…I'm not sure how the preparations…it's too bad, because I was thinking of the preparations for taking over the U.S.S. Constitution, and I was in on that one because it was my idea, so they invited me in on it. But the actual preparations for Lexington, I don't recall being around so much.

INT: Do you recall who were the people who were in that organizing group?

BB: John Kerry, Michael Roach, Jerry [Jerome] Grossman. A few others: Bestor Cram, Rusty Sacks, Ida Mcdonald.

INT: You have a great memory.

BB: Yes. Those were some. There are some more.

INT: How did you hear about Operation POW?

BB: Well, I had decided to check out the VVAW after going to a larger anti-war march, and shortly after checking it out, that was the project that

they had. They called it Operation POW, and I even painted that on the back of another jacket.

INT: The point of that name?

BB: Well, that we're all POWs of the Vietnam War, and the only way we're going to get the POWs back is if we end the war, because we're all prisoners to this. People are getting killed. People are bummed out watching the war go on. It's on everybody's mind. There's a lot of anguish. And so we did a march from Concord to Lexington to Bunker Hill and to the Boston Common to bring attention to the need to end the war.

INT: What are your memories of that march?

BB: We were pretty amazed that they wouldn't let us camp over, and they were very stubborn about it, and so there was a lot of discussion. There were a lot of people; I was amazed how many people showed up at the Lexington Green, and there were a lot of supporters around people against the war from the Lexington-Concord area, and there were discussions and discussions, and seemingly little councils, and then a larger circular council of people. I don't know how they got to be in the circle with other people standing by watching the discussion, but things have to run somehow, you know. You have to have some kind of coordination when you have 500 people. I was satisfied with it. I was always a little jealous of the heavies, but it was pretty functional and pretty voluntary, even though there was what we call the heavies making the decision, people were pretty much in support of their leaders and everybody was pretty satisfied. There wasn't any problem with how the decisions were being made that I could see.

INT: Was it a group decision to be arrested, or did the individuals make an individual decision?

BB: It was both. We decided that we were going to do it. They may have even asked for a show of hands from people, anybody that was around that wanted to do it after a lot of discussion. It got to the point when they began [arresting people] people got up and got tired of waiting for the next bus to take them away, and would line up and get on the bus, and I decided that I wasn't going to line up to get on a bus to get a arrested. I was just going to sit here by the tree and see if they arrest me. You know? I'm not going to go arrest myself. So, they didn't get around to me. They had people lining up to get arrested there. Somebody asked me to answer the phone at a church which is right off the Green, and we were taking calls from when there was more alternative media around as I recall [it] was the very, very early days of, for example, National Public Radio news, when they actually presented a wide variety of views, unlike, I think, today. And so there was NPR, and Liberation News Service, and all kinds of people calling, and messages of support from people, Benjamin Spock, and Abbie Hoffman, and I don't know, but there are all kinds of names coming in and supporting— telegrams started arriving and stuff. Well, I went down to the arraignment, and there were displays of moral outrage from the box as they faced the judge; there's a couple of elderly Quakers that stand out in my mind, and Sheppy Gerowicz was very indignant of the whole thing, very angry that they wouldn't let us camp there, and was warned a couple of times that he could be held in contempt of court. Sheppy was very affected by the war, and saw a lot of action and, well, one time I think at the Statue dedication or the Wall dedication, Sheppy was down in DC, and he started giving General Westmoreland some opinions of the war, that it was all messed up and it was a disaster, and you misled everybody, and some faithful Airborne— Sheppy was in Airborne and under Westmoreland, led troops of war of his huge command, in the elite Airborne— so, some loyal Airborne boys grabbed him and they were indignant that he would insult

General Westmoreland. The elderly couple from the Quakers, the woman somehow they put her together with me to drive down from Lexington down to Bunker Hill because they heard rumors that the "townies" [Charlestown residents] are going to kick the shit out of us, so we went down to kind of check it out, and we didn't see anything that looked like it was going to happen. So, we were kind of apprehensive. We didn't know what was going to happen, but we were going to do it anyway. We marched through Charlestown and nothing happened, and when we got to Bunker Hill Monument there were hundreds of people up there cheering and welcoming us. I was amazed! That was, you know, Bunker Hill.

INT: How was your reception in Lexington?

BB: It was great, like a lot of the people that were a part of the 500 that got arrested were from Lexington.

INT: You were in the church answering the phone?

BB: Yes.

INT: Did you spend enough time on the Green to be able to describe the moods there?

BB: Oh, yes.

INT: …where the police were when they came? Give us some of that detail.

BB: Yes. There was apprehension. I know I was apprehensive, and we decided to go along with it. But at this stage, you know, I was not that anti-establishment, and I was very apprehensive about being arrested. I thought it was a very serious thing. You know, having a little mutiny over a righteous thing was one thing, but being arrested, I just couldn't…that's strange. But once it started going I realized how trivial it really was in terms of a record or anything like that. It was just an exercise in symbols that you could see that this wasn't going to mark anybody for the rest of their life as a criminal or anything like that, especially with 500 people.

And that it was just making a statement, and the stubbornness of the Chairman of the Selectmen of whatever who was just providing a spotlight to show the intransigence of sections of the establishment over the rights of veterans of the war to camp out on the Lexington Green. We figured as veterans we had a right to camp out on the Lexington Green. That wasn't a really radical issue so we were surprised that we couldn't do it so we were ready to push, even those of us who weren't radical at the time or ever.

INT: Were there rules of conduct for the VVAW members when demonstrations were taking place?

BB: It sort of all just fell into place, and you took cues from people and so forth. It was kind of like doing it by experience and without formalizing it to the point where often in larger demonstrations we would be like the marshals, you know? Because we're just a natural organization, and we were so fresh from the military and a realistic war situation that functioning together was easy, and even when we were say marshals for a big demonstration, there weren't any big powwows or anything like that or any training. We just took radios and put armbands on, and we're the marshals, right?

INT: Can you describe "guerilla theater"?

BB: While we were marching along through these towns, we put on little skits with vets and supporters, usually girlfriends, and I must add here though that Linda Van Der Vanner has written a book as a woman Vietnam veteran, and tells of a bad experience that she had in Washington, D.C. because we didn't recognize that there were some women who were in Vietnam and were veterans…I don't recall any women claiming to be Vietnam veterans around our area at the time, but Linda says that in Washington she was actually asked not to march with the vets, because this is a vets-only march, and she said, "I'm a vet. I'm still in the service. I'm at the Bethesda—not Bethesda, the Army hospital—Walter Reed Army

Hospital." Well, maybe I have them backwards. And he said, "Well, okay. We appreciate that, but the people aren't going to know that, so if you didn't march with us, we don't want them to think that you're lying. They're not going to even believe you're a vet." And she's not only a Vietnam vet, but saw a lot of carnage. Linda was very angry for a long time. Apparently she's doing very well now. I got to meet her years later in the early eighties in some Vietnam vet activities. So, with that said, they were basically around Lexington as far as I could tell. I may be wrong; I don't recall any VVAW activity from around here with women vets. We probably would have reacted wrong really, because we were very backwards at the time. I know I was anyway, but I was probably one of the worst. Some say I still am. I don't think so. I try. So, the girlfriends or whoever, potential girlfriends, fellow anti-war…but you know, we're kids, so we're all, you know, this wasn't any male, necessarily, I mean it was, but it wasn't totally a male trip, because a lot of the women were growing up, and they were amazed at our experience and it would be like football or it would be like academic pursuits. They were into this area of political and historical life of the country, and here's guys that were, and so the women would play peasants and would dress up in black pajamas and white faces like ghosts when they were dead, and we have toy M-16 rifles and we would put on examples of grabbing people off the street to interrogate them possibly being an enemy suspect. We would try to present to the people along the route in Lexington and Concord and wherever we went that, look: Can you imagine if foreign armed forces came into your town, and this was your town and this is you, and this is how we treated them? As a matter of fact I recall that in some of this guerilla theater people were dressed up as Vietnamese in certain circumstances, and in other circumstances, people were dressed in "plainclothes," and we dragged them off the street with guns and so forth to try to show the cultural similarities, so we didn't dress

them up sometimes as Vietnamese. We had men, too, that were just dressed as the general civilians of Lexington, and we would come along dressed like this with plastic M-16s and demonstrate like what we were doing was to preserve freedom. And we finally broke the M-16s up when we got to the Boston Common for our grand finale of the march where Bonnie Raitt played.

INT: How did people express their opposition and their support during that?

BB: Well, the civilians were very kind and understanding to us. When I say "civilians" I mean people of all ages besides men and women of our peer group. People were very understanding and very kind and we didn't encounter any personal bad vibes on the trip at all. *I* didn't. There were some people out in the woods on top of a hill along one of the roads who unfurled a giant Nazi flag somewhere around here, Lexington, Concord, or Hanscom Field, wherever we were running around, but that was far away. Everybody we ran into were neutral at worst and supportive, kind of generally, you know, and then as I said, I was surprised that so many people showed up to support us sleeping and to actually be willing to get arrested. We thought that was a thrilling…we didn't know what to call it, but it was solidarity.

INT: What kinds of people were they who showed up would you say, or were they all kinds of people and ages?

BB: It was a cross-section in age group. I recall them being all white. There may have been some exceptions, but pretty much. VVAW was disproportionately white with some definite exceptions; there are some blacks involved with VVAW. But there wasn't 11 percent.

INT: How did you see the issues for the vets, for the Selectmen, for the townies?

BB: Well, we figured we were going to go ahead. Some of it I think probably had to do with the whole cold reception when we got back, and for me being denied…you know, they're going to skip giving me lunch because they ran out, twenty minutes after landing in the United States coming back from the war zone. That was typical. In general, I don't recall anybody with a couple of exceptions, but the majority from neutral to hostile vibes, and I guess that's probably for me part of why…See, we're going to sleep on this damn Green, and if they don't like it they can arrest us. And to be then welcomed at Bunker Hill in Charlestown really egged us on. We got youthfully carried away in the sense of self-righteousness, so when we started getting hit with big welcomes in Charlestown and on the Common, and a good word from some journalists and press coverage and stuff it spurred us on, some more than others. I think it definitely greased my movement towards anti-establishment Movement politics, because it seemed like the best understanding and welcome we got were from people who were against the war. And that's very disappointing. And your friends, you know, your comrades are important. You know who's your friend.

INT: You have mentioned a couple, are there any other specific images or memories that you have of that particular march? The mood on the Green, was that anything…?

BB: I don't really…the mood on the Green, I…

INT: How was the arrest handled? You were watching from under a tree?

BB: Yes.

INT: How did the police treat you?

BB: Oh, wonderful. It wasn't any problem. "You're under arrest." "Okay." They got up and got in the truck.

INT: You went out to Concord with this—do you remember the name of the Quaker couple you were with?

BB: They were elderly then.

INT: The Green was left immaculate. Who cleaned it up?

BB: I seem to recall we wanted to make a point of cleaning up after ourselves. It's good politics. I'd forgotten about that until you'd just mentioned that, and passed out trash bags, and that's something that was done a lot at various demonstrations: Boston Common, they do it. Good politics.

INT: And before we leave this, what exactly do you think the Selectmen were worried about when they voted against letting you guys speak?

BB: To me it's all just part of the same thing: the establishment. They didn't care about us, and they wanted to forget about us and later allowed us to be demonized. They were uncomfortable because they thought we lost the war, and we didn't really lose the war. I mean, we lost it, but I it wasn't like we weren't fighting or anything; it was that the Vietnamese—the NLF and the NVA—were so organized and had so much support, and were so brave, and so smart and [had] patience that they just hung in and kept fighting and fighting and fighting, and we never had more than one or two people captured. You see films of World War II, the Battle of the Bulge, they're marching them off by the hundreds with five guys guarding them. They never captured more than a couple. It wasn't like we were giving up or anything, you know? We were fighting an ingenious, entrenched, popular war, and even though, as I said, it might not have been 51 percent of the population of Vietnam, it was a damn sizable majority that were putting their asses on the line, and that has kept me radical all these years. You know, it's your commitment. It's your willingness to do what has to be done for a cause, and there are enough people doing it, that the technicality

of 51 percent sometimes is irrelevant because…I'm not being that clear. Maybe if I say that even though it's less than a majority, it's probably a plurality of people who were engaged in the political life of the country, that even if it's 30 percent, there's probably another 40 percent that are neutral, say, and with these elections in Saigon and so forth there's vote buying and this and that, and I don't think we're all that far from it today here. You know? Narrow interests and being able to—through television and Madison Avenue and public relations and so forth—being able to convince somebody through negativity to support somebody…I'm not sure how democratic that is. There is some democratic aspect to it. It's not a total sham, but it's damn close to a total sham.

INT: What do you think was accomplished by the demonstration in Lexington and others like it? Do you think you've had an impact on national policy?

BB: It was one of hundreds of serious incidents that just showed that there were several years to the continuation of that war, and that action was one of the major national—"covered action" is the way we would have put in our strategy in the anti-war—and the advantage of national coverage, other than your ego, is the propaganda value of what you believe in being demonstrated nationally. These sorts of things were on the news every other day; every few days things like this were happening.

INT: And do you think those protests had an effect on anything?

BB: Yes. That's what ended the war; otherwise, you know, it would have continued even longer. It may even have continued long enough to destroy so many people in Vietnam that we could have won—by killing another million people. Yes. That's what some of the right-wing nuts were… I think some of the logical extension of what some right-wing guys [said]: "Well they didn't let us win the war." I think the logical extension of that statement is, if everyone was silent we probably could have killed

another million Vietnamese and another 50,000 Americans and just decimated that country for so much more than we already had for another few years that they would have had to. But then you carry the logic further, and it reminds me of a story of General Giap who, with the French before Dien Bien Phu when the French were in a dominant military position temporarily, dressed up in a white suit and handed the French commander the key to the city of Hanoi, and meanwhile just had the revolutionaries regroup out in the mountains until they gathered enough strength to start it again, and even if we had killed another million people; it haunts me that even if we had even done that, it may not have permanently stopped that movement. That's how strong that movement was.

I had to battle people thinking that we were just messed up individuals, especially when some people who were doing studies around the VVAW came up with a theory of post-Vietnam syndrome, which later metamorphosed into post-traumatic stress disorder, which was later accepted by the American Psychological Association and the VA for treatment and compensation. The early days of that it was called post-Vietnam syndrome and it was challenged from all quarters practically, and they were saying that these vets are just a bunch of messed up people. This I had to wrestle with for year after year, and to this day I still wrestle with it. One of the things that lifted some of the doubt was during the Iranian hostage situation it conjured up real strong emotions in me, and the woman who I was with at the time sort of intimated that you're just emotionally, you know, "zigzaggy," unbalanced. And, lo and behold one evening on the national news there's Ron Colvic out on the West Coast— this was during the yellow ribbons for the Iranian hostages, the American hostage in Iran— surrounded by a bunch of other Vietnam vets articulating what I was feeling. So, I am saying, well if this is a neurosis, it's a pretty large category, and it's funny so many vets feel this way. There has to be more to this than just, oh, you

guys…if you weren't messed up you wouldn't have gone to Vietnam. I've actually heard that that was de facto proof that you were messed up: if you were stupid enough or crazy enough to go to Vietnam. That's the extent of burden that was placed on the young people. Let's face it, 17 years old is pretty young to be making a decision of war and peace; there was leadership involved that wanted us to go. We didn't think it up. So, given that [there were] 17-18 years old entering this thing, that when the thing turns out to be a fiasco, to then try to put 95 percent of the blame upon these kids that you either drafted or through the society made it appealing for them or appealed to their sense of duty and manhood at the time—appealed to 17 or 18 year olds— I'll never forgive them for that. One of the things about making this tape is once again in 1994 to see what individually may seem like some unorthodox, maybe even eccentric, opinions, to see how many people actually share some really out-of-the-mainstream similar or exactly the same opinions, because through patterns comes legitimacy. If you can show the patterns, then that is not absolute proof, but is proof of a degree that there's more to this than some individual neurosis, that the experience was a seminal experience for a whole generation. I would like to throw something in that you'll probably… now, I'm going to go against everything I just said, which is maybe—I hope you hear this from other people—this just happened to coincide with in my opinion the apex of the American Empire, that until the evacuation of Saigon, the end of the Vietnam War officially or close to it, that was the height of the American Empire, and since then it has been declining economically and so forth. Also, at the same time there's the end of the Vietnam War; the height of the American Empire; the end of the Vietnam War as far as I can tell ended the period of modernism, which is about 1975. And when they speak of post-modernism, that was the third thing that's coincided with the height of the American Empire and the end of the Vietnam War— that also was the end

of modernism. And the turmoil that went on during the Vietnam War was the tumultuous climax of modernism. Rock and roll…there was so much good music being made that kids listen to today, like your daughter knew of Hendrix, but that's Hendrix. There were groups that people who were making music that was simply incredible; if you play it now, we would like it, kids would like it. What was the driving force of all that creativity? I'm convinced that it was the energy of the climax of modernism. This was the last creative finale of the modernist period, and it basically dropped off not totally, but a sharp drop off, and then the rest of it has been going since about 1975. That's when Miles Davis stopped creating new music. It's when a lot of the rock and roll, a lot of the folk rock stopped making classical hits. Every other day a song was coming out that we still like. Every other day! In 1975 that was the year The Band had "The Last Waltz Concert." That was it. It was the last waltz of the rock and roll generation. You know? After this it's who knows what? And it turns out to be the post-modern period. In rock and roll there's some creativity, but the vast bulk of it just a rehashing of the sixties and the early seventies; architecture is just basically a rehashing and a blending together of styles that have gone before. There are now buildings in Boston that are part modernist and part Victorian. It's post. So, the hallmark of this post-modern period is a lack of creativity, and just a regurgitation of what has been created up through the modern period. It's arguably the same time that the end of the Vietnam War, which was at the same time the height of the American Empire.

INT: Do you tie the climb of the American Empire to the fact of the Vietnam War?

BB: As far as I can tell, it's almost a phenomenological thing that the Vietnamese particularly stand out because they were so tenacious, but the directions of former colonies in the modern period were definitely going towards liberation. The Vietnamese were particularly shining examples of

that. So, in a sense it was, but in another sense—to make an analogy—when the stock market dropped 500 points, they said okay, we're going to do XYZ so that there won't be a 500 point drop, and one day what will happen, the same circumstances will create maybe a 300 point drop over a several day period. Well, what the Vietnamese did was just hurry along the general cultural, political, historical, reaching…you know, maybe without them being as tenacious and heroic as they were it would have been another five or ten years before a multitude of circumstances caused the Empire to decline instead of…maybe they just forced it along quicker through their tenaciousness.

INT: You talked a little on the phone about a couple of things that you might want to go over...the phenomenon of the Gulf War and the VVA, the President in the White House, and the protest of calling for the whole fragmentation thing. If you want to talk specifically about that…

BB: From the end of the Vietnam War until the Wall was built in Washington, DC, it was a continuation of the period of the marginalization of the Vietnam vet from the American mainstream by portrayal artistically as basically doing its killing in movies and stories and TV shows. By the late seventies there began to be more sympathetic things coming, and I think the first thing on television was "Friendly Fire," and after a while there started to be a very slow building of sympathy. Well, as that slow sympathy built, I think probably [President] Carter might have…Carter's administration didn't have a lot to do with it, but it was that period—I don't know how much—I don't think it had a lot to do with it. It got to the point where somebody came up with the idea of the Vietnam Memorial and this brilliant design by Maya Lin was chosen, and there was some controversy about it and so forth, but when people actually saw it, it began to really break down the last cultural barriers of disdain that were still there. They're pretty much broken down by that Wall. What it did was bring a lot of vets

out into the social-political arena who weren't there before. And as the people were coming out a new issue or a smaller issue that was there for the Left became the major issue of these new people—and pushed by conservative forces, and capitalized on by conservative forces— which was the POW/MIA issue. Since the Wall there has been a steady entrenchment of POW/MIA adherence. When I say "adherence" I mean people who think that Vietnam is holding people in cages still, that they could possibly be in Cambodia after the holocaust of Cambodia. Yes, there may be a couple, and the more progressives would say, well, there may be a couple in Laos because there are just so many people so involved with the POW/MIA [Prisoners of War/Missing in Action] you figure, Jesus, maybe there are a couple somewhere. God. You know, there's guys running around with POW/MIA flags, and they're flying everywhere. Well, maybe there are a few, and probably the thing that I'm least proud of the anti-war protest was the attitude that I picked up from some civilian counterparts towards POW/MIAs that may still be there, which was too bad, and I did not champion that, but I was comfortable with that, and I regret that. That said, I feel that basically as I mentioned, the POW/MIA issue has been issued by right-wing politicians, and they're playing into the psychological dismay of people who went through the first major American defeat, and then were also disdained for years afterwards, looking for a place to vent their hostility and keep the event alive because they can't accept the outcome, psychologically can't accept the reality of it. By concentrating on the possibility of POW/MIAs, some people are still fighting a war. I believe that's the case and it's being used by right-wing politicians, often who never served in any wars, to continue to punish this tiny country that basically beat the United States. I consider it extremely uncivilized, brutish vengefulness against a small country that you could not defeat in their homes to continue to punish them in the international arena because of the

size and power of the United States. I consider it extremely poor taste and disrespectful not only to the Vietnamese who won but disrespectful to the Americans who were there, too. To take such cheap action against such a valiant enemy disrespects us as well as it does the Vietnamese, the heroic Vietnamese people.

INT: And?

BB: And in terms of VVA, people who were originally—a short time before that—in Vietnam Veterans Against the War started the Vietnam Veterans of American. It started out founded by Bobby Muller, a paraplegic combat-wounded Marine, junior officer advisor to Vietnamese platoons, rabidly anti-war, very bitter, brilliant, courageous, particularly after, not so much…you know, maybe in the battlefield too, but we know for sure that since he was back to go from the Bronx VA Medical Center after Ron Colvic and go through that, and then go to law school and do anti-war work while in law school, and after the Vietnam War to go to work on getting Vietnam Veterans some benefits and help with their experiences— just a tremendous intellect and political maneuverer and righteous human being who had a great following. The founding convention was wild; very much majority were anti-war veterans, but there was not a terrible amount of rancor with the significant number even at the founding convention who were conservative and right-wing and early adherents to the early days of the POW/MIA, and this was right after the Wall, a year after the Wall. But they were in the minority. After the Wall slowly it began to change to the point where Bobby Muller left the organization. The founder left the organization. He swore that if he were ever appointed to run the VA he would turn it upside down and inside out, and he runs an organization now that's called "Vietnam Veterans of American Foundation," which all it is, is Bobby Muller and a few vets that have access to $1 million a year through the Federal Employees Check-off

Fund, and people think they're giving money to Vietnam veterans; they're giving it to Bobby Muller and Company, and what they do with it is reconciliation work with Indo-China, not totally above-board, but I am very, very indebted and very committed to Bobby Muller because they cannot take away that he is the one that organized the Vietnam Veterans of America. He got it going. There were lots of attempts. I was around that whole period. I was an activist that whole period, and there were lots of attempts by different people to start national Vietnam Veterans groups and Bobby Muller did it, and I was in the area when he was wounded. It turns out I found out the story of where and when he was hit, and I was up in that area. I probably ran the med-evac over the radio for him. So there's that kind of connection. His protégé, Mary Stout, was very committed to Bobby and succeeded Bobby as the President of VVA. Well, as I said, the founding convention was in 1983, by 1991 in the Gulf War Mary Stout had gone from a protégé to an anti-war radical veteran, to being photographed at the White House with the Vice President of VVA handing George Bush a giant portrait of soldiers charging across the desert with a blue desert sky with a couple of clouds, and one cloud [was] [General] Schwarzkopf's picture, and the other cloud was [General] Colin Powell's picture. Well, that's a long way from being a protégé to an anti-war veteran. When Mary stepped down—Mary was the first; less than one percent of the people serving in Vietnam were women and our second president was a woman—you know I was a Mary supporter—she did take a job with the VA, unlike Bobby Muller. To me, you know, it was a payoff. It was a payoff. She got along real well with Bush's Director of the VA, and they did throw us a couple of demands, and Congress passed a couple of bills that we wanted, and Mary got respect from Bush's head of the VA. And when Mary stepped down after two terms, we re-elected her. I voted for her the second time, too. When Mary stepped down, she went to work in

some group cubbyhole for God knows what, probably along the same lines as she made at VVA, which was $52,000 a year.

INT: You know, let's say implicit in this entire interview is your radicalization with the coming revolution, and (we don't know) it's really about now. So, looking back at what you've learned by being a vet against the war, from the Vietnamese history that you studied and the political activism that you got engaged in, how— this is such an awkward question— how has all this impacted on what you do now with your life? We've already talked a lot about what you've learned, and I don't mean that I didn't hear that. I did hear that, but how has it…what kind of a direction has that taken?

BB: Well, I think I mentioned that I was making some definite progress to adjustment to society and the Gulf massacre just knocked me down, and I've been sort of not only mid-life mulling over of things, but the Gulf massacre, as well, has had me sort of wondering what's what for the last few years. I was out in Nevada for about five and a half years. And for various reasons decided to come back and do some politics that I still had these views and I ought to be a little more active. And so I came back and looked around at what was going on here with the collapse of the Soviet Union and so forth, and started taking a close look at what's happening in Cuba and the blockade that this country still has on Cuba, but the revolution is still alive in Cuba, and it still has majority support despite [the fact that] all the favorable trade relations with the Soviet Union are gone. They're still hanging in there with tremendous popular support. So, I got involved with the solidarity work with Cuba to try to lift the blockade, and actually the end of this month I'm going down on the 25th anniversary of the Venceramos Brigade which started 25 years ago, which would be what?—1969 student radicals going down to cut sugarcane and support the Cuban…so as long as I pay my airfare and throw a couple of hundred bucks

to the revolution for room and board and show solidarity in doing construction work in the mornings…I'm going down with a lot of other people to be guests of the Cuban Revolution and see the state of things down there. From what we can understand from people that have gone down there recently there's a lot of suffering and there's a lot of determination. I mean, the reason I don't mention dissension is because we already know that, that's what you read in the paper here, and besides the dissension there's a lot of determination. So, I think that we've got to come up with a different way of doing things, and a different way of looking at people and the economy. You know? This dog-eat-dog system is getting to be not worth it for a lot of people, and the radical critique was right, the only thing is a lot of revolutionaries that got into power did a bad job when they were in power. I see the drift of the way things are going today is so bad that just here we're turning into the Third World, slowly, and the Third World is getting to the point of absolute barbarism. It's worst now…the Third World is getting worse; we're getting worse; Europe is practically in a depression. They've started to cut some of the famous Social Democratic benefits in Europe because they're in economic crisis and I'm putting all my chips on the Left, and that the Left has got to get it together and learn from all the mistakes that it made when it did achieve power in various places, and right now the Cubans have to learn from that. We have to learn from the Cubans, but it's not a very optimistic time for me, and I think for anybody that really takes a hard look at the way things are going…I mean, children being killed in school. Our society is crumbling. You know? Just 25 years ago there were things happening— today every day in this country— that were unheard of in the whole country, and I think these are not just isolated… well, gee, you know? Or that's over there…this situation over there, gee; I don't think they're isolated. I think they're all connected, and it's got to do with the way we do things, and there's something about

capitalism that's poisonous. And there's something about it that makes it work in a lot of ways, and I think Cuba has to deal with the parts of it that work in a lot of ways because they're totally surrounded by a sea of capitalism, but we have to look at the parts that are poisonous as they point out, and we can see the difference of the way people are treated and we have to deal with what's poisonous about it. I think it's desperate and it calls for…Just as we're making a film and people were so riled up and considered it so important, the Vietnam War; to me, what's going on in this country, is a larger tragedy than at the height of the Vietnam War. There's many children being killed—well, not children—but there's as many people being shot to death or wounded in this country per year as during the Vietnam War, average per year, and that's just gunshots. And then we have people on the street—all these unheard of new bizarre, decadent crimes; we have a general deterioration of civility of people towards each other to varying degrees; a coldness that's apparent to a lot of people. You know, if we were active during Vietnam, I think that there's more than enough reason to be that active now, to be doing the kind of activity that went on during Vietnam now. That's where I'm at.

INT: You talked a little before of falling off the divisiveness in the anti-war, progressive channel.

BB: Now, particularly.

INT: Now.

BB: There always was, but now it's…

INT: Can you just talk a little bit about why you see that as happening or what the consequences are or what we could do about it?

BB: Well, Gore Vidal said that we're going to be seeing—he said this about two years ago—is things broken down into tribalism. And I think what we've got are examples of that, of course, in the Balkans, and Somalia, but we also have it in terms of groupings of people: a tribalism of

feminists, a tribalism of people involved with Amnesty International versus people that have a different perspective; people that believe that black activists shouldn't work with white activists. There's not a sense of people working on different things and then coming together as brothers and sisters that we tried to do, that wasn't really perfectly happening at the height of the anti-war Movement but that was what everybody was, like, agreeing on. I've seen people wince when I say that today at meetings of political people.

INT: When you say people should work together?

BB: As brothers and sisters. Generally, that should be the goal. I mean, we won't always do that, right? But that's what we should be doing. I've seen people who recoil at that, who are Movement people. There's been major, major setbacks of the Movement, and there's been major, major victories of these capitalist and imperialist establishment, and I think it may have driven people a little crazy. It may have chased a lot of people out of it, who can't deal with it anymore. We may be bare bones down into a lot of people who are just misfits and therefore that could be one of the reasons why this sort of thing is happening, that so many people's faith has been shaken by the collapse of the Soviet Union that it was actually almost as bad as the establishment here said it was. I say almost. I don't believe it was as bad as they said it was.

INT: Explain that a little more. What was as bad as they said it was?

BB: The Soviet Union. Yes. Most leftists in this country were not big Soviet Union fans, but to varying degrees felt that it wasn't as bad as what it proved out to be. When you have the disastrous conversion to dog-eat-dog, the jungle laws of capitalism, and you have people being chopped up and sold for body parts when they're under psychotic conditions and drugged, and having their kidneys taken and out and sold[1], when you have people

[1] This actually relates to an "urban legend" as these types of stories are called that was current at the time of this interview: Stories of people having been drugged who discovered when they regained consciousness they had been operated on and had organs removed—presumably for transplant—was passed along via the internet. None of these stories was ever verified.

being murdered, lured by advertisements to sell their apartment and murdered, when you have robberies and rapes and killings that were unheard of, when you have the economy slowing and slowing and slowing down, and you have an election, a lot of the old Communist Party leftists were happy like that the old Communist Party of the Soviet Union got 14 percent of the vote, and the new Women's Party, which is allied with the old Communist Party, got 8 percent, and the Agrarian Party, which is allied with the Communist Party got, I think, 14 percent of the vote, and they added it up, the old ruling Communists in groups got a third; a lot of old Communists in this country were taking heart. I look at it and with the disastrous conditions they had, and after 75 years of rule all they could get was a third? That to me shows total, enormous dissatisfaction with the Soviet system, and they may even get back in power, but that is where I say it is not quite as bad as they [say] here because there is a chance that the people are not going to accept conversion from a Third World country that tried to provide basic things for its country to become a flat-out Third World country where everybody's a piece of garbage. They may—and I think rightfully so—vote the old regime back in. You know, it's not a long leap from a third to 51 percent. But there's a real disheartening of people to see that much dissatisfaction with the Soviet Union and that China is involved with some kind of weird, mishmash of socialism, Stalinism, and capitalism; that North Korea—God knows what trip they're on these days—and the Cuban Revolution, the whole Socialist Movement of the world which used to be a third of the world…the only really good example that I think could be argued from the way I see it is the Cuban Revolution of 11 million people, the only decent exponent left. That's got to be disheartening if you're a leftist and believed in a world movement that was linked somehow to…that China and the Soviet Union they had something there, and it's just a matter of loosening them up. They're too much like the

teamsters, and all, you know, they were just kind of like the teamsters used to be, I might add. The teamsters probably are one of the most democratic unions and righteous, and on strike right now. They've gone through some great changes, but thinking that we could have, like…we'll do the New Left, Age of Aquarius, new visions, new consciousness level, and we're kind of like doing what the Teamsters for a Democratic Union, the facts of the teamsters, when we get things rolling here, hopefully the Soviet Union will loosen up a little bit and start having a little rock and roll and not be worried so much about perks and there's always the actual services that…I mean, they ran things, but I say the teamsters, because I think there is an analogy there. They also made sure that their society, or the teamsters' membership were taken care of, that they do not believe in people living on the street; they do not believe in people not getting medical care. They believe that people deserve this stuff, and they did—you know, not perfectly, and maybe they were just doing it out of ideological necessity; their hearts weren't really in it—but they were permitted to people having daycare centers and people having housing, and so that for a while there it was…we figured, well, it was just a couple of steps from the liberation to bringing the Soviet Union around to a more open, good-hearted, democratic, less materialistic nature, ecology way, than we could this government, and they fell! With the falling of the Soviet Union there has been just an enormous boost to the old line leaders of this country that now feel they're on some kind of holy war of capitalism that has been proven, but you just let capitalism work and whoever dies in the street, that's nature. So, it's been disheartening, and a lot of people, I think, fell into that "Well, you've got to accept it." "I'll try to be nice myself, but socialism doesn't work." It did shake a lot of people who were marginally there, and the people who were very serious about socialism, it shook them. So, you know…

INT: Well, it's hard to bring this to a close, but those are the formal questions that I had. Do you have any questions that you want…

INT: No. I don't have any official questions at this time, but I'd like to keep contact information.

BB: Okay.

INT: Oh, I know, I was supposed to ask if you have any thoughts about this project?

BB: Well, I think being a moviegoer and not involved in making the thing and so forth, my mind is kind of looking at possibilities of—as Kay [Kay Bell LOHP staff member] I think mentioned—different kinds of productions, presentations, that can be made out of the archival tapes. If you get enough videos, if you get enough people there can be different projects, an over-arching project, it could be a series; it could be a concentration; I think it's a great idea getting all this together, and I'm glad you're doing it, and I like your politics as people from what I've heard. Maybe you're just very, very diplomatic, but I like your diplomacy and/or the diplomacy and/or hosting, and/or politics…

END OF INTERVIEW